

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

MINUTES of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee for Children's Services held at County Hall, Lewes, on 9 November 2010

PRESENT	Councillor Ensor (Chairman) Councillors Field, Gadd, Kenward, Shing, St Pierre, Waite and Whetstone. Jeremy Alford (Health Representative) David Sanders (RC Diocese) Mike Wilson (C of E Diocese) Sam Gregory (Parent Governor)
Chief Officer	Matt Dunkley, Director of Children's Services
Scrutiny Lead Officer	Gillian Mauger
Also present	Councillor Elkin, Lead Cabinet Member for Learning and School Effectiveness Councillor Glazier, Lead Cabinet Member for Adult and Children's Services Councillor Stroude, Lead Cabinet Member for Children and Families Peter Davidson, Governor Services Manager Cathie Pattison, Independent Social Care Consultant Liz Rugg, Assistant Director, Children and Families Becky Shaw, Chief Executive Douglas Sinclair, Head of Children's Safeguards & Quality Assurance

22. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

22.1 RESOLVED – to confirm as a correct record the minutes of the last Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 7 September 2010.

23. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

23.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Webb, Councillor Jonathan Johnson (District/Borough representative) and Carole Shaves MBE (Police Authority representative).

24. REPORTS

24.1 Copies of the reports referred to below are included in the minute book.

25. ANNUAL REPORT OF LOCAL SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD 2009-10

25.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services that advised Members of the inter-agency arrangements in place to safeguard children in East Sussex. The Committee was informed that there had been significant changes to the way in which the Board now operates, mainly as a result of legislative changes. The Board now had an independent Chair and Councillor Glazier, Lead Cabinet Member for

Adult and Children's Services, now attended the Board as a participating observer. The new chair brought a wealth of experience to the role, having over 30 years experience of child protection, and also chaired other Safeguarding Boards. The Board faced a challenging time over the next year or so as a result of the reduction in resources which all the organisations/agencies represented on the Board faced at a time of increased demand. The Board would also have to find a balance between the way in which statutory work and preventative work was funded and carried out.

25.2 In response to questions by the Committee the following points were made:

- Ofsted agreed the terms of reference and provided a framework for the way in which serious case review reports had to be written and graded the Internal Management Reports of each agency, the Overview Report and the Executive Summary. It had been necessary for the Panel to rewrite its first review report as the agreed terms of reference were subsequently considered too narrow.
- Information on the child deaths subject to Serious Case review was provided to key members. However, it was difficult to release the information too widely due to any coroner's inquests and possible on-going prosecutions that resulted from such deaths.
- The initial findings of the Munro review of child protection indicated a shift back towards social workers being able to use their professional judgement in cases and a move away from the 'tick box' culture of assessment that had developed. This view seemed to be supported by national government. It was important that social workers were not seen as the only people responsible for protecting children and that schools, the police etc also shared that responsibility.
- Any changes resulting from the Munro review would not lead to an additional level of procedures being produced for safeguarding. Instead current procedures would be amended and rewritten accordingly.
- Some of the processes currently in place were as a result of the need to collect data for national indicators. It was hoped that the new system would reduce these expectations and allow Local Authorities freedom to set outcome focused targets in the future.
- The report did not include attendance figures for recent meetings of the Board and this would be provided outside the meeting. A record was kept of who attended each meeting and if a particular agency/organisation or person was not attending this was addressed. It was also hoped that a new induction pack, which emphasised the need to attend meetings, would have a positive impact on attendance.
- Whilst there was a tradition of encouraging the use of substitutes for meetings the new Chair had reservations about this as it could encourage key people, who had been picked for their particular expertise or level of authority, not to attend. There was now an expectation that substitutes were only used in exceptional circumstances.
- In response to concerns about the membership of the Board being too large for it to be effective, the Committee was informed that a lot of the practical work of the Board was carried out in the sub groups and the Steering Group, rather than being taken to the main board meetings, helping to speed up the business of the Board.
- The continued increase in referrals, children with a protection plan and Looked After Children continued to put strain on the Department. The Director confirmed that the Department now had more social workers than it had two years ago, although numbers had still not kept pace with demand.
- The Department was currently going through the budget exercise for next year but would not be looking to make reductions in child protection services.
- The Department was currently working with other agencies, particularly the police,

to develop a more effective route into the referral team to help reduce unnecessary referrals.

