

DONCASTER METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

SCHOOLS, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY PANEL

12th FEBRUARY, 2014

A MEETING of the SCHOOLS, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL was held at the CIVIC OFFICE,
DONCASTER on WEDNESDAY 12th FEBRUARY, 2014

PRESENT:

Chair – Councillor Rachel Hodson

Councillors Charlie Hogarth, Barry Johnson, Alan Jones, Sue McGuinness,
Jane Nightingale, Sue Wilkinson and Doreen Woodhouse and Mr John
Hoare and Mr Damien Thorpe.

Also in attendance:

Eleanor Brazil, Director Children and Young People's Service
Jackie Wilson, Assistant Director Children and Families
John Duhig, Head of Service, Standards and Effectiveness
Allan Madeley, Senior Procurement Category Manager
Ian Walker, Head of Service, Children in Care
Theresa Elvin, Children and Young People in Care Education Service
Jane Vose, Head of Service Learner Engagement
Anita Linsdell, Service Manager, Attendance and Pupil Welfare Service
Sarah Holmes, Commissioning Officer, Service Improvement and Policy

APOLOGIES:

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Andrew Bosmans,
Eva Hughes, Barbara Hoyle, Paul Coddington and Eddie Dobbs.

IN ATTENDANCE:

Prior to the meeting Councillor Hodson welcomed Jessica Crowe,
Commissioner and Executive Director of the Centre for Public Scrutiny and
Jackie Wilson the Assistant Director for Children and Families.

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| 27. | <u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST, IF ANY.</u> | |
| | No declarations of interest were made. | All to note. |
| 28. | <u>MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 21ST
NOVEMBER, 2014</u> | |
| | <u>RESOLVED</u> that the minutes of the meeting | All to note. |

held on 21ST November, be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

29. PUBLIC STATEMENTS

There were no public statements made at the meeting.

At this point in the meeting it was agreed that agenda items 6 and 7 be considered as a single item.

30. UPDATE ON THE DELIVERY OF THE IMPROVEMENT PLAN AND PARALLEL FINANCIAL PLAN; and

UPDATE ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CHILDREN'S TRUST

A verbal update was provided by the Director of Children and Young Peoples Service on the current position relating to the establishment of Doncaster Children's Services Trust. To accompany the presentation the Director circulated the indicative services to be transferred to the Trust and a copy of the Children and Young Peoples Service Financial Plan.

The Assistant Director for Children and Families had been in post approximately 6 to 8 weeks and outlined her initial views on the service, explaining that before arriving she had pre-conceived thoughts relating to the Authority's social care. However after meeting staff and reviewing services, explained that there were some excellent services but the real challenge was ensuring the good practice was consistent. Staff had explained to her that the position was improving compared to 9 months ago, for example, it was a much calmer and purposeful service but still very busy. She informed the Panel that there had been an audit of cases and she was currently identifying gaps in training to strengthen practices. One area that urgently required consideration was the multi agency audit.

With regard to practice improvement the Assistant Director explained that advanced practitioners were key in driving improvement and undertaking mentoring of less senior employees, for example, in areas such as court attendance. She continued by stressing that Members desperately needed to

engage with the Corporate Parenting function.

Excellent work had been undertaken in the last year with regard to early years need, but statistics showed that Doncaster's figures were higher than neighbouring authorities. To address this Members noted that an early help strategy was currently being developed concentrating on locally based integrated early stage need.

To conclude the Assistant Director informed Councillors that she would be forwarding all Members, ward based information on looked after children, for example, the numbers who are in foster care placements or residential homes and children in need.

The Director continued by reporting that the Secretary of State for Education had indicated that service improvement was being made and progress was pleasing.

The Improvement Plan agreed by Cabinet highlighted 6 key themes with actions, presented in detail to the Panel. Councillors Bosmans presented a number of questions for consideration with discussion focusing on the follows areas:

- £3.6m projected overspend - Specific improvement had been made including the continued reduction of agency staff, increased number of permanent staff, reduction in the number of children in need and those on a child protection plan;
- Draft proposals were being developed to increase the number of foster carers and continue the transfer of children in residential care to foster care.
- Increased interest in families who were willing to adopt and assessments required take time. It was noted that savings could not be proposed until 2015/16;
- Proposals to change the approach towards early assistance, some of which were provided through Childrens Centres. It was stressed that people who access the centres were not always the families that required the most assistance and measures needed to be put in place to reduce the reliance on use of buildings but to strengthen outreach services

to those who were most in need. Some service provision would remain and could expand, but the main emphasis needed to be on those people who were most in need. In response to concerns a Co-opted Member explained that the Advisory Board had been involved in the services provided by Edlington Childrens Centre and he had seen a difference and improvement in meeting the community's needs.

