

CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

TUESDAY 20 AUGUST, 2013 AT 6.00 P.M. AT THE COUNCIL HOUSE

Panel Members Present

Councillor B. Cassidy (Chair)
Councillor P. Lane
Councillor T. Jukes
Councillor E. Hughes
Councillor D. Barker (Substitute)

Non elected non-voting members present

S. Raynor (Lichfield Diocesan Education)

Portfolio holder present

None

Officers Present

Rose Collinson - Interim Executive Director, Children's Services;
Sue Butcher - Interim Assistant Director, Specialist Services
Louise Hughes - Assistant Director, Preventative and Targeted Services
Steve McGowan – Head of Human Resources
Neil Picken – Senior Committee Business and Governance Manager

316/13 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor D. Shires, G. Perry and R. Martin.

317/13 SUBSTITUTIONS

Councillor D. Barker substituting for Councillor D. Shires.

318/13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

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

319/13 MINUTES

Members considered the minutes of the meeting held on 17 July, 2013

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 17 July, 2013, a copy having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

320/13 PROGRESS UPDATE ON IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SAFEGUARDING WORKING GROUP

The Chair introduced the item advising that many of the issues within the safeguarding working groups report and recommendations had been echoed by Ofsted.

The Interim Executive Director (Children's Services) proceeded to update the Panel on each of the fourteen recommendations.

In relation to single assessments it was explained that this was being explored with information sought from neighbouring and pilot authorities who had implemented a single assessment framework. A careful balance was required to ensure that the period set avoided drift. Members were advised that they would be regularly updated on this matter. The Chair noted that implementing a single assessment framework was a recommendation of the Munro report.

Members considered progress in relation to recommendations seeking a review of the flexi system for social work staff. The Interim Executive Director (Children's Services) advised that clarity on the use of the flexi system, including time off in lieu (TOIL), had been issued by the Head of Human Resources. This clarity prevented confusion which had initially led to a number of complaints. Staff had now been correctly advised that they were entitled to two days flexi leave and five days TOIL every thirteen week period. Members were informed that staff had not reported issues in relation to the flexi system since clarity had been provided.

The Chair sought clarity on whether staff would lose hours accrued prior to further guidance being issued. In response, it was explained that hours gained during the period from January to June, 2013 would be lost. This had been explained to staff who appreciated that their concerns had been listened to and followed through by senior management.

The Head of Human Resources stated that the work of the Safeguarding Working Group prompted a review across the Council. The approach was exactly the same for all employees and offered sufficient flexibility for social workers.

A Member asked how morale had been affected by the flexi system. Officers advised that prior to clarity being provided it was a concern, however, this was no longer the case. The result of a recent Ofsted inspection also helped to boost morale.

Discussion followed on the PARIS system. The Interim Executive Director (Children's Services) advised that they were trying to make PARIS the best system possible whilst investigating alternative systems possible for case recording for children and families receiving help, including statutory intervention. Ensuring the safe migration of data and preparing existing data for transfer were two important tasks which would need to be undertaken. The existing system served both children and adult social care so it was important to consider interoperability should any new recording system for children be procured.

The Chair requested further updates on PARIS, the current recording system and any potential new systems be considered by the Panel. The Chair stated that a new system was crucial to continuing the improvement journey. Officers advised that Ofsted had also made recommendations regarding the PARIS system and would expect to see,

within six months, an audit trail which provided evidence that action was being taken. A specification for a new system was being developed and it was crucial that this was sufficiently detailed as to what the requirements were from the outset. The Chief Executive was aware that a new system was required.

A member asked for an estimation of the cost of implementing a new system to which it was explained that a 'rough guide' would be in the region of one million pounds.

It was explained that the system was not just a social care tool as it added value in terms of early help and information sharing. The Interim Executive Director (Children's Services) advised having an inadequate system could also be a barrier for attracting new staff (everything else being equal) as they may prefer other systems operated in other local authorities. Approximately five authorities used PARIS across the country and so support and development work was not readily available.

The Chair recommended that the progress in relation to the PARIS system be reviewed again by the Panel at the meeting scheduled to take place on 26 February, 2013.

The workload weighting tool was discussed. Members were advised that the tool was launched in July, 2013 and was being actively used within the children with disabilities team and looked after children team. Quarterly reporting on the implementation and findings would be reported to Walsall Safeguarding Children's Board and Improvement Board from October, 2013. Members were advised that cases differed in complexity and so it was not just a matter of the number per individual. Further, since the opening of the multi agency screening team the number of referrals was increasing. The key was to ensure weighting was appropriate. The Chair stressed the importance of ensuring that caseloads were not overly high as this was found in both the working groups investigations and Ofsted. It was also linked to recruitment and retention and was key to future improvements.

