

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
CREATING OPPORTUNITIES AND TACKLING INEQUALITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
HELD IN THE  
BOURGES & VIERSEN ROOMS, TOWN HALL, PETERBOROUGH  
ON 10 SEPTEMBER 2012**

**Present:** Councillors S Day (Chairman), Harper, N Arculus, B Rush, B Saltmarsh, J Shearman

**Also present** Alastair Kingsley Parent Governor Representative  
Niamh Kingsley Youth Council Representative  
Felicity Scholfield Safeguarding Children Board Chair  
Clare Young Manager, Cherry Lodge  
Louise Ravenscroft Chair of Family Voice  
Two Foster Carers

**Officers in Attendance:** Malcolm Newsam Executive Director, Children's Services  
Wendi Ogle Welbourn Assistant Director, Strategy, Commissioning and Prevention  
Sue Westcott Assistant Director Safeguarding Families & Communities  
Paulina Ford Senior Governance Officer, Scrutiny  
Catherine Berriman Lawyer

**1. Apologies**

No apologies for absence were received.

**2. Declarations of Interest and Whipping Declarations**

There were no declarations of interest or whipping declarations.

**3. Minutes of the meeting held on 23 July 2012**

The minutes of the meetings held on 23 July 2012 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. Fostering Action Plan**

The Assistant Director Safeguarding Families & Communities introduced the report which provided the Committee with information on the Fostering Action Plan. The fostering action plan was developed in April 2012 to ensure that skilled and experienced carers for children who were looked after were recruited and retained. The plan had a range of actions to ensure that the views, wishes and feelings of children were taken into account, and a high quality service was provided to both carers and children. A new permanency panel had been set up and a permanency policy and procedures had been implemented in July 2012. The Fostering Team had been reconfigured in July 2012 into three parts, the recruitment and assessment of new carers, the assessment of connected persons (formerly family and friends carers) and thirdly the support and supervision of approved foster carers.

The Fabulous Forty campaign which had been launched in April 2012 had raised the profile of fostering and had resulted in 33 households currently being assessed. The processes around assessment had been streamlined, Skills to foster training ran alongside the assessment to avoid delay, and timescales put in place with the expectation that from expression of interest to approval would take six months. The Assistant Director Safeguarding Families & Communities informed Members that there had been an extremely good response to the recent Fabulous Forty campaign.

Two foster carers were in attendance at the meeting and were invited by the Chair to give their views on fostering and the improvements that had been made in the fostering service. The foster carers confirmed that the support for foster carers had improved and they were happy with the way it was developing. The foster carers felt that a buddying or mentoring scheme could also be introduced. The Chair requested that the Assistant Director Safeguarding Families & Communities look into taking the scheme forward.

Observations and questions were raised and discussed including:

- Members asked the foster carers if they felt that they had been consulted throughout the process on the action plan. *The foster carers responded that they met with the Foster Care Management team on a regular basis and gave their feedback on an ongoing basis. The Assistant Director Safeguarding Families & Communities advised Members that fostering surgeries were held on a regular basis to assist with advice and guidance. However the aim was to set up a Foster Carers Forum made up of representatives which would then be the main consultative body. Local authority officers could then use the forum to seek their advice, start development and training programmes, offer more support and really listen to what they had to say.*
- Members asked the foster carers if they had attended the comprehensive training package. *Members were advised that there was an ongoing training scheme that foster carers were expected to attend but there was a new package that had been launched during September.*
- The report mentioned that there was a guide being developed for children and carers. Members wanted to know if the foster carers had seen the guide and been able to give any input into its development. *The Assistant Director Safeguarding Families & Communities advised that the guide was still being developed and that it would be shared with the foster carers. The guide had already been to the Children in Care Council, it would also go to the Corporate Parenting Panel.*
- Members commented that the out of hours telephone service had not worked properly over a holiday period and messages had not been passed onto the appropriate person. Had this been resolved? *Members were informed that this should have been resolved but a check would be made to ensure that it definitely had been.*
- Members noted that there was a need to strengthen the Children in Care Council and wanted to know what the weaknesses had been in the council and what the proposed action was to address them. *Members were advised that the Children in Care Council was very small and consisted of approximately fifteen young people five of which had been very active and two or three had attended the Corporate Parenting Panel. The Participation Officer had not been able to reach out to all of the Looked After Children both in the city and out of the city. Work was now being undertaken to organise groups of Looked After Children in the city that would come together for activities and then use the groups to consult with. The attraction to belong to a group would be that there would be activities taking place that they would like to do. This would then help officers assist with developing the service. There were about 120 Looked After Children.*

The Chair congratulated The Assistant Director Safeguarding Families & Communities for the way in which the fostering action plan was being taken forward and developing the service. The Chair also thanked the foster carers who were in attendance for attending and contributing to the discussion.

## **ACTIONS AGREED**

The Committee requested that the Assistant Director Safeguarding Families & Communities provide the Committee with:

1. A briefing note on the 'Staying Put' post 18.
2. A copy of the Children's Guide and Carers Manual.

The Committee also requested that the Assistant Director Safeguarding Families & Communities look into a buddy and mentoring scheme for foster carers.

### **6. Peterborough Safeguarding Children board Annual Report (PSCB) 2011/12 and Business Plan 2012/13**

The Safeguarding Children Board Chair introduced the report which informed the Committee about the work of the Peterborough Safeguarding Children Board (PSCB) through the presentation of the annual report for 2011-12 and the business plan for 2012-13.

The purpose of the report was to

- Provide an outline of the main activity and achievements of the Peterborough Safeguarding Children Board (PSCB) during 2011 – 2012
- Provide an assessment of the effectiveness of safeguarding activity in the city
- Provide the general public, practitioners and main stakeholders with an overview of how well children in Peterborough were protected
- Identify gaps in service development and any challenges ahead.

An independent review of the Safeguarding Board had been undertaken in March 2012 as part of the work led by the Improvement Board and the interim Director of Children's Services. The review had been generally positive. There were a small number of recommendations confined to key issues and they were set out in the report.

Observations and questions were raised and discussed including:

- Members wanted to know how confident the Safeguarding Children Board was that safeguarding was now being addressed. *The Safeguarding Children Board Chair advised Members that she was confident that safeguarding was being addressed but it was early days with regard to confidence in the medium to long term. Things had improved in a relatively short time but there needed to be sustainability long term. The Board would need to have measures in place to continually check and monitor progress. Monthly workshops for practitioners had been put in place to enable practitioners to learn and provide an opportunity to ask practitioners how things were working for them.*
- The report referred to multi agency audits and that the QA group had struggled to resource the agreed multi agency audits. Had there been any progress in ensuring that this was resolved going forward. *Members were advised that four audits had taken place and there was now a part time performance manager in place to help embed the multi agency approach.*
- The report states that not all children who died this year had been reviewed by the Child Death Overview Panel. Why? *Members were informed that a review of a death did not generally happen until after the inquest and guidance states not until after a serious case review had taken place.*
- The report suggests that an e-safety policy was in place but states that there was no guidance of how to manage an e-safety incident. *Members were advised that guidance had been put in place since the report had been written.*

- Members noted that a more robust Common Assessment Framework Form was now in place. What was the new form like? *Members were informed that it was an operational form which was used by all front line practitioners. The form had been simplified to four pages. There were three CAF co-ordinators in place that facilitated the process. The Multi Agency Support Group was now in place who took the CAF and identified all the services that would be needed to be provide the package of care. There was a very tight system in place in Peterborough.*
- Were there any figures for residential assessments that had been carried out? *The Director of Children's services advised that he did not have the information with him but could advise that the figures were small.*

## **ACTION AGREED**

The Committee noted the report and requested that an annual report be brought back to the Committee next year.

### **7. Respite and Home Support Unit – Children with Disabilities (Cherry Lodge)**

The Assistant Director, Strategy, Commissioning and Prevention introduced the report and introduced the Manager of Cherry Lodge who was also in attendance. The Manager of Cherry Lodge gave the Committee background information about Cherry Lodge, the services it provided and intentions to establish Cherry Lodge as a central 'hub'. Members were informed that Cherry Lodge was a purpose built, 8-bedded children's home providing short breaks provision. It provided care and support for children with very complex health needs.

Observations and questions were raised and discussed including:

- Members noted that Cherry Lodge was currently providing a service to a minimal amount of young people. If the 'hub' was to be created how many more people could be supported? *Members were advised that the current remit was to provide services to young people with severe disabilities and by expanding the service to include other services such as Link care and outreach support the numbers would expand but it was difficult to say how many more at this point.*
- Members referred to Peterborough's Range of Short Breaks and wanted to know if the Authority were required by Government to provide those services. *Members were informed that the authority had a responsibility to provide the service as they were children in need.*
- Members noted that the report stated that short breaks were continuing to be developed that were creative and appropriate. What did this mean? Louise Ravenscroft, Chair of Family Voice was invited to address the Committee. *Members were informed that Family Voice Peterborough had worked hard over the past year to encourage parents to have a voice about the type of short break services that they would like to have from the city council. Family Voice had been commissioned to conduct a piece of research. Parents did not always want the high end residential care. Parents wanted a wide scope of choice, flexibility and control which might include going away with families or the children having time away from the families. It need not be expensive to provide what was wanted.*
- The report stated that the short breaks services were reliant on PCC funding. Was there a danger that the service might be terminated by the council? *The Manager of Cherry Lodge was confident that the funding would remain in place. There was a long term view to the service being provided.*
- With the rising population there may be more young people requiring this kind of specialist support which would have an impact on the budget. Where would the funding come from to continue with the service? *Members were advised that the needs of disabled children were growing with the increase in population. The desire to improve the services of disabled children was also growing which had a budget implication and this would be reflected in the budget this year.*

