

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
CREATING OPPORTUNITIES AND TACKLING INEQUALITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD IN THE
COUNCIL CHAMBER, TOWN HALL, PETERBOROUGH
ON 6 JANUARY 2014**

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

Also present Alastair Kingsley Co-opted Member
Cllr S Scott Cabinet Member for Children's Services
Pat Carrington Principal / Head of Service, City College

Officers in Attendance: Sue Westcott Executive Director, Children's Services
Jonathan Lewis Assistant Director Education and Resources
Wendi Ogle-Welbourn Director of Communities
Allison Sunley Head of Commissioning, Targeted Services
Lou Williams Acting Assistant Director, Commissioning
Simon Green Head of Adoption and Fostering
Mark Kerr Marketing Officer
Paulina Ford Senior Governance Officer, Scrutiny
Ruth Griffiths Lawyer

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Day, and Councillor Peach was in attendance as substitute.

2. Declarations of Interest and Whipping Declarations

Councillor Shearman requested that each Member of the Committee declare individually if they had been whipped. The following Members declared individually that they had not been whipped:

- Councillor Harper
- Councillor Rush
- Councillor Peach
- Councillor Shearman
- Councillor Fower
- Councillor Saltmarsh

3. Minutes of the meetings held 11 November 2013

The minutes of the meetings held on 11 November 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.

Due to the number of members of public in the audience and young people in attendance for item 6, New Vision for Early Years Services Including Children's Centres in Peterborough the

Chairman asked the Committee if they would agree to move this item to first on the agenda. The Committee agreed to this. Item 5 on the agenda City College Peterborough would therefore become item 6.

5. New Vision for Early Years Services including Children's Centres in Peterborough

The Chair acknowledged that there had been two written submissions to the Committee prior to the meeting from members of the public for consideration:

- Miss Sarah Tomkins, Peterborough Against Poverty who provided some alternatives options to the closure of the Children's Centres
- Susan Cooper, Hamptons Children's Centre who was opposing the closure of Hampton Children's Centre.

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services introduced the report which updated and informed the Scrutiny Committee of the outcomes so far for the consultation around the proposed changes to the way early years services were run in Peterborough including Children's Centres. Information was provided on the consultation process, emerging issues and themes that had come forward from parents and the community including alternative proposals. The Committee were asked to comment as part of the consultation process.

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services expressed a desire for an open an honest consultation and acknowledged that there was still time for people to express their views and reiterated a commitment to hear views of all people in Peterborough, including the wider public and parents that did not use the children's centres. Members were reminded of the financial restraints of the council over the next few years and that doing nothing was not an option.

Six public meetings had been held in three separate locations, with a total attendance of 107 people who shared an interest in children's centres provision. A wide variety of ideas had come forward including concerns about the social isolation of new parents and the benefits of mother and baby cafés which allowed new parents to form new social contacts. A strength of feeling among young mothers was recognised at these meetings and it was agreed that mother and baby groups should be supported. Parents had also expressed interest in volunteering in such support groups and training recommendations will be offered in response to this interest. A number of commercial organisations had also shown an interest in providing pre-school services and universal services to families in communities. Young families would be listened to up until the end of consultations on the 8 January. This would then be analysed and included in the report to Cabinet on the 20 January.

Observations and questions were raised and discussed including:

- Members stated that the evidence in favour of children's centres was clear and showed a positive effect on families and people in the community. The proposal placed super-hubs north of the river, which disproportionately affected children not deemed to be living in areas of deprivation. The Stanground, Brewster Avenue and Hampton centres had 21%, 18% and 22% respectively of children living in poverty. Therefore it was stated that the argument that it would help the most vulnerable did not stand up. Members asked how the services would help those south of the river. The consequences of not supporting young mothers would be felt later in life and have a negative impact on society as a whole. The centres provided many local families with vital services and support. Could the alternative proposals put forward be put in the final Cabinet report? *The Cabinet Member advised Members that she had been in discussions with the Brewster Avenue children's centre and believed that there was some possibilities available for providing social opportunities mixed in with health. The Director of Communities stated that the majority of responses wanted children's centres to remain how they were and there were less suggestions on how to deal with the financial challenges. The report articulated how to mitigate concerns*

parents have had, particularly the value parents placed on play sessions for 0-2 year olds and support for parents with post-natal depression and there were considerations to extend those provisions. Some parents were prepared to set up their own support groups but themselves needed support and training. Closure was not being looked at but rather re-designation and centres would still focus on child provision but may be child care or pre-school.