In relation to the relocation of social work teams it was noted that work was being undertaken and that accommodation solutions in the short, medium and long term were being considered. Specifically, the Initial Response Team's accommodation was undergoing works and the family room would also be refurbished. Work was scheduled to be completed by the end of September, 2013.

Members noted that work was being undertaken to develop a social work community with workshops being offered, a refreshed thresholds policy for sign off by the Walsall Safeguarding Children Board and Improvement Board in September and a training and staff development programme focussed on joint working, practical application and thresholds and the continuum from early help through to statutory intervention.

The issue relating the reluctance of agency staff to take up permanent positions was discussed. Officers advised that each person's reasons were very individual. One issue was that there was a very competitive market with inflated hourly rates. Being an agency worker offered flexibility. Walsall was starting to make headway with fourteen social workers being appointed starting in September, 2013. In September, a further fifteen posts would be advertised. The recent Ofsted result would assist in the recruitment drive. Officers provided a breakdown of the number of social workers by team and advised that the vast majority of new recruits were newly qualified. Due to market conditions recruiting experienced social workers was difficult although there were a small number appointed in the first tranche.

In relation to laptops, members noted that 197 laptops had been issued to Children's Services since July 2012. It was estimated that a further fifty laptops were required by social workers. A Member asked whether those with a laptop could access systems like PARIS remotely to prevent duplication of work. Officers advised that this was possible however there was some parallel work which was being addressed.

The Chair stated that funding was required for the provision of the remaining laptops to staff. It was recommended that the Panel write to the Leader and Portfolio Holder for Children's Services to ask for their view on addressing the shortfall.

In relation to the relationship between the screening team, schools and the disability team, Members were advised that the relationship worked well and that schools were confident that the right things would happen following a referral.

Finally, a discussion ensued on the one off direct payment scheme. Work on this recommendation would be commenced in September, 2013. Members requested that updates be provided on this matter.

Members discussed the use of administration staff within services. Officers advised that administration staff assisted in reducing the backlog with data input and reports however social workers now needed to undertake these tasks with administration focussing on other tasks. The Interim Executive Director (Children's Services) explained that the service needed the right people in the right place with the right skills.

Resolved

1. That progress in relation to the PARIS system be reviewed by the Panel at the meeting scheduled to take place on 26 February, 2013;
2. The Panel write to the Leader and Portfolio Holder for Children's Services to ask for their view on addressing the shortfall in provision of laptops; and;
3. That an update in relation to the one off payment scheme be provided to the Panel in October, 2013.

321/13 PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW

Members considered a report (annexed) providing an overview of performance and progress towards delivering the priorities set out in the Strategic Improvement Plan for Safeguarding in Walsall.

Specific mention was made in relation to the results of Redruth and Lichfield Road Children's Home which both received positive judgements from Ofsted. The Interim Executive Director (Children's Services) advised that should Members wish to visit any children's home they would be welcomed. Members were asked to call ahead of their visit.

Members considered the performance data and requested that a 'key' be added to assist in interpreting the data as in its present format it wasn't easy to understand.

Members asked if senior managers expected to see improvement in the level of vacancies and sickness as a result of the recent Ofsted result. It was explained that it would be difficult to measure in August due to annual leave, it was hoped that levels would reduce and this would be monitored as figures are received monthly.

Resolved

1. That a 'key' be added to the information to aid better understanding; and;
2. That the report be noted

322/13 OFSTED INSPECTION OF LOCAL AUTHORITY ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN

A report was considered (annexed) providing an update for Members on the Ofsted inspection undertaken from 24 June to 3 July, 2013.

The Interim Executive Director (Children's Services) advised that staff reported that the inspection had been much calmer than in 2012 and helped morale. She stressed that the inspection was positive however there was more to do. Services had made good progress in a short period of time and fared well in what was a deep and thorough review. Children's services were aware of the challenges going forward and had plans in place to address them.

The Chair congratulated all staff involved in the process for their hard work, commitment and continued efforts and sought the Panels agreement to send a letter to staff to that effect.

Further, the Chair advised that the Panel had also made good progress with the Safeguarding Working Group being mentioned numerous times within the Ofsted report. This together with the training undertaken in relation to Safeguarding were clear examples that scrutiny were undertaking their role in the improvement journey. The Interim Executive Director (Children's Services) advised that the report detailing progress on areas for improvement would be brought to the Panel for consideration as part of the improvement plan report.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

323/13 WORK PROGRAMME

Members considered the work programme. It was suggested that an item be included to consider how the integration of education services back into the Council was taking shape.

Resolved

1. That an item entitled 'integration of education' be added to the work programme; and;

2. That the work programme be noted.

324/13 **FORWARD PLAN**

Members considered the forward plan [annexed].

Resolved

That the forward plan be noted.

325/13 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The date of the next meeting was noted as 10 September, 2013 at 6.00 p.m.

The meeting terminated at 7.45 p.m.

Chair:

Date: