

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
CREATING OPPORTUNITIES AND TACKLING INEQUALITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD IN THE
BOURGES & VIERSEN ROOMS, TOWN HALL, PETERBOROUGH
ON 16 JANUARY 2012**

Present: Councillors S Day (Chairman), Harper, Nadeem, Saltmarsh, and J Shearman

Also present Cllr Sheila Scott Cabinet Member for Children's Services
Peter Godley Youth Council
Niamph Kingsley Youth Council

Officers in Attendance: Malcolm Newsam Executive Director, Children's Services
Jonathan Lewis Assistant Director Education & Resources
Brian Roberts Head of Learning & Opportunities for Children in Care
Sian Peer Commissioning Officer
Paulina Ford Senior Governance Officer, Scrutiny
Dania Castagliuolo Governance Officer
Ruth Griffiths Lawyer

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Benton, Councillor Elsey and Alistair Kingsley.

2. Declarations of Interest and Whipping Declarations

There were no declarations of interest or whipping declarations.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2011

The minutes of the meetings held on 14 November 2011 were approved as an accurate record.

4. Call In of any Cabinet, Cabinet Member or Key Officer Decisions

There were no requests for Call-in to consider.

5. Educational Attainment of Children in Care

The report provided the Committee with a review of the educational achievement of children in care, who were the responsibility of the City Council wherever they were educated. Peterborough City Council was responsible for 320 children who were in Public Care. Of those 240 were of statutory school age. The Council was also responsible for young people who had recently left the care system. Ten of this group were completing Higher Education Courses. There were also 32 children from other Local Authorities who were educated in Peterborough schools and colleges. The educational achievement of those children was supported by the Virtual School for Children in Care. In addition to promoting educational achievement, the Virtual School was also responsible for improving the wider opportunities offered to children in care, for participation activities and for the management of the Children in Care Council.

Observations and questions were raised and discussed including:

- The report states that “The results achieved by Peterborough Children in care reflect favourably with the national average result...” Is this the case, given the KS2 results show our average attainment for Children in Care (Level 4 English and Maths) at 20% vs the National Average of 46%. *Members were advised that maths had always been a problem in Peterborough. Compared to statistical neighbours Peterborough did not perform as highly as in the other indicators quoted in the report where Peterborough was often second.*
- For KS4 5A*-C English and Maths shows 10% vs the National average of 12.8% for children in care. *The number of children in care was a small cohort of 29 it was therefore a disproportionate number and if one more child achieved the grade this would take the City over the national average percentage.*
- Do our statistical neighbours also have small cohorts? *Members were advised that this was usually the case and that the average number of children was 30 to 40 but in the larger authorities that would be higher.*
- Why was the decision made to rebrand the Education Team, for Children in Care as Peterborough Virtual School for Children in Care? What were the costs associated with this and was it really needed given the financial challenges we face? *Members were informed that rebranding had been necessary. Three years ago the concept of the Virtual School was not widely recognised since that time most Local Authorities had recognised the Virtual School and felt that the name Education Team for Children in Care had given the wrong message. The new name helped when working with other authorities as it was something they understood. A reorganisation of the team was currently being undertaken to look at what the team does and how it could be done better.*
- The report highlights that there would be a reduction in staff. How will this impact on the service provided. *The staff had been reduced from four advisory teachers to two. The current consultation would assess what level of staff would be needed to ensure the educational attainment of children in care was improved. The consultation on the Virtual School would go out in March. The Head of Virtual School for Children in Care had been recently assured that the service that the Virtual School would be able to deliver would not be reduced in anyway.*
- The report indicates that the results achieved in 2010 were the best ever but the results for 2011 did not reach that level. Was this due to staffing levels? *Members were informed that there had been a number of contributing factors. During the preparation for examinations there was only one advisory teacher due to long term illness so the hands on support had not been available. There had not been enough resources to hand out one to one tuition because the pupil premium was being handed directly to schools for them to manage. It was therefore the schools responsibility to plan in a much more formal way and to engage with the authority for assistance.*
- Now that the pupil premium was being sent directly to the schools was this being overviewed and monitored and was there a possibility that the authority could take it back again. *The pupil premium was a grant that came from central government and the only role for the City Council was to pass on the full allocation. There was therefore no mechanism to reclaim the funds for the Local Authority. In theory any unspent funds would return to central government.*
- Can you confirm that the pupil premium money that is given to the schools is used for the purpose it was intended. *Schools were required at the end of the financial year to disclose where that money had been spent but this could not be tracked to individual children. There was no compulsion for a school to tell us how money has been spent on individual young people. The money for children in care should only go to schools that had children in care.*
- The report states that “No consultation has taken place regarding the educational achievement of Children in care “. Why? Was this something that we had done in the past? *The Head of Learning & Opportunities for Children in Care advised that no consultation had taken place during the time that he had worked for the authority.*