The Chair invited Members of the Public to speak.

Mrs Angela Brennan service user of Brewster Avenue and Stanground children's centres addressed the Committee and made a statement which included the following key points:

- The centres should be open to all families regardless of their financial situation as anybody can suffer post-natal depression or experience breast feeding problems.
- Mrs Brennan was glad that Councillor Scott was going to visit the Baby Cafés, however as the consultation ended in two days, she stated it should have been done a lot earlier.
- She stated that she had sent a clarification email earlier in the day to councillors on what the children's centres provide. It was noted that Councillor Scott had previously pushed children's centres and praised their usefulness, and wondered how and why her view on the matter had changed.
- It appeared that councillors were under the impression that the children's centres were playgroups. These were not standard playgroups as they included training on how to get back into work, cookery courses, how to deal with post-natal depression and much more.
- Parent led playgroups were fine but simply offering children's toys was inadequate and providing outreach services which parents were unable to access could hinder children's development.
- Nurseries and pre-schools were expensive and only 15 free hours were available which parents should not have to rely upon.

Mrs Faustina Yang speaking on behalf of mothers in Hampton addressed the Committee and made a statement which included the following key points:

- Mrs Yang was grateful that access to children's centres had been provided previously and was upset that this provision might be taken away.
- There had been a lot of uncertainty amongst parents in Hampton, and that children's centres were not just social hubs for parents to meet and have fun.
- Baby cafés only provided support for breast-feeding and yet only 20% of mothers breast-feed. What will be provided for them?
- Mrs Faustina Yang also stated that the figures on Hampton's level of deprivation were from 2010 and therefore outdated, and noted that when she asked the council to conduct a new survey on the level of deprivation in the area, a full survey was deemed too expensive yet the figures on how much it would cost were not known.
- She stated that only 28 councillors had responded to emails regarding this matter and that whilst councillors had visited and listened to views no alternatives have been provided.
- Many parents in Hampton were new parents and new to the area. How would separating target groups from other families assist the community?
- Peterborough education was currently near the bottom of the league tables. How would closing the centres make this situation better?

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services stated that proposals would be available around all the children's centres, however consultations had not finished yet. She stated that the report would be published before the Cabinet meeting and there would be proposals around every children's centre.

- Members asked the Cabinet Member why the Prime Minister in Prime Ministers question time on 20 November stated that there were more people using children's centres than

ever before and the government would be increasing the money going to local councils to support children's centres. Was this true? *The Cabinet Member stated that she had written to both Members of Parliament for Peterborough and North West Cambridgeshire asking for clarification from the Prime Minister. No response had been received yet. She would write to both of them again. Officers in both Resources and Children's Service were not aware of any new money or ringfenced money for children's centres.*

