

DONCASTER METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY PANEL

18TH SEPTEMBER, 2014

A MEETING of the CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL was held in ROOM 8, CIVIC OFFICE, DONCASTER on THURSDAY 18TH SEPTEMBER, 2014 at 2.00 P.M.

PRESENT:

Chair – Councillor Rachel Hodson

Councillors Paul Coddington, Sue McGuinness, Dave Shaw and Sue Wilkinson.

APOLOGIES:

Apologies for absence were received from the Vice-Chair, Eva Hughes, and Councillors Andrew Bosmans, Neil Gethin and Barbara Hoyle.

ACTION

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| 1. | <u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST, IF ANY.</u> | |
| | No declarations of interest were made. | All to note |
| 2. | <u>PUBLIC STATEMENTS</u> | |
| | There were no public statements. | All to note |
| 3. | <u>DONCASTER SAFEGUARDING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT AND PROTOCOL</u> | |

John Harris, the Independent Chair of the Doncaster Safeguarding Children Board was in attendance to present his report to the Panel, and provide any updates to Members. Mr Harris commented that since he had been appointed as Chair a number of measures had been put into place to strengthen the Boards effectiveness and bring about key improvements. It was noted that the work of the Board had been reviewed and they were working to bring partners together in order to ensure that effective services were in place. Mr Harris gave a very thorough overview of the detail contained within his report, and highlighted some of the key areas of work covered by the Board, including the following

issues:-

- There is a continuing increase in the numbers of Looked After Children (LAC).
- Early Help/Intervention – this was a top priority;
- Work on Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)/Missing Children – this was a huge national issue and a lot of work was being done to ensure a multi-agency team was in place to address this;
- Revised Board Arrangements – this was to ensure that there was a strong sense of challenge and effectiveness;
- Challenging partner organisations;
- A drive to promote the awareness of safeguarding and ensure good arrangements were in place;

Following the presentation of the report, the Panel were invited to put any questions to the Chair of the Safeguarding Board in order. An in-depth discussion ensued, whereby Mr Harris endeavoured to provide clarity to Members who raised a number of salient points, and allay any concerns they may have. Child Sexual Exploitation was a big area of concern, particularly what strategies were in place and Members sought assurances that this was being given adequate attention. Members were assured that this was at the forefront of the work of the Board and joint working was being strengthened in order to address this successfully across the board. There had been issues with this in the past and therefore it was imperative that this was addressed. Members also raised queries with regard to the following issues, all of which Mr Harris aimed to provide answers to:-

- The Board structure and consistency of attendance to meetings – what was the impact this has had on the Board's work?
- Children in Care – clarification concerning LA roles and responsibilities of Out of Authority Placements
- Relationships with Academies - engagement with schools and Heads;
- Concern over absent children and what was being done.
- Information on the Board's Learning and Improvement Framework and ensuring this was progressed and implemented;
- How the Board would hold the Doncaster Children's Trust to account once operational;

- The Structure of the Board – past issues and how it is moving forward.
- Performance targets – have they been realistically set?

The Chair thanked Mr Harris for attending the meeting and for providing the Panel with an enlightening, informative and useful presentation that would enable the Panel to understand the processes being undertaken elsewhere.

RESOLVED that the Panel noted the Doncaster Safeguarding Children Board's Annual Report and Protocol.

Scrutiny
Officer

4. DONCASTER CHILDREN'S TRUST – PROGRESS ON THE CONTRACT

Members considered an update with regard to progress made on the Doncaster Children's Trust. It had been agreed in Autumn of the previous year, that a Children's Trust would be established in order to accelerate improvement and innovation with regard to the delivery of Children's Services in Doncaster. This was a landmark initiative and it was anticipated that this would be operational by 1st October 2014. The implementation of the Trust would look to ensure that maximum protection was provided for children and young people, with vastly improved life outcomes.

Members were informed that the contract for the Trust was 98% complete, but there were still a number of outstanding issues that would need to be resolved prior to the Trust becoming operational.

