

# Scrutiny Children Services Review Group

## Minutes

2 March 2021 at 6.00 pm

### Present:

Councillor Keens (Chair), Councillors D. Chapman, Khurshid, Lovell, Moles, Petts and Roche

### Statutory Co-optees:

Dr Mohammad Alramahi (Parent Governor Representative)

### In attendance:

Damien Elcock, Service Director, Quality and Improvement  
Allison Parkinson, Service Director, Children Operations

## 12 Apology for Absence

An apology for absence from the meeting was received from Debbie Main, Diocesan Representative.

## 13 Minutes (Ref: 2.1 & 2.2)

That subject to the note below the minutes of the meetings held on 13 January 2021 and 21 January 2021 be taken as a correct record of the meetings and the Chair be authorised to sign them in due course.

- (i) Cllr Moles enquired about the extra funding for flying start centres mentioned by Cllr M. Hussain, Portfolio Holder for Children Health & Wellbeing at the 21 January meeting. The Service Director, Quality and Improvement advised that no additional funding was available other than the income stream from the Airport. In response to the suggestion of a report back to a future meeting on funding, the Service Director, Children's Operations confirmed Officers would not be in a position to provide any further update to a future meeting. Funding from the Airport community fund would continue to organisations such as the Early Year's Alliance and some funding was also be available from the new Family Partnership Service. Funding was also available from Public Health for some children services community projects mentioned at the last meeting for BAME expectant mothers and new and expectant parents from other minority groups. The Service Director, Children's Operations agreed to contact colleagues in Public Health for a report back on the type of funding streams provided to a future meeting of the committee.

## 14 Chair's Update

The Chair informed the committee that the Executive at its meeting on 9 March 2021 supported and noted the reference on Integrated Family Partnership Service Proposals and Delivery of Universal Services.

The Chair commented on the two school representatives vacancies, which had remained unfilled for some time. The Service Director, Children's Operations agreed to raise the issue the Corporate Director.

The DSO informed the committee that a parent governor position had also become vacant following the disqualification of Louise Boateng for non-attendance at meetings for more than six months.

## 15 Disclosure of Interest (Ref: 3)

Councillor Keens declared a personal interest as a local authority governor of Ashcroft High School and Richmond Hill School and remained in the meeting.

Councillor D. Chapman declared a personal interest as a teacher at Icknield High School and remained in the meeting.

Councillor Roche declared a personal interest as the chair of governors at Meads Primary School and remained in the meeting.

## 16 Children's Services Ofsted Improvement Plan – Bi-monthly Update on Progress (Ref: 8)

The Service Director, Quality and Improvement presented the report (Ref 8) on Children's Services Ofsted Improvement Plan – Bimonthly Update on Progress. He informed the committee that a comprehensive improvement plan had been developed to compliment the delivery plans sitting underneath in response to the January 2020 Ofsted inspection, where the service was judged inadequate.

The following points were highlighted:

- The service now had a fully permanent senior management team;
- A review on the consolidation of a collaborative audit process to ensure evidence of continuing improvement in the quality of practice, and young people were engaged to gain their views on the work undertaken. 40% of cases were audited so far with only one case deemed inadequate with over 80% regarding as good;
- The Foster Carer Association was re-launched and now fully functional;
- Work on the case management system continues to make progress to streamline recording times for social workers to spend more of their time with families. Additional systems were now in place to increase the pace of change in case management system and performance reporting resulting in the social work academy welcoming the first cohort of newly qualified social workers in January who are in the process of completing their 4-week induction and be allocated to a social work team soon;
- The agency social workers numbers continue to reduce which is due to the progressive recruitment and retention work in place;
- The turnover amongst permanent workers had significantly reduced over the last 10 months;
- The Practice weeks held in October and February dedicated to learning and engagement and delivered by external advisors with sessions from the Police on safeguarding, research and practice and support to local authorities. Other sessions held were on the framework and interactions between social workers and families; and some looked after children are now training to be social workers. The sessions were successful in increasing levels of engagement across the week.
- Ofsted's next focus visit planned for Jan/March, however, due to lockdown restrictions was now put back to the first quarter in the new financial year (April/May). A decision on whether to continue with the monitoring visits or if sufficient improvement was made to move to a full inspection to achieve a good improvement rating will be taken.

