

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
CREATING OPPORTUNITIES AND TACKLING INEQUALITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
HELD IN THE  
BOURGES/VIERSEN ROOM, TOWN HALL, PETERBOROUGH  
ON 10 JUNE 2013**

**Present:** Councillors S Day (Chairman), C Harper, J Peach, B Saltmarsh, J Shearman, D Fower

**Also present**

|                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| Alastair Kingsley | Co-opted Member   |
| Keith Jones,      | Citizens Advice Bureau  |
| Julie Coleman,    | Relationship Manager, Department of Work and Pensions         |
| Sharon Keogh,     | Social Engagement Manager, Peterborough Food Bank / Care Zone |
| Stuart Mathers    | Rainbow Saver Anglia Credit Union Ltd                         |

**Officers in Attendance:**

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| Sue Westcott    | Executive Director, Children's Services                |
| Jean Imray      | Assistant Director Safeguarding Families & Communities |
| Adrian Chapman  | Head of Neighbourhood Services                         |
| Allison Sunley  | Head of Commissioning, Targeted Services               |
| Leonie McCarthy | Social Inclusion Manager                               |
| Paulina Ford    | Senior Governance Officer, Scrutiny                    |
| Ruth Griffiths  | Lawyer   |

**1. Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Rush and Councillor Nawaz. Councillor Peach was in attendance as substitute for Councillor Rush.

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

There were no declarations of Interest or whipping declarations.

**3. Minutes of the meeting held on 22 April 2013**

The minutes of the meetings held on 22 April 2013 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. Impact of Welfare Reform**

The purpose of the report was to inform the Committee of the impacts of Welfare Reform and the work that had been undertaken through the Peterborough Community Assistance Scheme to tackle poverty and destitution. The Head of Neighbourhood Services advised Members that the report was being presented very early on in the progress of work and confirmed that there was also work being done on the unintended consequences of welfare reform, e.g. shoplifting and domestic abuse. The subject would need to be kept under review for some time as many of the reforms would not happen for several months to come.

Officers in attendance with the Head of Neighbourhood Services gave a presentation on the work they were doing to help mitigate the impact of Welfare Reform.

### **Peterborough Job Centre**

Julie Coleman, Relationship Manager for Peterborough Job Centre, Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) advised Members that her work involved supporting the Local Authority and the DWP to work together for the roll-out of Welfare Reform. This had included coordinating provision; providers, employers and partners. There were approximately 6500 people currently claiming Job Seekers Allowance. The job centre had been going through welfare reform for the last sixty years. The first part of that was the Social Fund Reform, followed by council tax changes, housing benefits, under occupancy and the next step would be the July benefit cap. Part of the work had been to prepare all the partners of the voluntary and support organisations by holding awareness sessions.

### **Care Zone & Peterborough Food Bank**

Sharon Keogh, Social Engagement Manager for Kingsgate Church advised Members that Kingsgate Church had been running the Care Zone Project which offered emergency furniture for people in crisis. They were also the lead agency for the Peterborough Food Bank.

Care Zone was a project that had been set up twelve years ago by Kingsgate. It typically served people who were leaving hostels who have been homeless or victims of domestic abuse. The scheme was driven by public donations. They only took referrals from agencies and they relied on those agencies' professional assessments. Last year Care Zone had supported 2010 people and in the first eight weeks of the project they had 130 new referrals. Food Bank was set up in October 2012 with the purpose of supporting people with emergency food. This followed the Trussell Trust model of food banks and was a partnership between a number of local churches. The scheme was driven by public donations. There were seven distribution centres placed strategically across the city and were open from Tuesday to Saturday. They were run by volunteers who offered both signposting and food. The volunteers had received training from CAB so that they could offer people the correct support and help them find other agencies if necessary. In the first eight weeks of the project 572 food parcels have been distributed.

### **Citizens Advice Bureau & Peterborough Community Assistance Scheme (PCAS)**

Keith Jones, Chief Executive, Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) in Peterborough informed Members that he was leading on the advice function and the initial assessment for the Peterborough Community Assistance Scheme. His role also included triaging all of the support arrangements under the auspices of the Peterborough Community Assistance Scheme.