The Director of Children and Young Peoples Services provided a great deal of information to the Panel, and covered the following issues, and endeavoured to answer all Members questions on these:-

- Scrutiny's role in monitoring the delivery of the Trust, and in future how they would hold the Trust to account;
- Pensions;
- Any additional costs that would be incurred such as insurance and VAT.

One of the major concerns raised during the course of the debate, was in terms of Scrutiny's role in the future. Whilst the DfE didn't want the Council to 'micromanage'

the Trust, the Director of Children and Young People's Services would look to monitor the Trust, and report her findings to Scrutiny, so whilst it was not anticipated that Scrutiny would have a direct role in holding the Trust to account, there would be still avenues whereby they would have responsibility for ensuring the robustness of the services provided. Additionally, the Councillor Tony Corden, informed Members that they would receive a monitoring report from the Trust on a quarterly basis.

It was noted that there was still a great deal of work to be done in achieving what would become a very unique arrangement, and it was imperative that the Council and the DfE worked to ensure that the services provided would be as robust as possible, and ultimately, protect the vulnerable children and young people in the Borough as much as possible.

RESOLVED that the Panel noted the update on the Doncaster Children's Trust.

5. CHILDREN'S SERVICES PROGRESS REPORT – A YEAR OF IMPROVEMENT

Further to the previous item on the agenda, The Director of Children and Young People's Services gave a further update with regard to the Progress Report on Children's Services which was due to be considered by Council on Thursday, 25th September, 2014. Members had received the agenda papers for the meeting of Full Council, and this report would be discussed at length at that meeting. However, Members were still given the opportunity to discuss this issue prior to the full debate at Full Council.

Members were informed that a number of things had been put into place over the past year, and improvements could be seen. Positive change had been brought about in a number of areas including SEND, School Improvement Service, and Child Sexual Exploitation with real evidence seen of these improvements. A lot of work had been done regarding the recruitment of good quality staff, and the Early Help Offer had been improved, all of which was demonstrated by the reduction in the number of case referrals. The Director of Children and Young People's Services commented that better decisions were now being made, and the feedback from families was more positive, with the number of complaints beginning to reduce.

There was still a great deal of work to do, but progress was being made and confidence in Children's Services was beginning to rise. Members noted the comments made, with general consensus that progress was pleasing, and this was a work in progress with vast amounts of work still to do, but nevertheless welcomed the positives within the report.

RESOLVED that the Panel noted the update provided by the Director of Children and Young People's Services.

6. COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS ANNUAL REPORT

Members considered a report that provided information on the number of complaints made with regard to the Children and Young People's Service from 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014.

Members were informed that it was a statutory requirement to produce an annual report for complaints. This was stipulated under the Children's Social Care Statutory complaints procedure and required that this was a mechanism by which the Local Authority be kept informed with regard to the consideration and handling of its complaints.

The Chair commented that they were happy with the report presented before them, as there were generally a lot of positives contained within it. Overall, the number of complaints had reduced, and the Director of Children's Services informed Members that whilst complaints were still being made, this was unavoidable, but the way in which complaints were being handled was better, quicker and more efficient.

RESOLVED that the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Panel accept the report.

7. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL WORK PLAN REPORT 2014/15

Members considered the work plan for 2014/15 which provided an on-going summary of the work being undertaken by the Children and Young Peoples Panel throughout the 2014/15 Municipal Year.

The Chair updated the Panel with regard to some future

dates in respect of proposed meetings and site in respect of their in-depth review of Academies and Educational Attainment. The following dates were confirmed:-

- 26th September, 2014 – Site visits to Town Fields Primary School, Stone Hill School, and Copley Junior School.
- 15th October, 2014 - Meeting with Teaching Alliance.
- 4th November, 2014 – Site Visit to DeWarenne Academy.

Members were also informed that Sir Thomas Wharton College had been in touch and a date was in the process of being arranged.

RESOLVED that the revised work plan be noted. All to note