The following responses made to questions/comments asked by the committee

The recruitment process for foster carers received 25 applications for mainstream foster carers. The number of applications received were slightly down on last year's figures, which was due to the pandemic and the service is keen press on with the assessments. The campaign had led to a reduction in the number of Independent Fostering Agencies, which means they can look at recruiting foster carers from within families referred to as 'connected carers' to support children coming into care.

Out of Borough, placements placed extra pressures on social workers but due to covid restrictions, most of their work had switched to virtual visits rather than in person. Children placed in far locations are allocated a local social worker in the area.

A social work practitioner chairs weekly meetings for children missing from home and care and is responsible for carrying out return interviews, teenage children were the most likely to go missing.

Support for foster carers when a child abscond was available from the emergency social worker duty team. They also receive support from the Police and from their allocated social worker; and have access to an Educational Psychologist who works with them to help and support them understanding child behaviours, and a foster carers network also provides support.

In terms of social worker numbers the current figure was 193 social workers in post with 16 unfilled post, when all posts are filled the total number of qualified social workers will be 209, which equates to 141 permanent and 52 agency workers.

The information in the audit reports displayed on page 27 relates to care plans and case files for social workers to record the outcomes of their assessment visits to families. The information is looked at by a moderator usually a senior staff member and so far the reports show a steady improvement. The service has been unsuccessful in filling the role of the Core Compliance Officer with no applications received after the post was advertised twice. The job description was revised to reflect business and children's law skills and it is hoped the revision will attract applicants.

The committee requested a report back to a future meeting of on wellbeing of staff in education and vulnerable groups. The Chair also requested a report on the recruitment of foster carers, which goes to the Corporate Parenting Partnership Board to come to a future meeting of the committee and the Service Director, Children's Operations agreed to bring a report to the June meeting.

**Resolved:** (i) That the Committee's thanks to Officers be recorded.

- (ii) That the series of highlight reports from the most recent Children's Improvement Board on 15 February 2021 be noted.
- (iii) That a report on funding for children services to a future meeting of the committee.
- (iv) That a report on staff wellbeing in education and the effects on vulnerable groups be reported to a future meeting.
- (v) That a report on the recruitment of foster carer be reported to the June meeting of the committee.

## 17 Stronger Families Programme Update (Ref: 9)

The Service Director, Children's Operations presented the report (Ref 9) on stronger families programme update. She informed the committee that an update was provided to the committee last year and it was unclear whether funding would continue due to the governments slow in confirming the funding for the troubled families programme, which had now been agreed to rollover for another year; and the troubled families programme will continue to sit within the family partnership service realigned into the Early Help Service.

In response to whether the programme was funded by results was advised yes, and a strict criteria is applied for the council to demonstrate these had been met.

**Resolved:** (i) That the committee's thanks to the Officer be recorded.

- (ii) That the report be noted (Ref 9)

## 18 Draft CSRG Work Programme 2021/22 and Executive Forward Plan (Ref: 10)

**Resolved:** (i) That the DSO populate the draft dates on the CSRG draft work programme for 2021/22 once these are known.

(ii) That the committee note the additional meeting on 13 April 2021 had been arranged for the following items:

- Inclusion Strategy – John Wrigglesworth
- Effective Support Strategy – Allison Parkinson

(iv) That a report on funding for children services be reported to a future meeting of the committee – Public Health

(v) That a report on staff wellbeing in education and the effects on vulnerable groups be reported to a future meeting – Service Director Education

(vi) That a report on the recruitment of foster cares be reported to the June meeting of the committee – Service Director, Children's Operations

(Note: The meeting ended 7.12 pm)