

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Children and Families Scrutiny Committee**
held on Monday, 14th September, 2009 at Committee Suite 1,2 & 3,
Westfields, Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

PRESENT

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

Councillors D Flude, J Goddard, O Hunter, A Kolker, G Merry, M Parsons,
M Simon, L Smetham and D Thompson

Apologies

Councillors Rhoda Bailey, D Beckford and T Jackson

32 ALSO PRESENT

Councillor J P Findlow, Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services

33 OFFICERS PRESENT

L Butcher, Head of Services for Children and Families
M Bayley, Children and Families
F Bradley, Children and Families
S Lawrence, Children and Families
D J French, Legal and Democratic Services

34 DECLARATION OF INTEREST/PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations made.

35 PUBLIC SPEAKING TIME/OPEN SESSION

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

36 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 3 August be confirmed as a correct record subject to one amendment to minute number 31 the second bullet point in paragraph 4 to read "Pay L £1,500...".

37 REDESIGN OF CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE

The Committee was briefed by Lorraine Butcher, Head of Services for Children and Families, on key actions undertaken in relation to safeguarding services in Cheshire East. Cheshire County Council had received a rating of 2 - Adequate

for its Safeguarding Services following the Annual Performance Assessment 2008 with a number of issues identified:

- Assessment timescales;
- Securing placement stability for Looked After Children;
- Adoption;
- Fostering.

The position at April/May 2009 was:

- Ofsted inspections had judged provision at Redsands and Priors Hill Residential homes to be inadequate;
- The Lord Laming report "The Protection of Children in England – Progress Report" had made a number of recommendations including that children in need had access to effective specialist support at an early stage and more needed to be done regarding safeguarding and child protection across all front-line services;
- A review of frontline child care services had looked at various areas including access to services, caseloads, team management and size, computer systems and training and development;
- An Audit and Review of Children under 5 subject to Child Protection Plans in Cheshire East had been conducted.

A number of actions were now underway:

- The Cheshire East Local Safeguarding Children Board had been established and an independent Chair appointed – David Mellor;
- Regular performance reporting meetings had been arranged with the Chief Executive;
- Two interim managers had been appointed;
- A separation of the review process from the delivery of services had been introduced into the departmental structure;
- A new team of agency workers had been appointed to support the team in Crewe;
- Agency workers were filling current vacancies and providing additional capacity in Crewe, Macclesfield and Congleton;
- Changes were being introduced to PARIS – the computerised system used by social workers;
- Residential provision – Redsands was closed and two new residential units were scheduled to open in October/November; a Scrutiny Task/Finish Panel had been established to look into residential provision;
- Risk assessment training for staff had been scheduled;
- Briefings with key managers on audits had been held;
- Unannounced internal proxy "Ofsted" type inspections had been held in Crewe;
- A Supervision audit had been undertaken;
- Amended Thresholds of Need guidance had been reissued to all staff and revised guidance to staff reissued on Referral, Assessment, Planning and Decision making;
- Redesign of Services, Phase 1 was underway including processes for children in need such as assessment, referral, case management and child protection plans and ensuring arrangements were on a locality basis;
- Redesign of Services, Phase 2 would focus on embedding across the Children's Trust and all elements of the Children's workforce the early

identification, prevention and targeting of support to children and families at risk of needing statutory intervention;

- Refocusing of services to provide a wide range of family support and prevention whilst also maintaining a clear focus on children who are most at risk;
- Halting the continuing increase in the numbers of children/families requiring statutory interventions through well co-ordinated arrangements for early intervention and prevention.

During discussion of the item the following points were raised:

- The Audit report that had been received in June had led to the view that additional temporary resources were required and some additional temporary staff had been appointed to work in Crewe. A rolling programme to recruit permanent staff was underway;
- A national Social Work Task Group had made recommendations around practice and training and Cheshire East already offered training opportunities and social care work experience to students;
- The staffing structure for Children and Families Section would take into account the outcome of the redesign including joining up services where possible to reduce management levels;
- The Committee requested the opportunity to visit the two new units that would replace Redsands.