CAB was leading the forefront and DWP and Customer Services at Bayard were signposting people either in crisis or reaching poverty towards CAB, where they had a brief assessment. They were trying to break the cycle of poverty and enable people to move forward by giving them good quality advice. Members were given a 'snapshot' of what had been achieved in the first two months. Just over 1300 people had been seen under the scheme. The issues were predominantly benefits, tax credits, debt, housing, relationships, families, and employment issues. CAB was also one of the key referrals into the food bank and they had issued 245 food vouchers in the first eight weeks. 72 referrals had been passed into Care Zone. There were also emergency packs for the homeless or people coming out of care of which 9 had been issued. 21 referrals had also been made to give people access to recycled white goods. 70 referrals had been made for people to get emergency meter cards for those who had no money for gas or electricity.

## Peterborough Rainbow Savers

Stuart Mathers, Voluntary Director of Rainbow Saver Anglia Credit Union; known as Peterborough Rainbow Savers, advised Members that Peterborough Rainbow Savers provided financial access for those who were unable to get it. The scheme had 1500 members before starting in Peterborough. In the last two months an additional 250 people have joined the scheme. High volumes of people were being managed on a weekly basis most of which were enquiring about how they could get loans as the Union was a suitable alternative to payday lenders and loan sharks. All the products available were set up to help people save money and learn how to budget. They were also able to provide small loans to people who had smaller incomes and would be rejected by banks. The scheme was governed by the same financial ombudsman as all other lenders. The majority of people who had taken a loan had paid back first payments. The Union was funded by Axiom, Cross Key Homes and Peterborough City Council.

Observations and questions were raised and discussed including:

- Members asked if it would be possible to include a summary in the report of PCAS clients and which services those clients had accessed. *Members were advised that the PCAS clients were generally the same people who had accessed other services. Initially they were seeing people who were long-term benefit dependent. They had also seen people who had changed which benefit services they accessed and people who had experienced genuine crises. Therefore there had been a mixture of situations but nothing unexpected. Members were advised that the arrangement for the first six months was that the team would be the umbrella organisation for all the work happening across Peterborough and the data collected for every person coming through would capture their circumstances. The performance measures that would be put in place were not yet captured in the report. Phase Two of the project would be about people being trained up by CAB to be able to triage themselves and would look at volunteering and employment opportunities.*
- Members sought confirmation on whether there would be a shortfall in the budget available to the Peterborough Community Assistance Scheme; and if so, how much would it be. What would happen to the people in need of support when the funding had finished. *Members were informed that the team had been aware of the amount available to them for some time and had developed a scheme which would prevent such shortfalls. Whilst there may be some short-term pressures on some of the services, such as the food bank, they were confident that they had got enough funds to sustain the services long-term. The model was sustainable based on current funding levels.*
- Members asked about the unintended consequences of Welfare Reform and were concerned about impacts affecting people with mental health issues. What measures were being taken to try and forestall, for example, attempted suicides? *Members were informed that work was being done on putting together a suicide strategy. Work was being done on how to support people who were feeling desperate and how to prevent people from getting to that point. One of the biggest challenges in dealing with suicidal people was getting the right support quickly. The strategy had to date managed to accomplish a direct line for the voluntary sector organisations to mental health systems in order to liaise with them and get people assessed. All doctors in the city had been advised about the strategy.*
- Members asked how many job vacancies there were within the city. *Members were informed that there were on average between 1000 – 1500 jobs advertised per month most of which were temporary, part-time or zero-hour contracts.*
- Members had noted that the food bank was set up by a religious foundation and that there may be people who wished to receive food from the food bank but were of other religious faiths and might feel reticent about going into a Christian building. What was being done about this? *Members were advised that there were other distribution centres other than Kingsgate which were not religiously affiliated. Members were informed that there had not been as much resistance as one would think; and that some people had felt that a religiously based centre could be better trusted than a more formal setting. Work had*