- The report states that out of a cohort of 29, 13 did not take GCSE's. This seemed a high proportion. *This reflected the number of children with educational needs who were not capable of taking GCSE's.*
- The report states that the authority has been successful at getting care leavers to university. Were alternatives offered for children not wanting to attend university? *University may not be for everyone so alternative pathways were offered like apprenticeships.*
- When care leavers want to go to university do we offer support to help them achieve this? *The authority was generous in the support care leavers received. The Corporate Parenting Group wanted to ensure that no child would be disadvantaged because they had been in care.*
- You stated that your business administrator was employed by Serco. Can you ensure that this post will remain and not be cut? *Serco would supply whatever support was required and if there was a requirement then the post would remain.*
- Members commented that the attendance figures for children in care were good and reflected the good work of carers in getting their children to school. The Chair congratulated the carers on their good work.
- What controls do you have in place to ensure that the children in care that are educated at schools outside of the city were receiving the same quality education as those educated within the city. *There was a statutory requirement to have a personal education plan to record what the schools, carers and social workers were doing to provide the educational attainment of any particular child. However the further away a school was the more difficult it was to ensure the quality of education.*
- The report mentioned a multi-agency conference which was held in March 2011. Please can you tell us who the multi-agencies were? *The Fostering Network, National College of School Leadership, Adult Education and Private Fostering agencies.*
- What is Akamas? *It was a training group which provided online and face to face training. It gave schools access to online training for traumatised children for a year.*
- Are the results of children educated outside of our authority included in the overall Peterborough figures? *Children educated out side of the authority would be included in that authorities figures. Children educated within our authority who were the responsibility of other Local Authorities were included in our set of figures however all children were included in the schools data.*
- If children being educated outside of the authority were doing better than those educated in the authority would this make our own data look better? *The number of children in the cohort was so small that the difference would be negligible.*

ACTIONS AGREED

That the Committee note the report and;

- Recognise the achievements of this Vulnerable Cohort of Young people for whom we all have a Corporate Parenting responsibility
- Acknowledge the contribution made by the Virtual School in supporting young people and partners so that they are able to achieve and in the role that it plays in ensuring that Peterborough is able to honour its Promise to Children in Care
- Recognise the impact that any change in resources will have on the ability of the Virtual School to continue to provide this level of service delivery

6. Child Poverty Action Plan

The purpose of the report was to provide Members with an update on the nature and characteristics of poverty within the city and to outline the effectiveness of action planning to support local families in moving out of poverty. Members were reminded that there was a Statutory Duty to work collectively, as equal partners, to do everything possible to reduce child poverty. To ensure, as far as possible, that today's children did not become tomorrow's

poor adults. Childhood experiences laid the foundations for later life and there was a desire to make that experience in Peterborough as positive as possible. Members were advised that growing up in poverty could damage physical, cognitive, social and emotional development and could affect what was achieved in adult life. While some children who grew up in low income households would go on to achieve their full potential, many others would not.

The Lead Officer for the Child Poverty Agenda advised Members that when comparing statistics with statistical neighbours there were two different ways of recording the data and it had not been recorded the same way across the organisations. The statistics were based on the income agenda but poverty was about far more than income. Poverty was not an identity but was an experience that families went through. A Poverty Needs Assessment had helped to identify what the priorities would be. Four different groups of poverty had been identified:

- Vulnerable Groups e.g. lone parents, teenage parents, newly arrived families
- Vulnerable Lifestyles e.g. NEET's, Rough Sleepers, risk of homelessness, obesity
- Vulnerable Moments e.g. birth, redundancy, family breakdown, debt, new home
- Vulnerable Settings e.g. deprived areas, rural locations, temporary accommodation

Observations and questions were raised and discussed including:

- Some Members had attended the recent Poverty Conference which had been held at the Fleet in Peterborough and wanted to know if there had been any initiatives that had been captured from the Conference that could make a difference to Peterborough. *There were at least thirty potential projects which were currently being scoped to see which were the most viable.*
- Members were concerned that with the forthcoming Benefits Reform the national average wage would drop and that some people who today may be considered in poverty may not be identified as such under the new Benefits Reform. *Members were informed that one of the ways that this might be addressed would be by working with the welfare benefits teams to do some projections as to what might happen and then sending a brief out to all services to help them identify potentials that may not have already occurred. This would help identify families who potentially may fall into poverty and those who are already in poverty but their situation would be worsened.*
- Members wanted to know if the Poverty Team were in contact with the Operation Can Do team. *Members were informed that they had been working together.*
- Why is child poverty in Peterborough higher than in the East of England region and rising year on year? *There was a lot of reasons and looking closer at ward level data would highlight those reasons. Some of it was due to unemployment, disability, people not being aware of the benefits they could receive and some wards had specific issues.*
- One of the outcomes you have identified as important to address is troublesome behaviour to increase learning opportunities for young people. How are you addressing this? *Members were advised that it was about addressing the sporadic low level troublesome behaviour and helping those children who were being affected by it. Various services and organisations were working together to identify and address this issue and the work was being led by the 8 to 19 team.*
- Members commented that they had not heard of any actions or projects addressing poverty within their wards and requested that they be informed.
- Members commented that the report stated that there was an unacceptably high level of 25.3% of our children, 12,144 under 19 year olds recorded as living in relatively low income households. What was being done to address this? *This was being covered through the broader work that the Greater Peterborough Partnership was doing as part of programme SO2 (A Commissioning process designed with strategic intent to ensure service providers work with us to lift families out of poverty). This would address worklessness and the issue around families that were in work but had fallen into poverty and helping them to understand what welfare and benefits they might be entitled to. A leaflet would also be issued to*