RESOLVED: That:

(a) the current position be noted and regular updates be submitted to the Committee; and

(b) a visit be arranged for all Members of the Committee to the two properties that have replaced residential provision at Redsands.

38 TEENAGE PREGNANCY

The Committee considered a report of the Strategic Director People on issues that had arisen from the National Support Team's visit to Cheshire East which had arisen due to sustained underperformance in the reduction of teenage pregnancy rates across Cheshire.

Lorraine Butcher, Head of Services for Children and Families, explained to the Committee that the Government's Teenage Pregnancy Reduction Strategy 1998 had set a target for Local Authorities to reduce by half the numbers of conceptions among under 18 year olds by 2010. In Cheshire the rate had not reduced by a sufficient amount. Under 18 conceptions were focused in small geographical areas with the pattern of conception being significantly greater than would be expected in these areas indicating that deprivation was only one of a number of responsible factors. Such "hot spot" areas had historically received prevention services but rates had remained steady or increased. Some areas had shown high levels of single or repeat terminations and there was concern for vulnerable groups such as care leavers.

The National Support Team had produced a formal report after the visit with the key recommendations being:

- An Executive Board to be developed and chaired by the Directors from the Council and the Primary Care Trust to lead, drive forward and performance manage the teenage pregnancy prevention strategy;
- A Senior Strategic post be recruited to the Council to lead on teenage pregnancy prevention – this was funded by Government grant;
- As part of the Children's Trust arrangements, data should be disseminated in an accessible and relevant format by all and between all partners, to better inform planning, targeting and performance management of the strategy;
- The Council and PCT communications leads to be responsible for the urgent development of a Teenage Pregnancy Communication Strategy and Action Plan;
- There should be an explicit and detailed young people's Sexual Health Needs Assessment to inform the design and delivery of young people's contraception and sexual health services as part of a strategic commissioning plan;
- There should be a radical overhaul of current Contraceptive and Sexual Health (CASH) provision to ensure it meets young people's needs.

During discussion of the report the following issues were raised:

- It was difficult to assess the success of work aimed at reducing Teenage Pregnancy rates as the figures were always about 15 months late;
- Was the rate of Chlamydia high in Cheshire East? In response it was explained that rates locally were not known but nationally rates were high;
- How much detail was known – was it possible to identify specific schools with higher than average rates? In response, Members were advised that the Council was aware of particular hotspot schools;
- What age was considered appropriate for pupils to receive lessons in sexual health? In response the Committee was informed that there was some evidence to suggest that it was effective to begin such lessons in Primary School;
- It was important to consider the impact of alcohol;
- Whether there was a link between housing needs and teenage pregnancy due to a lack of hostel type accommodation for young women;
- Some young women made an active choice to get pregnant and it was important to consider aspirations and what choices young women felt were available to them.

RESOLVED: That the recommendations of the National Support Team be supported and Cheshire East Council work with the Primary Care Trust and other partners to finalise Action and Delivery Plans in line with the timescales outlined in the report.

39 SUMMARY OF SCHOOL PERFORMANCE 2008-09

The Committee considered a report of the Strategic Director People outlining a summary of school performance across schools in Cheshire East for 2008 – 09. Members were advised that the report provided an early overview of results and more detailed information would be available at a later date which would allow clearer comparisons to be made.

The main headlines were that:

- Key Stage 1 – at all levels results showed either an improvement or the same position as 2007 – 8. Performance against statistical neighbours (10 other Councils) showed Cheshire East was 7 – 9th for the indicators of Reading, Writing, Maths and Science, with the national level placement being 26 -39th;
- Key Stage 2 – in English the Council performed above national averages and was now ranked first for Level 5+ and first equal for Level 4+ against statistical neighbours; in Maths at Level 5+ the Council was first equal and at Level 4+ was second equal among statistical neighbours; in Science at Level 5+ there had been a drop in attainment which was in line with the picture nationally and the Council was third equal while at Level 4+ there had been no change in attainment and the Council was 3rd against statistical neighbours. It was noted that 10 pupils had achieved Level 6+ at the end of Key Stage 2;
- Key stage 3 – national assessment tests had been removed and Teacher Assessment data would be available at a later date;
- Key Stage 4 – initial data showed 72% of pupils had achieved 5 or more A* - C grades; 59% of pupils had achieved 5 or more A* - C grades including English and Maths and 96% of pupils had achieved 5 or more A – G grades. In all cases the results had improved compared with last year;
- Post 16 – 98% of pupils had achieved a pass rate of A – E, 51% had achieved a Pass rate of A – B.

