

MINUTES OF CABINET MEETING HELD 3 AUGUST 2015

PRESENT:

Cabinet Members: Councillor Holdich (Chair), Councillor Coles, Councillor Elsey, Councillor Fitzgerald, Councillor Hiller, Councillor Lamb, Councillor Seaton and Councillor Serluca.

Cabinet Advisors: Councillor Casey and Councillor Maqbool.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor North.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN PETERBOROUGH

Cabinet received a report which advised on issues highlighted by the self-assessment of the quality of services for children and young people.

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services and the Service Director Children's Services and Safeguarding introduced the report, highlighting the main issues contained within.

Councillor Serluca left the meeting at this point.

Cabinet debated the report and key points raised and responses to questions included:

- The strategic proposals would return to Cabinet following consultation and a further financial analysis.
- It was established that youth workers and family support workers were much more available than experienced, qualified Social Workers, which were in short supply nationally.
- Working as a Social Worker in Peterborough is particularly challenging given the particularly diverse population with many cultures and languages in comparison with other nearby Authorities.
- It was suggested that by creating multi-disciplinary team it would attract more experienced and qualified social workers.
- A Member posed the question whether the Council was progressing with developing qualified social workers through education in the city. It was advised that this was being done, however would take a number of years to provide benefits. The proposals identified actions to address short term and long term recruitment issues.
- The benefit of Social Workers having a close relationship with other local authority services such as housing services should be used to attract recruits.
- In the past, specific investment had been requested for particular issues, for example, child sexual exploitation. This report, however, sought to develop a longer term, sustainable model to address the day to challenges within children's social care

- Approximately 800 referrals were made to the service every month. Only 150 of these would be allocated to a social worker, the rest would be diverted to other forms of support. It was believed that a focus on early intervention would reduce the number of referrals and reduce service demand.
- Neglect was an area of focus for the service. The Children's Safeguarding Board are looking to work with a range of professionals to see how the Council could better meet the needs of families where neglect is the primary concern.

Councillor Serluca re-joined the meeting at this point.

Cabinet debate continued, and included:

- Members were assured that the service was currently function at an acceptable level to keep children safe. This was however, while relying on expensive locum staff and a long term sustainable model was needed.
- Social Workers would make use of update technology, which would assist in reducing the level of duplicated work carried out currently.
- It was noted that support workers would not replace Social Workers, but would complement the work social workers do and provide a higher level of contact with families which social workers were unable to do.
- Peterborough was in a beneficial position of having a Peoples and Communities Directorate and as a unitary authority, there was a direct access to a wide range of services only a short distance away.

The Chairman commented that, in order to assist this initiative, a key worker housing scheme should be a high priority for housing services. It was further suggested that the local media spend a day with Social Workers to experience first-hand the pressure they face.

Cabinet considered the report and **RESOLVED** to:

1. Endorse the strategic proposals relating to the provision of services for children and young people, namely:
 - a) The approach taken to the recruitment and retention of social workers, team managers, conference chairs and reviewing officers;
 - b) Reviewing management of referrals into the service, the role of the local authority designated officer and the audit function;
 - c) Creating a more sustainable social work service in the longer term through multi-disciplinary teams;
 - d) The strategic approach to tackling neglect; and
 - e) Implementing new technological approaches to assist business transformation.
2. That a further financial analysis is completed of these proposals to enable full consideration of the financial implications arising, with a report presented back to Cabinet in due course.

REASONS FOR THE DECISION

The current model of delivery was too heavily dependent on high cost social workers, of which there was a national shortage. The Council needed to take more assertive action to recruit and retain the best available social workers by improving its recruitment and retention offer.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

The alternative option of doing nothing was considered, however this may have resulted in the continued current pattern of increasing numbers of children and young people being referred into statutory children's services before sufficient support had been given to families to address their difficulties through the Council's wide range of early help Services.

This continuing increase in referrals would result in increasing caseloads for our social workers, resulting in a poorer service to children and young people who are in need of protection and a likely increase in staff turnover. This would result in ever increasing agency social workers costs, and the likelihood that a Cabinet report would follow, requesting that the Council increase the establishment of social workers further to deal with the increased pressures within the service.

CHAIRMAN
10.00am - 10.33 am