

## **SPECIAL CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL**

TUESDAY 29 APRIL, 2014 AT 6.00 P.M. AT THE COUNCIL HOUSE

### **Panel Members Present**

Councillor B. Cassidy (Chair)  
Councillor R. Martin (Vice Chair)  
Councillor G. Perry  
Councillor D. Shires  
Councillor P. Lane  
Councillor T. Jukes  
Councillor E. Hughes

### **Non elected non voting Members present**

R. Bragger (Primary Teacher Representative)

### **Portfolio holder present**

Councillor R. Andrew

### **Officers Present**

Rose Collinson - Interim Executive Director,  
Children's Services;  
Neil Picken – Senior Committee Business and  
Governance Manager

### **408/14 APOLOGIES**

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Mr S. Raynor, Mr D. Blackwell and Councillor G. Perry.

### **409/14 SUBSTITUTIONS**

None.

### **410/14 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP**

There were no declarations of interest or party whip identified at this meeting.

### **411/14 TO CONSIDER THE INVESTIGATIONS OF THE FOLLOWING WORKING GROUPS; LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN; ELECTIVE HOME EDUCATION; HEALTH MATTERS.**

The Chair welcomed Members and Officers to the meeting. In doing so, she explained that the meeting provided an opportunity to consider the investigations of three working groups and approve the final reports.

Prior to consideration of the final reports, the Chair reflected on a previous working investigation undertaken by the 'Safeguarding Working Group'. She reported that

she had revisited the Initial Response Service which, upon initial inspection at the time of the investigation in April, 2013, required significant improvement and formed one of a number of key recommendations of the working group. It was now much improved and a bright, busy, modern, airy space which looked nothing like the dark, rather tired-looking building previously visited. Removing the walls and partitions has been cathartic in many senses and staff had certainly echoed this sentiment. The family room perhaps remained a little forbidding though it was accepted that budget restraints needed to be taken into account.

Further updates were provided notably that all staff that required a laptop had now been issued with one. The creation of Team 4 had been beneficial and staff had been positive about the improvements. The revised structure enabled staff to attend multi agency training sessions. Staff within the Multi Agency Screening Team (MAST) also explained that they are now able to give more time and attention to fostering good relationships with partner agencies. The Chair noted that there is still some way to go with this, however, as some partners are still not yet fully engaged and managers said that it remains an area of vulnerability.

Caseloads were averaging 15/16 with 20 being the highest reported which was an exception. This was in stark contrast to initial discussions in summer 2013 when peaks of 35-40 were reported. Staff had also reported that they were eagerly anticipating the new recording system to replace the PARIS system.

Finally, the Chair commented that whilst the problems highlighted with the flexi system had alleviated the loss of TOIL, staff still struggled with ATAR and its shortcomings in terms of being sufficiently flexible for those who carry out visits to CYP outside of "normal" hours. Administration of the system by staff was reported as time consuming.

In response, the Interim Executive Director explained that the referral rate was high and there was a need for Universal Services to hold cases for longer. There would be a review of the MAST to make sure that referrals were not coming in too early and external reviewers would talk to external agencies in May, 2014 to provide challenge. In terms of TOIL, it was acknowledged that whilst the system was much better than it was at the time of the review, further work was required to ensure that the system offered sufficient flexibility.

Members of the Panel supported the suggestion that a letter be sent from the Chair to the Leader of the Council to seek his views on how the situation in relation to TOIL and the flexi system may be resolved.

#### *Looked after children working group*

The Chair drew Members attention to the Looked After Children Working Group final report. Councillor Hughes, Lead Member of the Working Group advised that the initial plan was fantastic and very ambitious. The meeting with staff from across Children's Services was very informative, interesting and very useful in terms of improving knowledge of services.

The Chair stated that the working group had been a very useful process and that the final report would assist future Members, new to the Panel, to understand services within the Panels remit.

The Interim Executive Director (Children's Services) advised that Corporate Parenting Training would be delivered in the new Municipal year. The final report of the Looked After Children Working Group would be helpful background reading for all Members of the Council. The report would also be circulated to other Partnership Boards.

#### *Elective home education working group*

The Panel then considered the final report of the Elective Home Education Working Group. The Chair advised that the review had been insightful and valuable. It was highlighted that the Specialist Officers that provided advice and support to parents and young people home educating was a key role. A Specialist Officer had been shadowed during their working day and displayed great diplomacy and communication skills with families. Whilst the circumstances of each family differed, the level of support and encouragement as to the best education for each particular child was explored and agreed.

The Interim Executive Director (Children's Services) advised that it was valuable for the Working Group to understand that children are able to be 'out of sight' which could possible leave them vulnerable. The review had been positive and recommendations highlight matters that the Authority needs to be active and pro-active about.

A Panel Member reported that he was reassured, following the review, that an effective home education service was in place.

#### *Health matters working group*

The Panel moved on to consider the Health Matters Working Group Final Report. It was advised that this group had produced a report setting out an overview position which would require further work and investigation.

Members of the Panel advised that more action needed to be taken to address health inequalities within Walsall. Data and knowledge ensured that there was awareness and intelligence, however, this need to be turned into action to start having a positive impact.

At the conclusion of discussion, the Chair wished Councillor Rachel Andrew, Portfolio Holder for Children's Services well as it would be her last meeting.

Following consideration of the three final reports it was:-

#### **Resolved:**

1. That the Looked After Children Working Group final report and recommendations be approved;

2. That the Elective Home Education final report and recommendations be approved;
3. That the Health Matters final report and recommendations be approved;
4. The Chair write to the Leader of the Council detailing the issues identified in her visit to the Multi Agency Screening and Initial Response Service.

**412/14    DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

To be agreed at Council on 18 June, 2014.

The meeting terminated at 7.35 p.m.

Chair: .....

Date:.....