- With regard to the closure of youth centres, it was noted that a review of the service was currently being undertaken. Again, Members stressed that provision through communities needed to address the most vulnerable young people in the borough;
- Consistency of correct information being input into the Covalent system by the Children and Young Peoples Service Directorate and the need to use and analyse the data. Monthly performance clinics for all managers have been set up to analyse information in detail;
- The Children's Trust future relationship with Overview and Scrutiny was questioned and noted that options needed to be carefully considered and agreed prior to it being detailed in the contract and service specification;
- In response to concern expressed by a co-opted Member in relation to the split of services between the Directorate and Trust, it was explained that there would be boundary issues with the delivery of some services, for example, services for disabled children, but the risks associated with such transfers need to be acknowledged and protocols established to address the situation.
- Ensuring data on the children of Doncaster is secure once cases were transferred to the Trust;

A Member stressed that he was concerned with the costs of printing in colour and asked that future information be provided with a simple key enabling Members to print in black and white.

RESOLVED that:-

1. the update, be noted; and
2. the next report to Panel include exact

Director
Children and
Young
Peoples

changes that have been made to the Services
service;

31. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REVIEW UPDATES

The Panel received an update on the following reviews undertaken by the Schools Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel over the last two years:-

A Out of authority residential placements

The Panel noted that significant progress had been made with reducing the out of authority residential budget, in a short space of time.

A more robust culture of assessing the appropriateness of residential care as a placement type had grown over the last 12 months and was evident by the reduced numbers of placements made. However, there was still a need for out of authority placements required simply to safeguard a child or young person.

It was reported that the projected out of authority spend up to 31st March, 2014 was set to come in under budget by £256,000. Extended target cohorts had been established focusing on 4 core themes with 11 new strands, which have a combined savings target of £1,407,000 in 2014/15 and a further £807,000 in 2015/16.

Members noted the process of understanding the provision available locally and reintegrating children and young people back with the local authority ensuring issues such as the correct school placements were being made, in turn being able to keep a closer contact.

The repatriation of foster carers was addressed but it was noted that the local authority's position was difficult, as independent fostering agencies paid higher rates than the local authority. However, it was stressed that being a local authority foster carer could guarantee children and young people be placed in their care.

Members concluded by stating that they were pleased with the continuation and progress. The Panel noted the placement contingency but

acknowledged that it would take only one child with high cost needs that to throw progress off track.

B Outcome for care leavers

Members were thanked for undertaking this recent review and were updated with progress over the last three months.

It was noted that in addition to seeking the views of young people, the service had access to over 50 care leaving services who they were collecting information from, on a number of the recommendations made.

Areas that the team were making steps to achieve included independence guidance for looked after children before they reached 16 and piloting a scheme with St Leger Homes offering part furnished properties to young people aged 16+.

With regard to additional support, guidance and signposting for young people who fall short of meeting the adult services care criteria, work was being scoped to develop an accommodation framework, progress with the early identification and referral of a young person requiring transition to adult services and a new policy that identified young people and addressed thresholds for accessing adult services.

Managers of the 16+ Team have met with the Fostering Service to address ways of working better together, including joint training, joint management meetings, open days for foster carers to visit the 16+ team and production of 16+ booklets for foster carers.

In response to a query from Members relating to apprenticeships it was stressed that there was not any resistance in Directorates to employ apprentices but there needs to be a good match with strong administration and care. It was noted that perhaps the offer of traditional areas of apprenticeships needed to be strengthened.

The Panel was pleased to note that a number of senior managers had trained and were now able to undertake a mentoring role for young people.

To conclude Members stated that they were pleased

their recommendations had made a positive impact towards making improvements to the service.

C. Education of children in care

To accompany the report, the following update was highlighted to the Panel:

A training programme to support school governors was undertaken and delivered by the end of September, 2013, with targeted training for named governors with responsibility for children in care. The training plans for 2014 now include awareness session on children in care and potential barriers to learning. It was noted that there would also be the potential for on-line learning opportunities in 2015.

With regard to schools accepting children in care onto their registers the Local Authority, from the end of the review to January 2014 has had to direct one school to admit a child in care. Officers have worked closely with two other schools to develop appropriate alternative plans for the children concerned, preventing the need for direction. It was noted that further work was required to address delayed admissions mainly for young people in Year 11 where a change of school was required in the autumn or spring terms.

IT equipment was available in all residential units as part of the DMBC network and all homes have access to games consoles. A programme of distribution of IT equipment, for the purposes of education, to students in key stage 5, 4 and 2 being prioritised.