- Members stated that two years ago contracts had been agreed with Spurgeons and Barnardos to take over the children's centres to secure their future and make a saving. Could the contracts be renegotiated as the time limit had not expired? *The Director of Communities responded that to alter contracts with Barnardos and Spurgeons a variation would need to be discussed. Discussions had taken place with both providers.*
- Members commented that at a conference two years ago early year's provision was highlighted as a weakness. The new proposals had not addressed this. *The Cabinet Member stated that two to three years ago no one could have anticipated the financial restraints that would be faced and the strain on the council's accounts. There has had to be significant changes to the funding of local government, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer stated this would continue which has had an impact on all services. The priority was the safeguarding of children and maintenance of social services. The funding streams for early year's provision had changed and the government had put more money into free childcare and additional health visitors.*
- Members wanted to know if there was any evidence to show a tangible long-term saving. Consideration should also be given to the impact on the wider community. *The Cabinet Member responded that 2-3 years ago the funding for children's centres was ringfenced; now the funding for pre-school was ring-fenced instead. There was no ring-fencing for children's centres which had impacted on the recommendations. The Director of Communities stated that children's centres did add value in terms of additional support but in terms of whether that would have a long-term impact was difficult to evidence. However the government had stated that good quality childcare prior to school could make a difference, hence the ring-fencing of money around pre-school funding. Furthermore, good-quality healthcare for parents was important hence the increase in health visitors. Many interventions can make a difference in the outcome for children.*
- Members responded that the significant funding devoted to children's centres previously was premised on the positive impact it had on wider society and that impact had not disappeared.
- Members asked how the council could justify closing children's centres as a response to budget constraints whilst spending money on other projects. *Members were advised that certain aspects of the budget had to be spent in particular ways.*
- Members noted that the proposed provision for super-hubs had been based on the 2010 deprivation figures. Had the super-hub structure been adopted in other areas of the country and if not how could Members be assured that it would work in Peterborough. If it had been adopted in other areas had there been an evaluation of effectiveness. *The Director of Communities responded that some updated data existed in terms of population figures but the assessment was that the key areas of deprivation would not be altered substantially. The idea of the super-hubs was that the reach would be broader. All hubs would have a responsibility to reach out to the wider community. The scrutiny paper showed recognition of potential for social isolation and looked at recommending a facilitated play session a week and further mitigating some of the concerns put forward.*
- Members expressed concern at the loss of the local community hub south of the river and the potential to impact mothers experiencing post-natal depression. Looking at deprived families may make individuals who could afford to pay feel excluded. Had voluntary organisations been considered? *Members were advised that referral to hubs would not be connected to income it would be connected to need. Parents from areas of comparatively less deprivation were being taken into account and have been further included in the Cabinet paper.*
- Members were concerned about accessibility and the fact that if communities south of the river develop away from the city centre there will be further issues of accessibility. As money was tight the onus would fall upon other bodies to provide support for example

head teachers and parents which itself had a cost. Other front line services could also be negatively impacted. *The Director of Communities responded that she would include the question in the consultation. In terms of schools they received a pupil premium for children of deprived backgrounds.* Members commented that schools were already under pressure concerning the use of pupil premium funding.

- Members expressed concern that no alternatives had been considered.
- Members asked the Cabinet Member to consider all the proposals that had been submitted during the consultation including those regarding income generation.
- Members wanted to know what detailed assessment had been made regarding the impact of the proposals to close the children's centres on the poverty strategy. *The Director of Communities responded that the super hubs were recommended to be placed in areas of highest deprivation which was a key element of the poverty strategy.*
- Members responded that deprivation was not a fixed issue and was one of ebb and flow – thus areas experiencing closure of certain children's centers could in future find themselves in poverty. *The Director of Communities recognised this fact but reiterated that the super hubs should be able to provide help to all those who needed it.*
- Members expressed concern that Welland was a deprived area and the super-hub would not benefit families in Welland as it would not provide the same services as before.
- Members expressed concern that they were being asked to consider far reaching proposals without any solid data or evidence and in particular no meaningful financial information.
- Why had Members not seen a copy of the Equality Impact Assessment? What were the long-term impact assessments in terms of mental health, etc? *The Cabinet Member for Children's Services responded that these concerns had been recognised and stated that they would be responded to.*

The Committee took a short recess to discuss possible recommendations. On returning to the Council Chamber, Councillor Fower proposed that the following recommendations be put before the Committee for approval, this was seconded by Councillor Shearman.

The proposed recommendations were that the Cabinet member for Children's Services and the Director of Communities provide the following information in the report being presented to Cabinet on 20 January for their consideration:

- a. Include a detailed financial analysis to clearly show where the proposed cost savings are to be made and clarify how the figure of £1.28M was arrived at.
- b. To include within the report to Cabinet a copy of the full Equality Impact Assessment report.
- c. To identify clearly within the report which recommendations have been added to (or revised within) the proposal as a result of feedback gathered during the consultation process.
- d. To reflect within the report to Cabinet on the potential deferred/future costs that may be generated as a result of the proposal, and identify where the funding would be sourced to meet these. (Costs for local school or community provision of facilities, impact on early years learning etc.) and that
- e. Cabinet defer any decision making on the proposal until further alternatives and proposals have been thoroughly explored and considered.