- What did JASP stand for as mentioned in the report? *Members were advised that it was the Joint Agency Support Panel. This was where referral of children who require short access breaks were taken.*
- Members wanted to know if the Manager of Cherry Lodge felt that the service was accessible to all children and were there checks in place to ensure it was. *Members were informed that organisations like Family Voice were ensuring that parents were proactive in finding out what services were available and they were now more aware of what services were being offered. This also meant that parents have much more say in what services they wanted. Cherry Lodge was also on the same site as Phoenix Special school catering for young people with severe disabilities. Staff at Cherry Lodge attended target setting evenings and met with parents and providers and were therefore able to raise awareness of the services provided at Cherry Lodge. Cherry Lodge has also moved under the directorate of Strategy, Commissioning and Prevention which had also increased awareness.*
- Do you do any fundraising? *Members were advised that fundraising did take place and parents were very proactive. Local businesses also donated prizes for fundraising. Certain pieces of equipment had been provided through charitable grants.*

The Chair thanked the Manager of Cherry Lodge for providing an informative report and advised that the Committee were happy to support the plans for future development.

The Chair also thanked Louise Ravenscroft for her contribution to the discussion.

#### **ACTIONS AGREED**

The Committee noted the report and supported the ongoing development of Cherry Lodge Services.

### **8. Children's Services Improvement Plan – Progress Report**

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 progress report had been a regular report to the committee and the last update to the committee had been in July 2012. Highlights of the report were:

- Strong performance had continued in the referral and assessment service. The year to date figures in July had shown that 98% of initial assessments had been completed within 10 days and 88% of core assessments within 35 days.
- Referrals and initial assessments had continued to be generated at or around the statistical neighbour average and had seen a gradual reduction in volumes of core assessments.
- The "Assurance" audits had now all been completed. In total 954 cases were graded of which 392 (41.1%) were adequate, 413 (43.3%) remedial and 149 (15.6%) inadequate. Now in the process of ensuring that action plans were on the system and had been completed.
- Now moved into a position of being slightly over-established with qualified social workers. This reflected the overlap of new staff with exiting agency staff.
- Had introduced a new weekly report management information tool focussed on the work of the Family Support Teams and the LAC service. This was supported by highlight reports written by Team Managers and presented at a weekly meeting chaired by the Assistant Director. This was already having a marked effect in engaging front-line managers in the improvement programme while identifying where support and attention was required.

Challenges highlighted were:

- The reduction in children with a plan had been scrutinised by the Assistant Director and the primary factor appears to be premature de-planning without clear evidence of a demonstrable change in the risk factors. The Child Protection Chairs had been working on a consensus model of decision making, but immediate steps had been taken to address this and would be amending the multi-agency procedures to reflect a clearer recognition of the accountability for this crucial decision.

The Chair thanked the Director of Children's Services for a positive and impressive report.

Observations and questions were raised and discussed including:

- What was the current case load of social workers? *Members were advised that the average case load was 17 ½ cases per social worker. A guide going forward would be to allocate 20 per social worker.*
- How was the recruitment progressing for the new Director of Children's Services? *Members were advised that there had been good progress and there had been a talented pool of applicants. Interviews would be held during mid September.*
- Members noted that Peterborough was not attracting high quality social workers and wanted to know what development opportunities and succession planning had been put in place to ensure that these staff was retained. *Members were informed that high performers were being identified through the performance management review process. Once identified there would be a focus on the high performers and what they would need to be developed as leaders of the future. Succession plans were being identified right across the department for key roles.*
- If Ofsted were to inspect the service tomorrow what importance would they place on the fact that 1 in 10 core assessments were not carried out within 35 days. *Members were informed that the target set in the improvement notice had been 80% and the department was currently running above that. This put the authority in the top quartile in the country.*
- Has the social workers forum been successful? *Members were advised that it was working very well and social workers were very engaged and raising issues from strategic to practical issues. The Assistant Director Safeguarding Families & Communities meets with the Chair of the forum and takes up the issues raised.*
- The reports show clearly that there had been a change in the department. How have the social workers responded to the change in culture? *Members were informed that some areas were more positive than others. Most social workers understand the vision. The new regime has brought much more accountability and responsibility. The quality of the audits had put transparency on the work of the social workers which had been added pressure for the them.*
- How will us as Members feel confident going forward that the information in the reports represents the reality of what is happening in the department. *Members were informed that it was crucial to have a number of checks and balances in place to test the different areas of the service. The Members role was hugely important in this process and Members visiting the department, asking questions and talking to social workers was all part of the transparency going forward.*

## **ACTIONS AGREED**

The Committee noted the Safeguarding Improvement Plan and the progress that had been made since the last report in July 2012.

## **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 Councillor Arculus requested further information on the Jack Hunt and Ken Stimson Schools boiler refurbishment.

**10. Work Programme**

Members considered the Committee's Work Programme for 2012/13 and discussed possible items for inclusion.

**ACTION AGREED**

To confirm the work programme for 2012/13 and the Senior Governance Officer to include any additional items as requested during the meeting.

**11. Date of Next Meeting**

Monday 12 November 2012.

The meeting began at 7.00pm and ended at 8.48pm

CHAIRMAN

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