employers explaining about part time employment and benefits that part time employees might be eligible to.

- Do you have sufficient resources to target areas where it can have the greatest impact by focussing on tipping points? *It would be about looking at what we are already doing but in a much more effective way. It was not about having a dedicated budget but about gaining support and getting the message for everyone to think about poverty.*
- The Commissioning Officer invited Members to volunteer to become a Poverty Champion to help drive the poverty agenda forward across partner agencies. Councillor Saltmarsh nominated Councillor Shearman. The Committee approved the nomination and Councillor Shearman accepted.

ACTIONS AGREED

The Committee noted the report and requested that:

1. Members are kept informed and invited to any projects addressing poverty within their wards.
2. A detailed Poverty Action Plan to be provided to the Committee with timelines and lead officer names for each work stream at a meeting in June 2012.
3. The Commissioning Officer to contact Councillor Shearman with regard to the role of Poverty Champion.

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee recommends that Councillor Shearman takes on the role of Poverty Champion on behalf of the Committee.

7. Children's Services Improvement Programme

The Executive Director of Children's Services introduced the report. The report informed the Committee on progress that had been made on the Children's Services Improvement Programme which had been put in place following an Ofsted Inspection in August 2011. The improvement would be driven by three key elements:

- The Children's Services Improvement Programme
- The Core Strategy which focused effort on what must be prioritised
- The leadership of Members and officers in delivering the required changes

The Improvement Plan had been constructed under six key themes which would support sustainable improvement over the next twelve to eighteen months.

The key themes were:

Theme One: Providing confident leadership across children's services

Theme Two: Putting in place effective front-line practice

Theme Three: Creating an organisation fit for purpose

Theme Four: Strengthening partnerships to make a difference

Theme Five: Becoming the employer of choice in the region

Theme Six: Robustly managing performance

The core strategy of the Improvement Plan would focus on tackling those areas of greatest risk first. This would include ten core tasks which would cover increasing the number of social

workers, putting in place effective front-line practice and strong leadership across Children's Services.

The Chair thanked The Executive Director of Children's Services and the Cabinet Member for Children's Services for the progress made so far with the Improvement Plan.

Observations and questions were raised and discussed including:

- The report states that additional staff will be brought in to reduce the number of unallocated cases. We have been advised that this has been a priority over the last year, should we have confidence that this is achievable, and why? *Members were advised that there had been a history in the service for bringing in extra staff to clear the back log then the staff would go and have to return when there was a back log again. This meant that there had not been enough staff in place to deal with the work load. This was now being addressed and there would be enough staff put in place for the amount of work therefore taking the number of staff from 71 to 81. That would mean that there would be enough capacity to deal with any new work coming in and going forward once all the posts had been filled. Additionally there would be a specialist team of social workers in place for six months to deal with the work that accumulated over the previous six to nine months. Members were advised that there was no quick fix.*
- Will Legal Services be able to cope with the extra work coming through? *Legal Services would be able to up scale their response as long as Children's Services could give them reasonable notice. The Executive Director of Children's Services did not feel that there would be much additional work and that in the future dealing with families much more effectively and quickly should ease the burden on Legal Services.*
- How can you assure us that once you have improved Children's Services and a new Director of Children's Services was in place that they will want to stay in Peterborough long term. *There was no reason why Peterborough City Council (PCC) would not be a very attractive place to come and work for a future Director of Children's Services. The ambition was over the next twelve months to turn PCC into an attractive place for social workers and managers to come and work. The planning and recruitment process for the Director of Children's services would not be left to the last minute and was already being considered.*
- The report states that the cost of the improvement programme would be met within existing budgets. Was this feasible. *The recent budget proposals identified approximately £3M to support social care of which £1M would go to support social workers and support staff. The Assistant Director Education & Resources was confident that the money was in place.*
- How will the Improvement Plan be monitored? *Members were informed that the Improvement Plan would be monitored in a number of areas:*
 - *Through the Directorate*
 - *External Improvement Board which was Chaired by an independent Chair*
 - *Scrutiny Task and Finish Group*
 - *Creating Opportunities and Tackling Inequalities Scrutiny Committee*
 - *Cabinet*
 - *Council*
- While reducing throughput can be assisted by an improved system and training, can you expand on what is meant by "pruning caseloads"? Does this not rely on the additional resource? *Services start to go wrong when there is a backlog and cases are not being closed. The specialist unit that had been brought in would deal with the backlog and the additional resources long term will ensure that cases were dealt with in an effective way.*
- When a case is closed is there a mechanism for monitoring that family. *The social worker would never be the only individual working with the family. The children go to school; there would be Health Visitors, Youth Clubs, caring relatives etc. When a case is closed relatives were informed and if the need should arise they could refer the case back. Not all problematic families needed a social worker.*

- There has been a massive turnover of staff within children's social care. Will you be analysing why this has happened. *Historically social workers have travelled past Peterborough to work somewhere else. It was therefore important to become an Employer of Choice to attract Social Workers to Peterborough and ensure that they want to stay. There were three key drivers that would attract a social worker to work in an authority:*
 1. *A reasonable work load*
 2. *Will they get effective supervision from the Team Manager?*
 3. *Does the authority look after the individual's career and offer training and development?*
- You have said you want to produce and issue clear guidance for leadership and management roles. What major changes do you see this encompassing that differs fundamentally from your previous approach? *There had always been a strong sense in Children's Social Care that accountability was not clear, compliance had appeared to be problematic and the consequence for non compliance had also not been clear. They were symptoms of the difficulty the service had got into and the style of leadership. Therefore resetting the establishment resets the expectations. That will be supported by development that gets all Managers modelling the correct behaviours.*
- Members noted that the Improvement Plan included the development of an induction pack for Elected Members and senior offices outlining corporate parenting responsibilities. They welcomed this as an excellent idea.
- Who will be undertaking the regular thematic audits on specific practice areas and what will the process be. *There would be several layers of auditing. The first layer would be a monthly audit programme whereby each manager and the Executive Director of Children's Services would do at least one audit a month to build up a regular snapshot of progress on quality. This would be captured and put onto software and measured across the ten themes so that it could be analysed. There was also an Audit Manager who would conduct the thematic audits as requested.*
- Given that the development of a children's services performance management framework is essential to the monitoring of the service, what do you see as the key strands of this to ensure the findings can be validated? *The performance framework was currently being finished. The Executive Director for Children's Services advised that he would bring the completed performance management framework to a future meeting. The performance management framework linked management information to how it was used to manage performance. It also linked into the Quality Assurance Framework.*
- Are you still on target to get the new ICT system in place by 31 March? *The implementation date was the second week of April and was on target. Training would take place during February and March. Once training had taken place there would be 'floor walkers' in place to assist staff with any queries with the new system.*

ACTIONS AGREED

The Committee noted the draft Improvement Plan and the progress that had been made.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee recommends that the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group monitoring the Children's Services Improvement Plan also monitor the ten core tasks within the Core Strategy being implemented over the next six months. Those core tasks being:

1. Bring in additional staff to reduce the number of unallocated cases, reduce numbers of incomplete assessments and restore timely assessment timescales.
2. Restore reasonable workloads by rebasing the establishment to ensure sufficient qualified staff and team managers

3. Strengthening the quality of work undertaken in the assessment teams through better organisation and supported by robust supervision, audit and performance monitoring.
4. Reducing workloads by restoring throughput, pruning caseloads and reducing the number of children in need.
5. Making structural changes for handling contacts referrals and assessments and introducing family support teams.
6. Strengthening leadership, accountability and the quality of supervision through recruitment, training, and performance management.
7. Implementing an effective management information and quality assurance framework.
8. Filling resource gaps by more effective recruitment and putting in place a compelling workforce
9. Building an effective commissioning framework and range of preventive services
10. Providing front line teams with suitable ICT arrangements, business support and working arrangements

9. Forward Plan of key Decisions

The Committee received the latest version of the Council's Forward Plan, containing key decisions that the Leader of the Council anticipated the Cabinet or individual Cabinet Members would make during the course of the following four months. Members were invited to comment on the Plan and, where appropriate, identify any relevant areas for inclusion in the Committee's work programme.

ACTION AGREED

The Committee noted the Forward Plan and requested further information on the following key decision:

- Review of Play Centres in Peterborough – KEY/09OCT/11

10. Work Programme

Members considered the Committee's Work Programme for 2010/11 and discussed possible items for inclusion.

ACTION AGREED

To confirm the work programme for 2010/11 and the Scrutiny Officer to include any additional items as requested during the meeting.

11. Date of the Next Meeting

12 March 2012

The meeting began at 7.00pm and ended at 8.55pm

CHAIRMAN