

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee

held on Monday, 27th June, 2016 at Committee Suite 1,2 & 3, Westfields,
Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

PRESENT

Councillor Rhoda Bailey (Chairman)
Councillor S Pochin (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors B Dooley, D Flude, L Jeuda, G Merry, A Moran and J Saunders

Apologies

Councillors Kelly

1 ALSO PRESENT

Councillor Liz Durham – Children and Families Portfolio Holder
Councillor Paul Bates - Communities and Health Portfolio Holder
Councillor George Hayes – Deputy Cabinet Member

2 OFFICERS PRESENT

Kath O'Dwyer - Executive Director of People & Deputy Chief Executive
Nigel Moorhouse - Director of Children's Social Care
Jacky Forster - Director of Education and 14-19 Skills
Gill Betton – Head of Service - Children's Development & Partnerships

3 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 4 April 2016 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

5 DECLARATIONS OF PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of the existence of party whip.

6 PUBLIC SPEAKING TIME

Natasha Maroni referred to attempts she had made to secure a residential place for her daughter. At the present time, she had been offered 1 day placements outside of the Borough, which she considered to be unsatisfactory

Carol Jones referred to Article 3 of UNICEF (Best interests of the child):which stated that 'the best interests of children must be the primary concern in making decisions that may affect them' and linked the article to the recent Cabinet decision regarding safe walking routes to school.

Sue Helliwell sought clarification about the costs involved in the Council's February 2016 decision to de-designate four children's centres. In particular, enquired as to how many vehicles would be acquired; how many support staff that would entail; how much equipment; and whether provision would be made within the vehicles for private and confidential discussions. She also sought assurances about the future of outreach services in Alsager.

Ted Wall expressed his disapproval of the Council's decision to de-designate four children's centres and the fact that the Council had ignored advice contained in a letter from Fiona Bruce MP to the Council about delaying a decision until the publication of a report on children's centres by an all party parliamentary committee.

Susan Munroe referred to poor mental health of perinatal women which was often associated with isolation. She contended that a mobile children's centre service would increase isolation. Permanent buildings provided safe places for mothers and children to gather together.

Maeve Kelly referred to a statement made at the February 2016 Cabinet meeting by a Cabinet member which had suggested that the provision of children's centres was discretionary. However, Maeve contended that local authorities had a duty to provide children's centres. The original concept of children's centres was to provide facilities open to everybody, thereby removing any stigma.

Sally Handley referred to conflicting positions of the Leader of the Council and Health and Wellbeing Board in respect of footfall and usage of children's centres

Ethel Ranson suggested that the Council had opened itself up to potential lawsuits having not followed its own policies on consultation in respect of the decision to de-designate four children centres

Paula Eaton informed the committee that she had three children and had been a regular user of the Sandbach sure start centre. She outlined the timeline of the decision making process explaining that the consultation period had ended on 12 February, report was then produced on 22 February 2016 and a final decision taken on 28 February 2016. She therefore questioned the process and the disregarding of the letter from Fiona Bruce MP.

Michael Unett stated that in view of the significant number of new houses being built in the borough recently, many of the people who would be expected to purchase these houses would probably not be local the borough and could therefore have benefitted if permanent children's centres had been in place.

Susan Munroe, Maeve Kelly, Sally Handley, Ethel Ranson Paula Eaton Michael Unett each requested that the decision regarding children centre be reconsidered by Council.

In response to the many points made about the de-designation of Children's Centres, the Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director People informed the committee that she expected that nationally there would be a move towards a

more targetted model of provision in line with the Council's position. She also contended that the introduction of mobile facilities would provide a wider range of options than existed presently, in that there would be permanent buildings and targetted mobile services in the future.

7 CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S IMPROVEMENT PLAN UPDATE

The Committee considered a report of Kath O'Dwyer Executive Director of People & Deputy Chief Executive providing an update on the progress made against the Children and Young Peoples Improvement Plan to address the recommendations and areas for improvement identified by Ofsted in its inspection report of Children's services published in September 2015.

Kath explained that good progress had been made and that the report before the committee today represented the 4th quarter update.

In response to a question about the progress made in connection with recruitment and retention, Nigel Moorhouse explained that Macclesfield office was in a healthier position than Crewe in terms of recruitment. The Council had a large cohort of newly recruited staff and had cover for 5 vacancies from agency staff. Case loads had reduced. The Council had introduced an aspirant manager programme, but acknowledged that the Council had a large number of relatively inexperienced staff. The first 'grow your own' social workers would be coming through the system this year.

In response to an additional question about hour's worked and case loads, Nigel informed the committee that across the whole Council there were currently 900 cases open. He stressed that although some officers worked long hours, social work was a not a 9-5 job and all efforts were made to encourage staff to take time back at appropriate times. In addition the Council had good mentoring programme, whereby social workers met regularly over a two year period with their supervisor and manager.

In response to an additional question about how the Council assisted care leavers to find jobs and accommodation, Nigel stated that care leavers who were not in education employment or training (NEETS) was an area of intense focus by the Council.

RESOLVED – That the report be received;

8 PERFORMANCE MONITORING

The Committee considered a report of the Kath O'Dwyer Executive Director of People & Deputy Chief Executive.

In its report to the Council following an Ofsted its inspection in July 2015, published in September 2015, Inspectors had highlighted the need for this Committee to receive a broader overview of information to ensure it could take an overview of patterns and trends in performance.

An outline report was brought to the Committee in February 2016 setting out a draft scorecard template and performance relating to quarter 3. The format and content for future reporting were agreed and the scorecard at Appendix 1 reflected the changes agreed. The scorecard set out the performance against

the agreed indicators across the Children and Families Directorate for quarter 4, 1st January – 31st March 2016.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.

9 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee reviewed its work programme.

RESOLVED – That subject to the the item relating to SEND being amended to reflect the latest position, the work programme be approved.

10 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee reviewed the current forward plan.

RESOLVED – that the forward plan be received and noted.

The meeting commenced at 2.00 pm and concluded at 4.05 pm

Councillor Rhoda Bailey (Chairman)