

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY, 4 SEPTEMBER 2013

PRESENT:- Councillors Maureen Penny (Chair), Emma Faramarzi, Colin Lovell, Cindy Matthews, James Robbins, Nadine Watts, Steve Weisinger, Michael Bray, Ann Richards, Joe Tray and Mark Edwards.

Co-opted Representatives: - Rachael Matthey (Swindon Association of Secondary Headteacher), Andrew Wild (Church of England Diocese) and Mr Paul Sunners (Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education).

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Paul Baker, Dick Mattick (National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers), Mrs Melanie Sancto (Swindon Association of Primary School Headteachers) and Mr David Dawson (Catholic Church Diocese).

Also present: Councillor Fionuala Foley.

11. Declarations of Interest

The Chair reminded Members of the need to declare any known interests in any matters to be considered at the meeting.

Councillor Maureen Penny (Chair) declared a non-pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 5 (Fostering) as she was a member of the Fostering Panel.

Councillor James Robbins declared a non-pecuniary interest in respect of Agenda item 5 (Fostering) as he was a foster carer.

12. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 19th June 2013 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

13. Public Question Time.

No public questions were submitted for this meeting.

14. Fostering

Sara Tough, Head of Children and Families, submitted a report regarding the different forms of foster care and included details about how these operated. Terry Scragg, Head of Children and Young People in Care introduced Sharon Iles, Family Placement Officer who worked with foster carers.

The Chair welcomed the foster carers to the meeting and following introductions, enquired as to why they had chosen to become foster carers, how long they had been foster carers, age range of children being fostered, impact on family lives, the challenges faced by foster carers and the advantages and disadvantages of the services provided. The foster carers referred to the on-going

support received from the Local Authority including training and respite care.

The Committee thanked the foster carers and discussed the following points:

- The need for foster carers in Swindon and enquired regarding the methods that could be utilised to encourage members of the community to become foster carers. The need to have more publicity was discussed but it was noted that the best way was by word of mouth.
- The relationship between schools and foster carers. The Committee was informed of the positive support provided by schools.
- Recruitment process – Ease of initial contact and follow-on processes. The foster carers said that it was a positive experience and Terry Scragg explained the process undertaken to recruit foster carers. Members noted that the process from application to a Panel interview was between six and eight months.
- The number of foster carers and placements. Members noted there were 152 active foster carers and 200 placements. They further noted that whilst a number of foster carers went on to adopt children and young people, special guardianship status was also an option and this was determined by the needs of the child.
- Awareness of fostering services – this suffered from a lack of visibility in the community. The Committee was informed of an advertising campaign that utilised buses, newspaper articles and promotional stands at fairs.
- The number of children and young people placed with foster cares in Swindon. Terry Scragg advised that 82% of children and young people were placed with Swindon families. Members noted that whilst the majority of young people were placed within the community, the needs of the child dictated where they were placed.
- As Corporate Parents, the amount of pocket money allocated to foster children and young people. Terry Scragg responded at the meeting.

The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, thanked the foster carers for attending the meeting and requested them to forward any suggestions to support or improve service provision be submitted to the Scrutiny Officer.

Resolved – (1) That the foster carers be thanked for attending the meeting and providing a first-hand insight into foster caring.

(2) That the fostering report, be noted.

15. Children Services Performance Report.

Sue Wald, Head of Commissioning, Children and Adults, presented a report updating Members of the Committee on the performance within all service commissioning for the period April 2012 to end of March 2013 and for the first quarter, April 2013 to June 2013. She referred to the areas covered in the report that included information on the safeguarding process and commented on the changes throughout the year, particularly to the continued increase in social work contacts, referrals and child protection activity.

Members of the Committee enquired on the following points:

- Child Obesity Data. Sue Wald advised that validated figures would be available from November 2013.
- The challenge of the NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) figures. Paddy Bradley, Head of Commissioning Economy & Attainment

advised that the issue was age related. The figure for “not known” was low and declining for 16 and 17 year olds. The issue becomes visible at 18 on movement from full time education to employment. The age group 18 to 24 suffered from a lack of jobs resulting in high unemployment for this age group. Work was being undertaken by the “Raising Participation Age Group” who commissioned an 18 to 24 Strategy in collaboration with colleges with the aim of tracking and supporting this age group.

- In response to a query regarding the percentage breakdown of NEET figures, Paddy Bradley provided information on 16, 17 and 18 year olds. The Committee also noted that the Economic, Environmental and Sustainability Overview and Scrutiny Committee were reviewing the issue of young people not in education, employment or training.
- Breastfeeding coverage. The Committee enquired if follow-up visits between the initial visit and six week check were undertaken to ensure the family was able to cope and to enquire whether breast feeding was continuing. Sue Wald confirmed that health visitors attended and determined what further support was required using their professional skills.
- Secondary School attainment levels indicators. The Committee noted that GCSE results were available, but was un-validated at present and that no Key Stage 3 data was formally gathered and reliance placed on Key Stage 4 data.
- The difference between contact and referral safeguarding figures. Sara Tough confirmed no direct correlation should be taken as contacts do not always result in a statutory assessment referral. Work was being undertaken with the One Stop Shop to ensure that contacts were being referred to the correct team.
- Clarity on the definition of “lower than the national average”. Sue Wald explained that some data was compared nationally and other data compared with statistical neighbours.
- Increase in core assessments being undertaken. Sara Tough explained the increase and advised that a new base line had been set. She advised that staff discussions were being undertaken to ensure resources were allocated appropriately, particularly at the service front end.
- In response to a query regarding work being undertaken to reduce the teenage conception rate, Sue Wald explained that previously it was thought there may be a link between educational attainment and pregnancy rates as conception rates were high when attainment was low. She referred to awareness raising work being undertaken by the community to raise aspiration in young people. This had resulted in a downward trend over a number of years and that data showed that in areas of deprivation, there were higher rates of teenage conception.

Sara Tough referred to the Early Support Strategy that had been presented to the Swindon Children’s Trust Board on 6th June 2013 and advised that the document set out priorities for the delivery of early support and worked as a complimentary document alongside the Local Safeguarding Children’s Board business plan and all this formed the overall plan for Children Services. The Training Plan related to a new training programme regarding the Common Assessment and the Early Help Plan that would be formally launched in November.

Resolved – (1) That the Head of Commissioning, Children and Adults be

requested to include child obesity validated data in future performance reports.

(2) That the performance for the period April 2012 to end of March 2013 and for the quarter to June 2013, be noted.

16. Children's Services Revenue Monitoring - To note.

The Chair introduced the report for noting and requested the Committee to comment. Steve Haley, Head of Finance, Education and Innovation referred to the three funding sources relating to Core Education Budget, Dedicated School Grant and Children and Social Care.

The Committee enquired why completion of on-line monitoring forecasts programme was never 100%. Steve Haley advised that the report identified high and low risk areas and the reasons for non-completion were various and included such events as sickness, but further advised that high risk areas were always reviewed.

Resolved- (1) That, further to Point 2 of Annex A of the report (Completion of Online Monitoring Forecast), the Head of Finance, Education and Innovation be requested to include an exception report as part of future data submitted.

(2) That, the Board Director Finance, Revenue, Benefits and Property be requested to submit the Children's Services Revenue Budget Monitoring report for noting at future meetings of this Committee.

17. Work Programme.

The Committee received a report of the Director and Law and Democratic Services detailing its updated work programme for the Municipal Year 2013/14. The Committee noted the coming changes to the education system that encompassed changes at all Key Stage levels and included Ofsted reporting. They expressed their concerns that these changes were not yet highlighted for the Committee. It further noted that the Committee would need to have a flexible work programme to ensure these items were identified as these affected all young people currently in the education system. Paddy Bradley, Head of Commissioning & Attainment referred to the new Ofsted Inspection Framework and advised that part of this included a review of the Authority's Local School Improvement Services. He advised that part of the process included inspectors engaging with members of the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Sue Wald, Head of Commissioning Children and Adults informed the Committee of the new Ofsted Framework Inspection for Safeguarding and Looked After Children and that guidance would be launched in November 2013. She advised that the Chair and a selection of Committee members would be interviewed by the Ofsted Inspection team and explained the procedure.

Resolved: (1) That, the Head of Commissioning & Attainment to circulate a briefing note regarding the impact and implications of the new Ofsted Inspection Framework for Swindon before the next meeting of this Committee.

(2) That, the Head of Commissioning & Attainment, be requested to submit a report on the School Improvement Inspection Framework at the Committee meeting of the 13th November 2013.

(3) That, the Head of Commissioning & Attainment, be requested to submit a report on Skills and Employment Strategy, at the meeting of the 15th January 2014.

(4) That, if required, the Head of Commissioning Children and Adults,

together with the Scrutiny Officer, to set up a special meeting aimed at informing Committee members of the Ofsted Inspection process.