The Panel recommended that a review be undertaken how access by children in care to after school activities was affected by fixed home to school transport arrangements, but this was not undertaken due to evidence that suggested that children do take part in after school or community based activities. Personal Education Plans have been amended to enable reporting on participation in activities and interests. Provisional data completed for compulsory school age children during the autumn term suggested that 44.9% engaged with some form of additional activity whilst 16% do not.

To conclude and in response to Members questions relating to how as corporate parents they can ensure after school activities were accessed, it was stressed that it was important to assess the information in a child and young persons Personal Education Plans to provide appropriate activities for example, music classes.

D. Elective Home Education

Members were provided with a detailed update on the review undertaken just over two years ago. It was noted that services had progressed significantly resulting in an invitation from the chair of the House of Commons Education Select Committee to participate in developing a professional association for professional working with home educators. Consultation with home educators and best practice authorities has been undertaken to enhance services provided in Doncaster.

Steps had now been taken to ensure there was access to additional services, for example, examination centres can be accessed by external candidates and Doncaster college was now accepting home educated young people on to their courses.

Note: At this point of the meeting, in the absence of the Vice Chair, Councillor Alan Jones was appointed Chair of the Panel whilst Councillor Hodson, Chair, left the meeting.

With regard to easy access to health services, a partnership has been developed with the clinical lead for the healthy child programme with the Council providing a link to the Department of Health website on the elective home education pages, which gives access to school nursing services.

In response to questions by the Panel, it was noted that schools were continuing to be challenged by the Children and Young Peoples Service Directorate, particularly at a much earlier stage, with regard to students who are being removed from school roll to be home educated and are now asked to complete a form requesting additional information. A number of schools were being very supportive with this issue. It was clarified that if a young person was absent from school and refused to home educate then the

student would be allocated a key worker to progress the situation.

Members noted the future actions and priorities relating to the development of relationships with children's centre and provision of localised services for elective home educated families via the early help collaboratives.

Note: At this point in the meeting Councillor Hodson returned to the meeting and assumed the Chair.

Further to questions raised by the Members, it was outlined that there was no longer a general dull view of the Council by home educators due to the amount of hard work undertaken by officers, with the majority of home educators now more than willing to contact and engage in partnership with the local authority. It was also explained that there were a number of pockets of home educators particularly in the Rossington and Tickhill areas and amongst the gypsy and traveller community.

To conclude, Members acknowledged that the service had progressed dramatically with a lot of improvements made. The Panel congratulated the officers in being invited to take part in developing a professional association through the House of Commons Select Committee.

E. Teenage Pregnancy

The Panel was pleased to note, although it was still higher than the national average, that there had been a 50% reduction in teenage pregnancies between the highest point in 2003 to 2011.

It was highlighted that this years teenage pregnancy referrals were all living in the family home.

Members were also happy to see that the Maple Medical Unit, visited during the review, had moved to the facility at Balby in September, 2013 offering a wider range of services including teaching and skill sharing. Because the unit was centrally located it was easier for young parents to access. The resource is thought of as a dedicated resource, however, educational attainment showed effective improvement. In response to Members concern relating to continued education it was noted that

there was now nursery provision at Doncaster College. Generally more capacity was required for young mums to continue with their education and it was reported that the Princes Trust had approached the team with a proposed funding option for assistance, which was currently being considered.

RESOLVED that: the updates on the reviews and progress made to services, be noted.

All to note

32. WORK PLAN

The Scrutiny Officer outlined the following areas relating to the Panel's work plan:

Corporate Parenting Panel – The minutes of the meeting held on 3rd December, were circulated to the Panel for information.

Domestic Violence – Councillor Jane Nightingale was the Panel's representative and Councillor Alan Jones is also a Member of the Adults and Communities Panel. Both Members have been involved in the review which has involved meeting with partners, observed MARAC meetings, visited the Domestic Abuse Hub at the Mary Woollett Centre and met with high risk victims. The Panel was reminded that further meetings were currently being arranged to consider housing provision, voluntary organisations involvement and health provision. Recommendations from the review were due to be taken to the Adults and Communities meeting on 18th March.

Overview and Scrutiny Refresh – details of the proposed changes, as agreed by Full Council on 30th January, were set out in Appendix C to the report.

Informal Panel Meetings to look at items for consideration next year are programmed as follows:

7th April at 11.00am – Regeneration and environment

8th April at 1.30pm – Adults and Communities

10th April at 10.00am – Schools Children and Young People

10th April at 2.00pm - OSMC

Schools Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel
24th March, 2014 will consider:

1. Childrens Trust and Improvement Plan update;
2. How the issue of young people running away from local authority care is being addressed;
3. Cabinet Member priority update; and
4. Quarterly Performance information; and
5. Youth Offending Service Statutory Plan.

RESOLVED that:- The report, be noted.

All to note

Signed _____

Dated _____