The proposed recommendations were then voted on and approved (5 voted in favour, 1 abstention).

The Committee were then presented with two petitions from Mrs Angela Brennan and Mrs Faustina Yang. Mrs Faustina Yang's petition asked council to rescind proposals to close the Hampton Children's Centre. Mrs Brennan's petition asked council to stop the closure of the six children's centres. Mrs Brennan stated that as her petition had over 1,000 signatures she wished for it to be debated at full council.

The Chair thanked Members of public for attending the meeting and for their contribution to the debate.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Committee recommend that the Cabinet member for Children's Services and the Director of Communities provide the following information in the report being presented to Cabinet on 20 January for their consideration:
 - a) Include a detailed financial analysis to clearly show where the proposed cost savings are to be made and clarify how the figure of £1.28M was arrived at.
 - b) To include within the report to Cabinet a copy of the full Equality Impact Assessment report.
 - c) To identify clearly within the report which recommendations have been added to (or revised within) the proposal as a result of feedback gathered during the consultation process.
 - d) To reflect within the report to Cabinet on the potential deferred/future costs that may be generated as a result of the proposal, and identify where the funding would be sourced to meet these. For example, the costs for local school or community provision of facilities, impacts on early years learning etc.
2. That Cabinet defer any decision making on the proposal until further alternatives and proposals have been thoroughly explored and considered.

ACTIONS AGREED

The Committee requested that the Cabinet Member for Children's Services seek confirmation as to whether the current funding from government does or does not include an amount (albeit not ring fenced) for Children's Centres and if this amount is the same as, less or more than previous years. The Cabinet Member was asked to report back to the Committee via email as soon as this information is available.

6. City College Peterborough

The Principal of City College Peterborough introduced the report which provided the Committee with an overview of Peterborough City Councils Adult and Community Learning Provision at City College Peterborough (CCP). This included who used the college, its outcomes, NEETS, the Raising of the Participation age and the impact the service had on local residents and businesses. A short video of interviews was provided showing two NEETs (not in education, employment or training) who had been attending Peterborough City College. In the video they discussed the training Peterborough City College had offered to them to help them in their job search and in their personal lives.

Observations and questions were raised and discussed including:

- Members sought reassurance that Peterborough City College had the capacity to broaden the provision of qualifications offered and continued growth and success of apprentice schemes. *The Principal replied that the apprentice scheme was an area of growth and the Skills Funding Agency has noted that the College had achieved their contract early and had been told to expand the apprenticeship provision and to continue recruiting over target as it would attract funding.*
- Members asked if courses at the college could begin to address issues around the poverty strategy. *The Principal replied that a contribution had been made to the poverty strategy and that one of the Vice Principals had been involved with the poverty strategy and that City College would look to see how they could further support this.*
- Members congratulated the Principal on the success of the John Mansfield Centre.

- Members expressed concern regarding the categorisation of pupils and asked if pupils were aware of which categories they were placed into. *The Principal stated that such categorisation was confidential and the categorisation was for support staff in order to assess what type of support pupils would require in order to remove barriers to learning and apply for funding to increase support.*
- Members asked for a hypothetical example of a change in categorisation. *The Principal responded that a criteria of somebody who may be in care or have drug abuse in the family would place that individual into a category so that if they failed to attend college they would be prioritised for further support. The Principal further clarified that the introduction of a new category of purple to indicate an increased cause for concern in addition to the already existing categories was a response to more pupils indicating significant barriers to learning and therefore a new category was introduced.*
- Members asked about the youth access hub and inquired as to whether it would be part of the poverty strategy. *The Principal stated that she would make sure that this would be included.*
- Members then asked where funding for each individual person came from and if funding was allocated based on individual need. *The Principal responded that funding came from a variety of agencies. Young Persons' funding came from the Educational Funding Agency. An allocated amount was given per young person and additional high needs funding could be applied for therefore tailoring the funding to an individual dependent on their individual circumstances.*
- Members asked what the difference was between Peterborough City College and Peterborough Regional College. *The Principal responded that the difference was twofold which was choice and competition. Both of which helped to drive up quality. The City College was a smaller environment which worked with businesses and communities and for people that were not considering mainstream education. An example of this was adults and individuals with learning difficulties. Only a small portion of the students were in full-time education at the college. There were also individuals who were unemployed and socially excluded who attended.*
- Members noted that much work was being done to address the Poverty Strategy through the work at the college.

The Chair thanked the Principal of the College for attending and for an informative and interesting report. The Chair asked that thanks should be passed onto the staff at the college and students for all the hard work and achievements that had been accomplished.

ACTION AGREED

The Committee noted the report and the role the City College has to play in delivering improved educational outcomes for the city.

7. Review of Placement Strategy for Children Looked After and the Implementation of the Fostering Action Plan

The Acting Assistant Director, Commissioning introduced the report which provided the Committee with an update in relation to Children in Care placements and progress relating to the Fostering Action Plan. The report focused on progress made in bringing the mix of placements for children in care in Peterborough more into line with national averages through the recruitment and retention of in-house foster carers. It also detailed actions that were being taken to help ensure that the local authority only looked after the right children, at the right time in their lives and for the minimum possible period in line with best practice.

Observations and questions were raised and discussed including:

- Members asked if there was pressure for less families to provide fostering services because of financial pressures and whether it continued to be well-funded. Members also asked if the targets aimed at a reduction of children in foster care by 2017 were realistic

given the growth in population figures. *Members were advised that some foster carers were motivated to some extent by financial reward but this tended not to be their main motivation. It was made clear to foster carers that the amount of money given to foster carers was not dissimilar to the amount given by an agency. Rates had been increased significantly at the beginning of last year however private agencies still did offer more remuneration. Other aspects were therefore emphasised such as the fact that foster carers were part of a close-knit community. Population growth figures were challenging to meet and implications were being looked at. Further analysis needed to be done to assess the nature of population growth.*

- *Members asked how quick the process of placing a child up for adoption was and whether or not this was usually met. If not was it due to a lack of parents willing or able to adopt. Members were advised that children were best placed for adoption at a young age. The older children were the harder it was to find adoptive parents. When a child reached five it became harder to find parents able or willing to adopt. Court processes then needed to be gone through however the department tried to work as quickly as possible to place a child.*
- *Members wanted to know if foster carers were able to pick and choose which children they looked after. Members were informed that foster carers generally have a pre-approved criteria based on either preferences or ability as to which sorts of children they would like to look after. Foster carers were further able to say if they felt that a child may not be a good match but the procedure was handled with great care.*
- *Members further asked why a couple would choose to go to an agency as opposed to the council and why was there a difference in pay. Members were informed that the rate paid depended on the age and needs of the foster child relative to the experience and training that foster carers had. For a teenager payment to carers would be around £280 per week but a younger child with less issues it would be less. Agency foster carer rates would be slightly higher at around £350 for a teenager and would charge the council around £1000 for the placement. This money was spent on advertising, recruitment, etc. The Assistant Director of Commissioning stated that he felt that significant amounts of time and energy have been invested in establishing Peterborough an attractive area for foster carers.*
- *Members followed up by asking what plan was in place to get more foster carers in the city and how the council could compete with the agencies. Members were advised that it was important to continue what had been done over the past six months as the results had been positive.*
- *Members asked whether there were any foster carers from a non-white British background. The Head of Adoption and Fostering stated that they were targeting recruitment efforts towards minority communities but there were still not the amount of non-white British foster carers they would like to see.*
- *Members referred to terminology in the report which stated. 'highly responsive' things the department was doing. What did this mean? The Assistant Director of Commissioning responded that one thing that was to be avoided was challenging teenagers coming into care. Teenagers who were difficult to parent though not necessarily in need of foster care would be counterproductive and expensive were they placed into care. The department therefore offered family support services that provided 24/7 support. If necessary somebody would go round to the home and help to resolve a situation and prevent the need for foster care. Members commented that there might be scope to increase responsiveness through the use of social media.*

ACTION AGREED

The committee noted the contents of the report and noted the success of recruitment of foster carers.