During discussion of the report the following points were made:

- The Committee welcomed the achievements of pupils and teaching staff in Cheshire East;
- Was provision made for pupils who were “Gifted and Talented”? In response, Members were advised that the Council would maintain a focus on provision for such pupils;
- Schools were encouraged to provide personalised education and Ofsted would look at rates of individual progress among pupils to ensure all pupils made progress at a level appropriate for them;
- The Committee was advised about Fischer Family Trust data that analysed pupils’ actual attainment at Key Stage 1 and from that would then predict attainment at GCSE stage.

RESOLVED: That the initial results be noted and a further report be submitted to a future meeting when more detailed information is available.

40 PERFORMANCE AND OUTCOME REPORTING ARRANGEMENTS - CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

The Committee considered a report of the Strategic Director People outlining interim arrangements for reporting performance across Children and Families Services.

Currently a performance score card was being trialled showing key priority areas matched against National Indicators, progress data against each priority, explanatory commentary and actions required with timescales and staff responsibility.

A Performance Steering Group was to be formed to look at ways of aligning Children and Families Service's performance systems with those across other parts of the service. The report showed the current score card that was being used in the interim and two other formats – an excel structure giving data for Looked After Children and a format used by Salford City Council which was felt to be an example of good practice.

RESOLVED: That

(a) the current arrangements using the interim score card be supported;

(b) for any future performance score card the Committee would support the following approach:

- An explanatory commentary to show the story behind the figures;
- Include action to be taken along with relevant responsible officer;
- Colours used to be easy to look at and not too bright;
- Consistent use of either percentages or figures within the same category;

(c) a presentation be made to the next meeting of the Committee on the new Ofsted framework.

41 **THINK FAMILY**

The Committee considered a report of the Strategic Director People on the Think Family agenda which had been one of the Big Ideas underpinning the proposals for establishing two new Unitary Authorities in Cheshire. The Big Idea had a number of strands:

- It was felt that the organising principles often used by Councils when setting up departments were artificial and irrelevant;
- There was an ambition to bring services together not on the basis of the ideas of the professionals but on the basis of experiences and perceptions of the people who use those services;
- In particular, it was believed that a fundamental experience of most people is that of being or having been part of a family.

When adopting a Think Family approach it was important to use “family” in an embracing and inclusive way that embraced families of every sort. Think Family could be seen as an aspiration whereby the Council would not respond to people's needs in a narrow way but rather would put services together in ways that reflected people's lives.

The report outlined that “Think Family” had its origins in the Social Exclusion Task Force and the Department for Children, Schools and Families who had made additional resources available:

- £100,000 was allocated to the Parenting Experts programme and this would continue;
- £237,991 had been allocated as new funding from 1 April 2009 of which £143,000 would go into establishing Parenting Early Intervention Programmes to help mothers and fathers of children aged 8 – 13 at risk of poor outcomes, to improve their parenting skills.

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The Appendix to the report listed a number of other Think Family issues including Obesity whereby good work could be done in school but it was important to also focus upon the family environment.

RESOLVED: That the report be received and the Think Family approach be supported.

42 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered an update report on the current position with the Work Programme.

A number of items on the Work Programme had been progressed and the Committee was to receive training on Corporate Parenting on 25 September 2009.

RESOLVED: that the current position with the Work Programme be noted.

The meeting commenced at 10.30 am and concluded at 12.35 pm

Councillor R Westwood (Chairman)