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CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Children and Families Scrutiny Committee**
held on Monday, 6th July, 2009 at Committee Suite 1,2 & 3, Westfields,
Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

PRESENT

Councillor R Westwood (Chairman)
Councillor D Neilson (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors Rhoda Bailey, D Beckford, J Goddard, O Hunter, A Kolker,
G Merry, M Parsons, M Simon, L Smetham, D Thompson and J Kelly

Apologies

Councillors D Flude and T Jackson

15 ALSO PRESENT

Councillor A Richardson, Chairman of the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee.

16 OFFICERS PRESENT

J Weeks, Strategic Director People
L Butcher, Head of Services for Children and Families
F Bradley, Children and Families section
P Mossman, Children and Families section
D J French, Scrutiny Officer

17 WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed Jill Kelly, statutory co-opted Member of the Committee representing the Church of England and Lorraine Butcher, Cheshire East's Head of Services for Children and Families; both of whom were attending their first meeting of the Committee.

18 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 8 June be confirmed as a correct record.

19 DECLARATION OF INTEREST/PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations made.

20 PUBLIC SPEAKING TIME/OPEN SESSION

There were no Members of the Public present who wished to address the Committee.

21 SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN

At the previous meeting of the Committee, Members received a briefing on matters raised in the Lord Laming report on Child Protection and advised how safeguarding would operate within Cheshire East.

The Committee was circulated with a document showing Statutory Returns and Performance Indicators for Children's Services in relation to Private Fostering, Looked After Children (now referred to as Cared for Children) and Referral/Assessment and Child Protection processes.

In relation to private fostering arrangements, the Committee was advised of current numbers of privately fostered children and the assessment regime. The Council was required to assess private fostering arrangements within 7 working days and visit every six weeks thereafter. Cheshire East fulfilled this requirement. Numbers of privately fostered children appeared to be low in the Borough but further work on promoting awareness of the issue was to be carried out to ascertain whether there were more private fostering arrangements in existence than authorities were aware of.

The Committee was advised that there were currently 368 Cared for Children in Cheshire East and the Borough was now in line with national trends rather than previously when Cheshire was below average. Of these children, 10% were in Children's residential homes, 83% were with foster parents and the remaining 7% were either living independently or temporarily with their parents. There were enough adoptive parents available in the Borough and no age limit to adopters. A child who had to move placement would always try to be kept in the same school and would receive multi professional support. Each child would have a Personal Education Plan and there was specific support available for children sitting GCSEs. There was now a statutory requirement within each school that it had a Designated Teacher for Cared for Children. Members agreed that it was important to continue to monitor educational attainment of Cared for Children.

Foster parents would usually receive information in advance about the child they were about to foster although in an emergency situation this may not always be possible. A Placement Plan would be developed setting out as much information as possible and establishing the roles of all involved. Many fostered children would go on holiday with their foster carers but if a foster parent needed some respite from fostering this would not count as a breakdown in the placement.

A briefing was to be given to Town and Parish Councils on safeguarding which related to the emphasis in Lord Laming's report that safeguarding was the responsibility of everyone. It was important to try to mobilise local knowledge to enable a proactive approach towards families causing concern before issues accelerated.

RESOLVED:That

(a) a regular report on the National Indicator Set be submitted to the Committee on areas shown as amber and red with an explanation behind the figures and examples of actual practice;

(b) figures relating to children in Cheshire broken down into numbers of children in need, those subject to a care order, numbers fostered etc based on the categories listed in the Lord Laming report be circulated to Members as soon as possible; and

(c) a small team of Members visit front line services that work in the area of safeguarding.

22 WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Committee considered a report on progressing the Work Programme. A number of items had been identified from the Scrutiny Training Day held in April and further items had been suggested by Members. There were also a number of issues highlighted following a meeting the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Committee had held with the Head of Services for Children and Families and the Portfolio Holder and Cabinet Support Member.

The Committee was invited to agree its Work Programme, determine a priority order and agree timescales and methodology. Members were advised that each item should be assessed against a set of criteria including whether the issue fell within a corporate priority and was of key interest to the public. It was also important to consider whether the issue was being addressed elsewhere so as to avoid duplication and decide whether Scrutiny's consideration would be able to add value to the matter.

RESOLVED: That

(a) the Committee's Work Programme comprise the following items:

- Safeguarding – to be undertaken by the whole Committee with a small Task Group of Members to visit front line services and report back;
- Residential Placements and Review of Residential Provision – to be undertaken by a Task/Finish Panel comprising Councillors Goddard, Simon, Bailey, Beckford, Neilson and Smetham;
- Educational Attainment – to be undertaken by the whole Committee with an initial presentation on figures for 2008 and headlines for 2009 and to include the educational attainment of Cared for Children;
- Transforming Learning Communities (TLC) – this was currently being undertaken by a Task/Finish Panel who were reviewing the County Council's TLC programme of school reorganisation and also their Scrutiny Review of the TLC process;
- Family Support Services – to be undertaken by a Task/Finish Panel to begin when the Scrutiny Review of TLC had completed its work.

(b) that the issue of Transport for Young People be classed as a Medium Priority and reconsidered at a later stage; the issue of school admissions policy be considered in due course when a policy is developed for Cheshire East and Scrutiny is a consultee and all other possible items for the Work Programme be not pursued at the moment;

(c) that a one day Training event be held in September for all Members of this Committee on Corporate Parenting, to be immediately followed by a session on the Children's Trust subject to adequate time being available;

(d) that the draft Children's Plan be considered by the Committee at the appropriate stage in the consultation process;

(e) that a report on the detail of the Early Years Funding Reform be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee in September;

(f) that training be provided on the role and purpose of Children's Centres to include a visit to a Centre; and

(g) the report and recommendations of the Teenage Pregnancy National Support Team following their visit to Cheshire East in June 2009, be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

23 FORWARD PLAN - EXTRACTS

The Committee considered extracts from the Forward Plan that related to Children and Families services. The Committee was advised that the Scrutiny Chairman's Group was currently considering the content and format of the Forward Plan and its usefulness and relevance as a tool for Scrutiny.

RESOLVED: That the current Forward Plan be noted.

24 CONSULTATIONS FROM CABINET

There were no consultations from Cabinet for consideration at the meeting.

The meeting commenced at 10.30 am and concluded at 1.00 pm

Councillor R Westwood (Chairman)