8. Adoption Reform and Implementation Plan

The Head of Adoption and Fostering introduced the report which provided the Committee with an overview of the adoption reform and implementation plan and explained the Government's priority to increase the number of adopters available to children and to reduce the length of

time children waited for adoption. The report stated that this required structural reform on the adoption process, additional post-adoption support services, development of skills and capacity within the workforce and ensuring children who were at risk of suffering harm were identified earlier.

A short presentation was delivered which covered the following key points:

- Key drivers for change
- Service activity
- Adoption outcomes
- Fostering outcomes

Members were informed that the directorate had increased the total number of approved adopters this year from 16 to 24 over the past year. The most significant figure, however was that the total number of adoptions had risen from 14 to 22 which was a 50% increase on the previous year. In terms of outcomes the number of enquiries received had increased as had the total number of approved carers. There had also been a significant reduction in agency placements versus in-house placements.

Observations and questions were raised and discussed including:

- Members sought clarification on the meaning of customer care and assumed it meant the care that was given to parents after a child was adopted. *Members were informed that this was correct and part of the government's program. Peterborough was committed to the changing legislation which gave access to an assessment of adoption support following an adoption order being made.*
- Members mentioned that the Adoption Panel had asked for more feedback on cases that have been brought before them and expressed a desire for updates to become a regular item on the panel. *The Head of Adoption and Fostering stated that it was important for the panel to understand the context of their decisions and stated that regular updates to the panel would be implemented in the near future.*
- Further concern was expressed around Liquid Logic and the issues that had been reported. *Members were advised that a new version 9 of Liquid Logic was being developed and tested and there was optimism expressed that many of the issues would be addressed.*
- Members asked if Liquid Logic was used by other authorities. *Members were advised that there were a number of software options available but Peterborough chose to use Liquid Logic after testing out other options.*

ACTIONS AGREED

The committee noted the report and requested the following:

1. That a month after Liquid Logic is implemented Members of the Committee should be invited to attend a discussion with the Head of Adoption and Fostering to assess the progress of implementation.
2. The committee recommended that in future reports more data should be provided on previous years' figures rather than solely comparisons with the previous year.
3. The Adoption Panel to receive regular updates on cases that had been brought before them.

9. Children's Services performance Report to DfE

The Executive Director of Children's Services presented the report which provided an updated position statement on the progress and sustainability of social care performance as reported to the Department for Education.

The following comments and suggestions were made:

- Members were concerned about social worker retention and numbers and requested more information for the next meeting. *The Executive Director of Children's Services responded that there was difficulty in recruiting social workers but discussions were taking place to see how the advertising campaign could be refreshed. A further report could be provided.*

ACTIONS AGREED

The committee noted the report and noted the progress made and continued improvement.

The committee requested that officers bring back to the next meeting required information regarding recruitment of social workers.

10. Forward Plan of Key Decisions

The Committee received the latest version of the Council's Forward Plan of 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 Forward Plan and, where appropriate, identify any relevant areas for inclusion in the Committee's work programme.

ACTION AGREED

The Committee noted the Forward Plan of Key Decisions.

11. Work Programme

Members considered the Committee's Work Programme for 2013/14 and discussed possible items for inclusion.

ACTION AGREED

To confirm the work programme for 2013/14 and the Senior Governance Officer to include any additional items as requested during the meeting including:

12. Date of Next Meeting

- 17 January 2014 – Scrutiny in a Day
- 10 February 2014 – Joint Scrutiny of the Budget
- 17 March 2014 – Creating Opportunities and Tackling Inequalities Scrutiny Committee

The meeting began at 7.00pm and ended at 10.00pm

CHAIRMAN