- been done with other faiths, and some mosques and temples had been approached to see if they wished to engage with the food bank. This was a community-wide food bank and the Trussell Trust Model had been agreed on by all religious faiths at the time it was set up. It was always agreed that at the point of contact with individuals there would be no discussion about faith; unless those individuals choose to ask questions about faith.*
- *Members asked if there was a finite capacity to the credit union facilities offered in Peterborough. Members were informed that there were three funded staff; two from the Local Authority and one apprentice from Cross Keys. The facilities were volunteer-led and even the directors were volunteers. It was confirmed that the volume of people requiring assistance had not been expected and this obviously affected the capacity to serve. The amount of people the union could see in a day and support was therefore limited. Another capacity issue was that the union was only allowed to give 80% of total turnover in loans. In order to mitigate reaching that limit the union was constantly looking for people to save with the union; thereby increasing the turnover.*
  - *Members asked what work was being done to stop loan sharks in this city. Members were advised that there was a Financial Inclusion Forum that had been running for some time and this included all the partners that work at the front end with the public. The national body for tackling illegal money-lending attended the forums every two months. An action plan had been developed to try and stop loan sharks; some actions of which had already been undertaken to get the message out. CAB would oversee and monitor the action plan along with a rogue trader action plan. Members were also informed that there was national scrutiny on the payday lenders by the Office of Fair Trading. There had been examples in Peterborough where under 18 year-olds were being granted loans through deception. More could be done to educate young people about the dangers of this type of borrowing.*
  - *Members asked how many savers the Union had and what interest rate the Union provided and whether or not the Union was making a profit. Members were advised that the Credit Union did not base loans on interest but on dividends. There were 4500 members across Cambridgeshire, North Suffolk and South Norfolk area. The profit made was about £3000 - £4000. This was shared out as interest. Children who saved were prioritised; the union tried to guarantee a 3% dividend for children. The dividend encouraged people to save but it was not a large amount of profit. Most of the turnover went towards running the project. The Rainbow Saver was part of the National Credit Union expansion programme that government were financing and this was doubling membership of Credit Unions within twelve months.*
  - *Members asked if the number of rough sleepers had increased. Members were advised that the amount of rough sleepers in the city was currently twelve. It was too early to say whether there had been an increase but this was being closely monitored.*
  - *Members asked if there had been an increase in rogue landlords and houses of multiple occupation. Members were informed that there had been an increase over the last few years and it was therefore difficult to say whether there had been a continued increase due to the Welfare Reform. A proposal was being worked on to bring in a form of licensing in order to mitigate this risk. It would require a landlord to license their property with the Local Authority. This would enable the team to assess whether or not the landlord was fit and proper and that the tenants were protected.*
  - *Members asked where the food came from for the food banks. Members were advised that the food banks were reliant on public donation. Supermarkets were being very supportive in a variety of ways including monetary donations, collecting days, staff and customer involvement.*
  - *Members noted in the report the potential city centre hub which was for people over the age of 16 and wanted to know where people below the age of 16 could go for help. Members were advised that the team was working closely with colleagues in Children's Services and would expect those colleagues to help in such cases. The age limit of 16 was subject to review and the hub was part of phase two of the project. Eventually a hub would be developed that would provide open access for all with no age limit.*

The Chair thanked the Head of Neighbourhood Services for an informative report and thanked the guests for attending the meeting and providing an informative insight into their work around Welfare Reform.

## **ACTIONS AGREED**

The Committee noted the report.

### **6. Children's Play Services**

The Head of Neighbourhood Services introduced the report which provided the Committee with an update on the progress being made relating to the development of alternative play provision. Members were informed that the project was live and therefore subject to change. Children's Play Services had been subject to review over a number of years. In the medium term financial plan of 2010 it was identified that savings should be made from the Play Service but the savings had never been realised. In 2013 further savings were identified. The total savings therefore made the continuation of the staffing of Children's Play Services unviable. The contribution that Play Services had made to the community had always been acknowledged. In order to recognise this contribution during the half term period there would be opportunities for individual play centres to hold celebratory events and record the history of Play within those centres. Commemorative books had also been created which allowed staff to take away an enduring memory of their work. Many of the centres had delivered targeted activities to children and clear action plans had been put in place for any children who were in receipt of targeted support. A presentation was then delivered on what work has been done since the decision was made and what plans there were for the future including exploring the potential use of the buildings with communities. A range of options for each building was being looked at which included outright ownership; long lease; short lease; and a license. The Council was keen to support the communities and build community infrastructure with the buildings.

The work so far had focused on three key themes: Place, People and Business. Looking at place involved the condition of the building, the location and what funding would be required to make the building fit for purpose. Looking at people involved ensuring the community would have the capacity to run the service the building would be used for. The business model involved looking at whether the building could become more generic in terms of the service it would offer. Structural and condition surveys would be completed. There was a commitment to enter into a license agreement by the end of June for all eight centres. This meant there would be a group license to operate and run each centre; even if the future was as yet undecided.

It was clarified that Families First would not be replacing Children's Play Services but would at least provide the option for play in the relevant areas. 'Families First' could be offered as a support package to those communities who wanted to continue to deliver play.

