

MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SELECT COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 4 March 2014 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillors John Paschoud (Chair), Stella Jeffrey, Jacq Paschoud, Philip Peake, Alan Till and Lisa Palin (Parent Governor Representative) and Monsignor N Rotheron (Church Representative)

APOLOGIES: Councillors David Britton, Marion Nisbet, Gail Exon (Church Representative), Sharon Archibald (Parent Governor Representative) and Mark Saunders (Parent Governor Representative)

ALSO PRESENT: Tina Benjamin (Service Manager for Adoption & LAC & LCS (Looked After Children and Leaving Care Services)), Andrew Hagger (Scrutiny Manager), Ian Smith (Director Children's Social Care) (Directorate for Children & Young People, LBL), Frankie Sulke (Executive Director for Children and Young People) and Warwick Tomsett (Head of Targeted Services and Joint Commissioning)

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 29 January 2014

Resolved:

The minutes of the meeting held on 29th January 2014 were agreed.

2. Declarations of interest

2.1 There were no declarations of interest.

3. Safeguarding Services

3.1 Ian Smith (Director of Children's Social Services) introduced the report and highlighted the following key points:

- There has been an increase in Child Protection Plans (CPPs) since March 2013. Cases have been audited and no changes in thresholds have been identified. There has been a similar rise in CPPs in Greenwich and Southwark.
- Children in Lewisham spend less time on a CPP than Lewisham's statistical neighbours and numbers are also lower for children who were previously on a CPP subsequently returning to a CPP.
- The number of care proceedings has reduced, although Lewisham still has among the highest in London, as has historically been the case. A factor in this is in part the low cost of accommodation in Lewisham. Neighbouring boroughs will often house people in Lewisham, which means their children would then fall into Lewisham care.
- Care proceedings are being resolved more quickly through a partnership between Lewisham, Lambeth, Southwark and Greenwich and the Courts.
- The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) is a statutory officer who deals with allegations against professionals who work with young people.
- The Lewisham Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) is a statutory board which holds the Council and other partners in the borough to account for their safeguarding responsibilities.

- A lot of work is being done targeting child sexual exploitation, including a pilot with the Metropolitan Police which is now being rolled out across London as good practice.
- A regular safeguarding item as part of the Children and Young People Select Committee work programme is an expectation of Ofsted.

3.2 In response to questions from the Committee, Ian Smith, Frankie Sulke (Executive Director for Children and Young People) and Tina Benjamin (Service Manager Looked After Children, Leaving Care & Adoption) provided the following information:

- There has been an increase in physical abuse. Further information on the breakdown of types of abuse and gender will be provided in the next update.
- The Mayor and Cabinet are aware of the increase in CPPs as they form a core part of the management report that is regularly provided to Mayor & Cabinet and the Public Accounts Select Committee. Corporately, Officers are considering developing a range of indicators around the impacts of welfare reform, familial stress and overcrowding. It may be that these pressures are contributing to the increase. It is recognised that during a recession there is an increase in CPP numbers.
- The focus for officers is to make a decision based around the needs of the child. The increase in the number of children on CPPs has been looked at closely not to reduce the numbers, but to understand why it is happening and to make sure the necessary resource support is put in place.
- Where unborn and under 1s are subject to a CPP this is often due to a family history that has identified these children as at risk, such as a history of drug use or alcohol use among the parents.
- Referrals will come from many sources, there is a good relationship with the midwifery service and there are 3 social workers based at the hospital. Referrals will also come from GPs, drug and alcohol rehabilitation services as well as schools. More comprehensive information about where referrals come from will be provided in the next update.
- The recent rise in CPPs will not necessarily mean an increase in care proceedings as a number of intervention approaches will be put in place to prevent an escalation to care proceedings.
- Our aim is to complete an intense 6 week assessments before going to court for care proceedings. This means that there is reduced need to go carry out further assessments. There is also a member of staff monitoring and auditing cases, who carries out quarterly reporting.
- The Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) brings together different public services such as police, health and children's centres to share intelligence about families.
- Because the birth-rate has increased there would be expected to be an increase in CPPs.
- There are currently 2 Serious Case Reviews on-going, which are the first SCRs in 4 years. Both are focussed primarily around health.
- For an SCR to take place certain criteria have to be met and the person carrying out the SCR is appointed by the LSCB Chair. The emphasis around an SCR is to learn lessons from what happened in order to improve processes and prevent it happening again. A sub-group of the LSCB looks at cases that have the potential to become SCRs.