- Emotional abuse, a category used to record why child protection plans were being put in place, also included domestic abuse in the home. The Department continued to see an increase in domestic abuse, substance and alcohol misuse within families.

25.3 RESOLVED – to endorse the annual report on the Local Safeguarding Children Board business plan.

26. ANNUAL REPORT – SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN – MEMBER AND SENIOR MANAGEMENT MONITORING

26.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services that advised Members of the findings of the monitoring systems in place for senior managers and Members that ensured that services to safeguard children were properly co-ordinated and managed effectively.

26.2 In response to questions by the Committee the following points were made:

- In comparison with other local authorities, a lot of audit work was carried out within the social care teams and the frequency and style of the visits carried out by the Lead Member were not common elsewhere.
- Following each audit an implementation plan and action plan were developed by the teams involved.
- Discussions were taking place at present to decide where the audit of services to safeguard children fitted in with the overall audit process of the Council.
- There were issues regarding the current recording information systems and database used by the teams as when introduced they were not fit for purpose and these were currently under review and subject to improvement.
- The Lead Member used her visits to check out such issues as workloads of the teams, safety issues, access to equipment and parking problems. They also provided a good opportunity for her to compare what managers were reporting with what was happening on the ground within the teams.

26.3 RESOLVED to note the outcomes of the monitoring visits and audits undertaken by the Lead Member and senior managers.

27. SCRUTINY REVIEW OF SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL GOVERNORS

27.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services that detailed progress by the department in taking forward the recommendations outlined in the final report by the review board.

27.2 The following points and observations were made:

- The scrutiny review had helped raise the profile of governance and had highlighted to some governing bodies the need for training. It has also helped governors feel valued, as they recognised that a great deal of time and effort had gone improving the support they received through the completion of the review and the subsequent action plan.
- The recommendation to develop three levels of governor training had helped governors focus on their need for continued training and development and some were now using it to focus on a different area of development each year.

- The clerking service had now been discussed at the four Governing Body area meetings and there had been a positive response to it.
- A Parent Governor on the Committee reported that progress around training and support had been good since the review and developing the three levels of training had made a difference. The trainers used by Governor Services were people who the governing bodies knew well and they have been supportive in helping governing bodies understand their role and responsibilities.
- The Governors Panel, which appointed the Children's Services Department Governors, now had a criteria in place against which they judge the suitability of nominations.

27.3 RESOLVED to (1) note that the committee was content with the action taken by Governor Services to implement the recommendations from the Scrutiny Review of Support for School Governors and did not require any further updates; and

(2) agree that Governor Services should continue to monitor the outcomes of the action plan as part of their general work.

Councillor Field took the chair for the next item

28. SCRUTINY REVIEW OF MATHEMATICS ATTAINMENT AT KEY STAGE 2

28.1 Councillor Ensor presented the final report of the scrutiny review of attainment in mathematics Key Stage 2, highlighting the key findings and recommendations of the review board.

28.2 RESOLVED to support the report by the Review Board and recommend it for submission to Cabinet and County Council.

29. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

29.1 The Committee considered the scrutiny work programme and discussed further items to be included.

29.2 RESOLVED to make the following changes to the work programme:

March 2011

- report on primary and secondary policy and practice on behaviour
- report on how the local authority will monitor and support schools following the abolition of School Improvement Partners.
- College Central (the virtual college) report to focus on the development of the curriculum. (report outlining the outcomes achieved by pupils to be brought to the September 2011 meeting instead)

'For information' reports

- aims and objectives of the reintegration and secondary behaviour support service
- explanation of the work of the primary behaviour support team
- aims and objectives of the pupil retention grant.

30. FORWARD PLAN

30.1 The Committee considered the Forward Plan for the period 1 November 2010 and 28 February 2011.

30.2 RESOLVED to note the Forward Plan.

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 1.15pm