Observations and questions were raised and discussed including:

- Members asked how long support would be provided by Neighbourhoods and Children's Services to community groups. *Members were advised support would be provided to the community groups as long as it was needed. It was noted that this was about more than just the future use of Play Centre buildings; but rather about reflecting the spirit of Localism. It was confirmed that the Council was committed to maintaining and developing localism within the city.*
- Members asked about a seeming contradiction in the report where it had stated that there may be some buildings which may be found to be not fit and proper for service and yet it later stated that the project would ensure Play Centres remain viable facilities. *Members were advised that the contradictions were reflective of the fact that the team were still*

*trying to work out what the groups looked like. In some areas there were strong community presences whilst in others they were not as strong.*

- *Members asked how licenses were being supplied if the recipients were not yet validated. Members were informed that the critical task they were trying to achieve was to ensure the buildings did not get boarded up and become lost for use. In some cases there were groups who had expressed significant interest in the managing of the relevant facility and negotiations had been entered into with these groups in order to issue short-term licenses. Where there were no groups expressing interest shadow licensees were being sought to take on the licenses for the time being.*
- *Were there viable solutions for all eight buildings? Members were advised that there was concern for three of the buildings. In the three locations the communities had not previously benefited from support or investment by the Local Authority and therefore the level of community involvement was at a much lower level. A lot of work would be required to build the strength of community involvement in those areas to ensure they were ready to take the projects on. A more problematic issue was the condition of some of the buildings. In these cases development opportunities and other alternatives were being looked at rather than outright closure.*
- *Members asked who would be paying for the upkeep costs of the buildings. Members were informed that there was a small amount of money available to cover some of the costs but not enough to last for long which was why the project needed to move forward quickly.*
- *Members commented that the report had not included costings, number of children affected and that at Appendix 1 - Play Centre Summary Review certain Members of the Council had been referred to by their first names. Members were advised that the costings had been discussed during the Full Council meeting. The Officer advised that full names and correct titles would be used in future reports and apologised for the use of first names.*
- *Members also commented that there was a lack of clear vision in the report.*
- *Members sought assurance that groups would be given support regarding drawing up, reading in detail and understanding fully the licensing agreements. Members were informed that the short term licensing agreements were brief and the Can Do Communities would be working with all involved to ensure the communities fully understood the liabilities. Regarding the more complex work around asset transfer; a lead lawyer would join the team in order to establish exactly what the communities would need in terms of support. There was a commitment to fully support the communities throughout the project. Members were also advised that responses from legal colleagues regarding this part of the work would be included in updates and future briefs.*
- *Members wanted to know if an exercise had been undertaken to establish unintended consequences of closing down the Play Centres if the community groups were unable to continue the services themselves. Members were informed that Neighbourhoods and Children's Services were committed to work with the community to keep the Play Centres open. Members were also advised that there was a lot of work being done with Early Years Pathway for 0 to 5 year olds to help develop communication skills, good play, socialising skills and good learning to create stronger family units.*

The Chair thanked the people who set up Families First and thanked the Head of Neighbourhoods for taking on the task of alternative play provision and Children's Services for supporting him.

## **ACTIONS AGREED**

The Committee requested that an update be provided in the form of a briefing note before the September meeting and a further update report to be provided at a future meeting.

## **7. Children's Services Improvement Programme**

The Executive Director of Children's Services introduced the report which provided the Committee with an update on the Children's Services Improvement Programme and included

the refreshed Delivery Plan. Members were informed that it had been announced that Children's Services had been lifted off the Improvement Notice and thanked Members of the Scrutiny Committee for their involvement and work on reaching the target. Work on improvement was ongoing as it was about sustainability and the Executive Director confirmed that performance had been sustained so far.

- Referrals had remained steady and the rolling rate for the year had dropped due to early interventions work taking place.
- Re-referrals had markedly decreased and this had been a trend for the last few months.
- Performance of Initial assessment time scales within 10 working days remained good up to May.
- There were 11.2 fulltime equivalent vacancies; but there were 8 social workers waiting to start and 4 who were due to leave.
- Child Protection plans were above target at 270, although this dropped to 244 in May.
- Looked After Children had increased and this was predominantly to do with a number of young people in the system who were displaying risky behaviour and large sibling groups.
- The Children and Families Joint Commissioning Board held its first stakeholder event for Early Interventions activities on the 22nd April. The event was a showcase of the Early Prevention and Intervention Strategy, feedback from the Safeguarding inspection and a presentation of children's priorities going forward.
- There would be ongoing scrutiny from the Improvement Board and Scrutiny Committee in order to maintain the improvement going forward.

Observations and questions were raised and discussed including:

- Members congratulated the Executive Director and Staff in Children's Services on the lifting of the Improvement Notice.
- Members asked all to recognise that even with the Improvement Notice being lifted it was important for the Committee to ask constructive and informed questions to continually challenge the service.
- Members asked what the major challenges were going to be in the next six months. *Members were advised of the following challenges: recruiting and retaining high calibre staff, ensuring additional resources were mainstreamed and that the service worked within budget and that Early Prevention and Intervention work remained on track.*
- Members asked for clarity on the timescale on seeing fruition on the new staff coming on board; what are the reasons for difficulty in recruiting good team manager posts and how had the recruitment campaign been refreshed. *Members were advised that the new starters would be on board between one and three months due to notice periods. The recruitment of Team Managers was a national challenge. Peterborough had done very well in this respect comparatively speaking. A factor contributing to this problem was the growth in social work agencies. Local Authorities could not compete with the kind of salary levels agencies could provide and this provided a constant challenge. The service had held high standards for an applicant; which contributed to the delay in recruiting good Team Managers. It was highlighted that the entire Senior Management Team was now a permanent team. This was an attractive positive point for people considering working for Peterborough. The refreshed recruitment campaign involved rebranding and marketing the Local Authority; especially the fact that it was now out of intervention and the Improvement Notice had been lifted.*
- Members asked about child protection plans. Did the increase mean that thresholds had not been correctly applied previously and if so, was there an appropriate mechanism now to keep this on track? *Members were advised that it was not unusual for authorities in intervention to find the numbers of child protection cases rising and numbers of Looked After Children rising. This could be a reflection of having more control of cases that had previously been drifting where risks have not been properly understood. It was important to be clear that targets were indicative in these matters but they provided a sense of where the service thinks it should be compared to similar demographics. It was important that the service ensured they had the right children with plans and the right children were*

*looked after for the right period of time. This was constantly being looked at and challenged. As the Improvement Notice had been lifted and as the service continued to improve, partners and other agencies would have more confidence in the service to work robustly in other plans, such as Children in Need, and therefore not as many children would need protection plans.*

- Members asked about the Amber status on the RAG ratings and whether this meant they were behind in their targets. *Members were advised the Looked After Score Card had been developed and made available to the Corporate Parenting Panel and the Local Children's Safeguarding board. Action plans had been implemented for all the items with RAG ratings but it was work in progress and that was the reason for the Amber status.*
- Members asked why the lack of focus on work with fathers had been highlighted in the report. *Members were advised that this came out of the Children and Families Joint Commissioning Board Stakeholder Event which had highlighted that there was a lot of focus on mothers and their parenting skills but not a lot of work was being done with fathers and boys. This was the reason this challenge has been incorporated into the plan; to focus more on how to engage with fathers.*

## **ACTIONS AGREED**

The Committee noted the Children's Services Improvement Programme report.

### **8. Children's Services Improvement Programme Scrutiny Task and Finish Group – Progress Report**

The report provided the Committee with an update on the work of the Children's Services Improvement Programme Scrutiny Task and Finish Group and the progress it had made since it was established in November 2011. It was noted that this report has been read and all agree that it was a good report and the group would continue. It was suggested that people who were not actively taking part in the Task and Finish Group be approached to ask if they would like to continue. If they did not wish to continue others Members could be found who would like to take part.

## **ACTIONS AGREED**

The Committee agreed that the Senior Governance Officer would contact members of the Task and Finish Group to confirm if they wished to continue on the group.

### **9. Review of 2012/2013 and Work Programme for 2013/2014**

The Senior Governance Officer introduced the report which provided the Committee with:

- a review of work undertaken during 2012/13 and recommendations made
- the terms of reference for the Committee and
- a draft work programme for 2013/2014 for consideration

The Committee considered the report and decided that there were no recommendations from last year that required further monitoring.

Members requested the following items be added to the work programme:

- Reorganisation of schools in Peterborough.
- Development of the University in Peterborough
- Key Stage 1 and 2 Validated results to be presented in November and Key Stage 4 Validated results to be presented in March 2014.
- All other items on the draft work programme to remain.



## **10. Notice of Intention to Take Key Decisions**

The Committee received the latest version of the Council's Notice of Intention to Take Key Decisions, 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 Notice of Intention to Take Key Decisions

## **11. Date of Next Meeting**

Monday 22 July 2013

The meeting began at 7.00pm and ended at 9.20pm

CHAIRMAN

This page is intentionally left blank