- The Violence Against Women and Girls Plan includes an action plan around Female Genital Mutilation that will coming to the LSCB. So far there has been awareness training among staff and further work will be carried out to work more with schools and raise more awareness of female Genital Mutilation.
- A lot of work has been carried out targeting Child Sexual Exploitation and schools are very good at identifying it.

Resolved:

The Committee asked that further information on the types of abuse recorded, including the breakdown of gender in the different types, is provided as part of the next safeguarding update as well as more comprehensive information about where referrals originate from.

The Committee agreed to suggest adding the outcomes of the two Serious Case reviews to the work programme for 2014/15.

The Committee agreed to suggest adding an annual safeguarding update to the work programme for 2014/15 and subsequent years.

4. Corporate Parenting

4.1 Ian Smith introduced the report and highlighted the following key points.

- The terms of reference of the Corporate Parenting Group have been reviewed and a work programme has been introduced to get a balance between members and young people and what they want to do. The young people involved have found this change useful.
- There has been an effort to bring other younger Looked After Children into the Corporate Parenting Group.
- Placement stability is still a key concern for Looked After Children and further information on this will be brought to the Committee as part of the next update. Housing and education are other key concerns for Looked After Children.
- Officers work closely with the Children in Care Council to address their concerns and improve the services they receive.

4.2 In response to questions from the Committee, Ian Smith, Frankie Sulke and Tina Benjamin provided the following information:

- There can be difficulty in bringing all the concerns of Looked After Children to the Corporate Parenting Group. There is a mechanism for obtaining feedback from Looked After Children called Viewpoint which can produce data about concerns raised. Officers will bring information based on Viewpoint data to further meetings of the Corporate Parenting Group.
- The Children in Care Council is very active and has a junior and a senior group and includes more representatives than on the Corporate Parenting Group.
- As identified in the report, the stability of placements is a major issue for Looked After Children. On the 3 measures of stability, Lewisham performs well in 2 and poorly in the other, with 60-70% of placements regarded as stable.
- The reasons for a lack of stability can be complex. Some foster carers might stop fostering due to a change in circumstances and once a child leaves a placement they can get into a pattern of rejection and instability. A way of boosting stability for the child is to encourage adoption, while work has been

carried out to improve stability in social workers, so that Looked After Children work with the same social worker.

- If a school is seeking extra Looked After Children support, officers will generally challenge the school to use their pupil premium funding to provide this support. For example the Pupil premium can be used to support a Personal Education Plan.
- Most of the Looked After Children in Lewisham's care do not go to Lewisham schools.
- The contract with Barnardos to run the Children in Care Council will be ending, with support for this brought in-house to seek better value for money, particularly around improved transitions and sharing of information.

4.3 The Committee then discussed the government requirement around increases in rent formula for social housing which could impact on accommodation for those either in or leaving care. Officers indicated they are due to meet colleagues in Housing and will discuss this with them.

4.4 The Committee also suggested that the Children in Care Council should be given the power to summon the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People and/or the Mayor to their meetings.

Resolved:

The Committee resolved that officers should ensure that the Children in Care Council should be given the power to summon the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People and/or the Mayor to their meetings.

5. Falling Through The Gaps Review Update

5.1 Warwick Tomsett (Head of Targeted Services & Joint Commissioning) introduced the update and highlighted the on-going actions being carried out in response to the recommendations in the review.

In response to questions from the Committee, Warwick Tomsett informed the Committee that:

- Briefings for Councillors will form part of the induction for new Councillors after the elections in May.
- The feedback from the networking event for parents of children in elective home education was positive.

Resolved:

The Committee noted the update

6. Select Committee work programme

Resolved:

The Committee approved the work programme.

7. Referrals to Mayor and Cabinet

7.1 There were no referrals.

The meeting ended at 9.00 pm

Chair:

Date:
