

**MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MEETING
HELD AT 7.00PM, ON
MONDAY, 06 NOVEMBER 2023
BOURGES/VIERSEN ROOMS, TOWN HALL, PETERBOROUGH**

Committee Members Present: Shaheed (Chair), Hemraj (Vice-Chair), Allen, Asif, Cole, Fenner, Rangzeb, Rush, Skibsted and Warren.

Co-opted Members: Sameena Aziz, Peter French and Katie Howard.

Youth Councillors: Abigail Adebayo and Daisy Blakemore-Creedon.

Officers Present: Belinda Evans, Customer Services Manager
Gary Jones, Interim Service Director for Children's Social Care
and Safeguarding
Karen Dunleavy, Democratic Services Officer
Madia Afzal, Democratic Services Officer

22. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Lane, Over, Councillor Warren was in attendance as a substitute, Co-opted Member Dr Andy Stone and John Gregg, Executive Director, Children and Young People's Services.

23. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING DECLARATIONS

No declarations of interest were received.

24. MINUTES OF THE COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 25 SEPTEMBER 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 September 2023 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

25. CALL-IN OF ANY CABINET, CABINET MEMBER OR KEY OFFICER DECISION

None were received for this meeting.

26. FORWARD PLAN OF EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the report which included the latest version of the Council's Forward Plan of Executive Decisions containing decisions that the Leader of the Council, the Cabinet or individual Cabinet Members would make during the forthcoming month. Members were invited to comment on the plan and where appropriate, identify any relevant areas for inclusion in the Committee's Work Programme.

- Clarification on the delegated partnership agreement procuring independent advocacy services for children decision was sought (KEY/24APR23/02). The interim Service Director for Children's Social Care and Targeted Support agreed to review the Forward Plan and provide the Committee with a briefing note to confirm the status of this item.
- Clarification on the young people home and community support decision was sought (KEY/28AUG23/07), with the Chair querying the uptake of the consultation and engagement via social media. Following a discussion with Democratic Services, the Chair's query was resolved.
- Cllr Allen queried whether the amendments to the Forward Plan could be circulated ahead of the meeting to give the Committee sufficient time to review any changes. The Committee were advised that the publication of the Forward Plan took place on a Friday and that it was standard practice for Members to receive any updates on Monday morning. However, it was noted that Democratic Services would endeavour to update Members at the earliest opportunity.

AGREED ACTIONS:

The Children and Education Scrutiny Committee considered the current Forward Plan of Executive Decisions and RESOLVED to note the report. The Committee also requested that Officers:

- Review the Forward Plan and provide the Committee with a briefing note confirm the status of the delegated partnership agreement procuring independent advocacy services for children decision (KEY/24APR23/02).
- Democratic Services to circulate any changes to the Forward Plan at the earliest opportunity and update Members via an email prior to the meeting.

27. ANNUAL CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMPLAINT REPORT

The Children and Education Scrutiny Committee received a report in relation to complaints under the Children Act 1989 complaints procedures for children and young people.

The report sought to provide the Committee with an update on the complaints from children in care and how these were being resolved. The Customer Services Manager introduced the report and key points raised included:

- Members were advised that the volume of statutory complaints had fallen by a significant margin.
- There was an increase in complaints following the corporate process, this accounted for the aforementioned fall.
- There was an increase in the percentage of statutory complaints where fault was identified, and this impacted complaint escalation. However, Members were advised that this was low for the 2022-23 year.
- The increase in the percentage of complaints where managers had spoken with complainants was noted.
- Areas for improvement such as complaints being responded to within the statutory timescales were identified.

- In terms of the non-statutory social care complaints, the Committee were advised that these had increased for both family safeguarding and early help.
- It was noted that many of the education complaints for the 2022-23 pertained to special education needs and this was in line with the previous year's figures.
- It was recognised that 4/6 cases that were upheld at the Ombudsman pertained to children's services.

The Children and Education Scrutiny Committee debated the report and in summary, key points raised and responses to questions included:

- Clarification on page 39 of the report - the child in care Stage 1 table and the delays in obtaining a driving license was sought. The responsibilities of the social care team in ensuring that documents are progressed efficiently were detailed and the Committee were advised that in this case a delay was noted.
- Members sought further information on page 36 of the report - Stage 1 outcomes - why there had been a 20% increase in faults since 2021-22 and where these had derived from.
- Clarification on the number of upheld complaints was also sought. It was noted that mistakes had been made and rectified and the Committee were referred to the low escalation rate for the 2022-23 year.
- Members queried whether parents understood the procedural element to complaints. It was acknowledged that improvements could be made, especially in respect to the literature. However, the Committee were assured that young people had sufficient access to information.
- A question was raised on the advocacies under Page 38 of the report. The advocacy contract for young people was detailed and it was noted that parents and adults did not have access to the service for complaint handling.
- Members queried the advocacy support for parents and adults, whether they would benefit from assistance and whether the proposed community and religious support especially for minority groups had the potential to reduce complaints.
- It was acknowledged that improvements could be made in respect of the support for parents/adults.
- However, Members were advised that children's services were not obliged to offer advocacy services to adults. Moreover, the Committee were assured that this could be examined at a later stage if required.
- In terms of the legal advocacy, it was advised that parents had access to legal assistance during proceedings and their views were presented to the courts through legal advocacy.
- The role of the allocated social worker during this process was noted and the Committee were advised that social workers played a key role in terms of safeguarding and offering support to parents.
- Members were assured that parents were signposted to relevant support services.
- In terms of the outcome of the complaint with respect to the payment for adaptations to a disability vehicle and how the user gained access to funding, Members were provided with some background information including the upfront costs for the adaptations and the processes surrounding this complaint.
- In terms of the overall outcome, it was decided that the payment ought to be made to enable the foster carer to provide care for the child

and it was noted that the carer was reimbursed for the costs.

- With the complaint stopping at stage 3 and not progressing to the Ombudsman, Members were assured that a sensible solution was found.
- With respect to the financial support for care leavers and whether young people were being adequately signposted, the Member's concerns were acknowledged, and it was noted that young people ought to be given every opportunity to thrive.
- Reference was also made to the pathway plans. The Committee were advised that pathway plans were specific to each individual and detailed their financial, skills and employment needs.
- The Committee were further advised that young people ought to raise their needs with the service area to prevent the leaving care complaints detailed on page 39 and 41 of the report from occurring again.
- It was recognised that the conversations with respect to housing options for carer leavers ought to be forward to a young person's 17th and a half birthday as opposed to their 18th birthday to prevent them becoming homeless and feeling let down by the service area.
- The Committee were assured that the volume of complaints from young people was low and that collaborative work with the housing team was underway. The work sought to make young people aware of their post care options and rectify issues in respect to this area.
- Furthermore, it was noted that the Interim Service Director for Children's Social Care and Safeguarding had met with the Director of Housing and Communities to address these concerns in an effective manner.
- Clarification on 'out of time jurisdiction' listed under ineligible complaints on page 33 of the report was sought. In response, the criteria was detailed as well as the complaints specific to Peterborough.
- A co-opted Member sought clarification on statutory and corporate complaints and queried whether the language for parents and children was user friendly. The co-opted Member also requested information on the decline in complaints. Furthermore, the decrease in compliments was also queried.
- The statutory and corporate processes were outlined.
- In response to the terminology query, the Committee were assured that information was tailored to children and reference was made to the Momo app which enabled young people in care to log their complaints in an appropriate manner.
- With respect to the Co-opted Member's third query, the Officer could not provide a definitive answer. However, the Committee were advised that the reorganization of the service area including the changes to roles and responsibilities and the process of capturing complaints may explain the decrease.
- In terms of the investigations contract, Members were advised that cases had been placed on hold due to COVID-19 and the acquisition of investigators.
- Members were further advised that the service area was now up to date with these cases and where required, compensation had been provided.
- Clarification on Stage 2 investigations on page 37 of the report was sought. The timescales for Stage 2 were outlined as well as the instances in which timescales could be extended.
- In terms of compliments, the Committee were advised that these were kept on a central spreadsheet and communicated to the individuals

in question.

- With regards to education complaints, it was advised that these were managed by head teachers as they did not fall under the council's remit for complaints handling and that schools had their own processes in place.
- Furthermore, the Committee were informed that the Director of Education would draw up a briefing note to provide further clarity on the matter.
- Members were advised that it was difficult for the authority to oversee the education complaints due to the fragmented nature of the education system.
- However, the Committee were assured that the desired information was available upon request.
- Members were also guided to foster strong working relationships with the Multi Academy Trust as this would enable them to access the information in respect of education complaints.
- The Ombudsman's consultation around the social care statutory complaints process was noted and the changes in relation to this process were highlighted.
- In terms of the partially upheld outcome, it was advised that this would cease to exist from April 2024

AGREED ACTIONS:

The Children and Education Scrutiny Committee considered the report and RESOLVED to:

1. Make recommendations for further scrutiny if deemed appropriate.

The Committee also requested that Officers:

- Provide the Committee with a briefing note to confirm the process of complaints for children in care/clarification on the complaints that fall within the schools/education remit.

28. CHILDREN SERVICES IMPROVEMENT BOARD ARRANGEMENTS

The Children and Education Scrutiny Committee received a report in relation to Children's Services Independent Improvement Board Arrangements further to the Department for Education's (DFE) Improvement Notice, dated 2 August 2023.

The report sought to provide the Committee with an update on Children's Services Improvement Board Arrangements.

The Interim Service Director for Children's Social Care and Safeguarding introduced the report and key points raised included:

- The developments in respect to the Improvement Board were outlined.
- The Committee were advised that the Board's terms of reference was detailed in appendix 1 of the report.
- Members were advised that the Board's first informal meeting took place on Wednesday, 8 November 2023 and that the frequency of subsequent meetings was to be determined by the independent chair.
- The purpose of the Children's Services Improvement Board was also outlined.

The Children and Education Scrutiny Committee debated the report and in summary, key points raised and responses to questions included:

- With respect to the outcome of the Ofsted/children's services inspection, it was advised that it was difficult to determine when the outcome would be received. However, the details of the inspection were outlined.
- In terms of further improvements, it was advised that these were to be determined by the independent chair.
- With the Ofsted report being published on 09 May 2023 and the notice being issued on 02 August 2023, the Committee queried why it had taken so long for the report to become before scrutiny.
- The Committee were assured that they had received updates on the Multi- Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and Improvement Plan at previous Committee meetings.
- Members queried whether the Secretary of State had appointed an advisor to work in collaboration with social services. It was confirmed that the appointment was yet to be made.
- In terms of a follow-up on the Ofsted inspection, the Committee were assured that the service area would be looking to action the improvements as a matter of urgency.
- Furthermore, it was confirmed that any concerns surrounding progress would be dealt with at the Improvement Board.
- It was noted that the Ofsted report was presented to the scrutiny Committee in September.
- Members queried whether updates on its progress had been scheduled for the Committee. In response, it was confirmed that regular updates on the Board formed part of the recommendations and that these would be provided.
- It was acknowledged that Ofsted had raised concerns and identified two priority actions for the service area. However, Members were assured that the overall rating was good, and the two priority actions would be considered within the full review.
- It was confirmed that the Board would cease to exist should strong improvements be made and the Committee's role in respect of checks and balances was outlined.
- Youth Council representatives queried whether their voice could be included on the Improvement Board. The Interim Service Director for Children's Social Care and Safeguarding confirmed that he would follow this up with independent Chair.
- In terms of the appointment of the independent Chair, it was advised that leadership experience at a senior level would come into play when making such an appointment and that the successful individual would have to possess the relevant skills and experiences.

AGREED ACTIONS:

The Children and Education Scrutiny Committee considered the report and RESOLVED to:

1. Note and comment on the Children's Services Improvement Board Arrangements.

2. Consider items presented to the Children and Education Scrutiny Committee during 2023/2024 and makes recommendations on the future monitoring of these items where necessary.
3. Determines its priorities and approve the Children's Services Improvement Board Arrangements.
4. Notes the recommendations and consider the legal implications of the committee report.

The Committee also requested that Officers:

Provide the Committee (Youth Councillors) with an update on whether their voice can be included on the Improvement Board, arrangements to be confirmed with the independent Chair.

29. WORK PROGRAMME 2023/2024

The Democratic Services Officer presented the report which considered the relevant items presented in 2023/24 of the Children and Education Scrutiny Committee and looked at the work programme for the new municipal year 2023/24 to determine the Committees priorities.

- Discussions centred around the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Report.
- The Committee were advised that the report ought to be independent and not written by Chris Baird (Interim Director for Education) and Emma Harkin (Head of SEND and Inclusion).
- The Committee were further advised that something ought to be created for the new cohort of children starting in September and for this to be delivered to 3-4 years olds in a nursey setting.
- It was noted that extensive research had been conducted with organisations within the city and that a report on SEND in Peterborough had been drafted by Cllr Cole which had been circulated to members of the Committee.
- In terms of SEND provision for parents, it was highlighted that Peterborough ranked fourth last in the country.
- It was confirmed that parents did not understand the language around SEND.
- Thus, it was requested that a parent toolkit be developed.
- It was hoped that the parent toolkit would explain the different types of SEND and help parents to identify any special educational needs.
- It was further advised that the toolkit ought to be in plain simple language and ought to address cultural issues.
- In terms of the proposed independent report, the Committee were advised that the proposals ought to go in house before going independent and that work should be conducted with Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) and the Early Years Team in the first instance.
- Cllr Cole's forthcoming meeting with Cllr Bisby and Emma Harking was noted.
- It was advised that the January report on SEND ought to incorporate views from SENCOs as well as parents and schools.
- Cllr Bisby mentioned that he had spoken with the Executive Director for Children's Services regarding the request and that further meetings

had been scheduled.

- In terms of timescales, it was hoped that the above would be ready by January. However, the Committee were aware of time constraints and the impending Christmas break.
- It was re-emphasised that the above ought to be ready for the new cohort of children starting in September 2024, in plain simple English and multiple languages.

AGREED ACTIONS:

The Children and Education Scrutiny Committee considered the Work Programme for 2022/2023 and RESOLVED to note the report.

30. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was noted as being the 15th of January 2024.

CHAIR

Meeting started at 7.00pm and finished at 8:23pm