

## SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

MINUTES of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee for Children's Services held at County Hall, Lewes on 15 September 2014.

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### PRESENT:

Councillors Kathryn Field (Chair), Stephen Shing (Vice Chair), Peter Charlton, Angharad Davies (substituting for Cllr. Roy Galley), Michael Ensor, Kim Forward, Jim Sheppard (substituting for Cllr. Claire Dowling), Alan Shuttleworth and Francis Whetstone.

Catherine Platten (Parent Governor Representative).  
Simon Parr (Roman Catholic Diocese Representative).  
Cllr Johanna Howell (District & Borough Council Representative).

Lead Members: Councillors Sylvia Tidy (Lead Member Children & Families / designated statutory Lead Member for Children's Services).

Scrutiny Lead Officer            Martin Jenks

Also present                     Stuart Gallimore, Director of Children's Services; Liz Rugg, Assistant Director (Safeguarding, Looked After Children and Youth Justice ); Fiona Wright, Assistant Director (Schools, Youth & Inclusion Support); Mark Whiffin, Head of Finance.

### 11.    MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

11.1    RESOLVED – to confirm as a correct record the minutes of the last Committee meeting held on 16 June 2014.

### 12.    APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

12.1    Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Nick Bennett (Lead Member Learning & School Effectiveness). Councillor Claire Dowling, Councillor Roy Galley and Nicola Boulter (Parent Governor Representative).

### 13.    DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS

13.1    Councillor Field declared a personal interest under item 5 when discussing external Fostering and agency placements as her husband works for an agency. She did not consider this interest to be prejudicial.

### 14.    URGENT ITEMS

14.1    No urgent matters were notified.

## 15. RECONCILING POLICY, PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES (RPPR)

15.1 The Director of Children's Services introduced the report. The information contained in the appendices comes from the State of the County report which some members of the Committee may have previously seen. The department has reviewed the savings plan in appendix 3 to test previously stated savings targets and to mitigate any savings that cannot be achieved.

15.2 The Committee made a number of general comments on the RPPR information provided to them. The department is to be congratulated on providing cost driver data (p27 -31) as this is helpful in providing the context to the financial information. However, it would be helpful to be able to directly link the revenue budget totals (appendix 1, p16) with the totals and sub totals contained in the savings plan in appendix 3.

15.3 The Committee requested that a column is added to the savings plan for the November Scrutiny Committee meeting to show the total budget for the current financial year against each savings target. This will enable the Committee to see what proportion of the current budget the savings represent. A number of comments were made by the committee on the text within the portfolio plan for the department.

### Savings Plan 2015/16 Comments

15.4 The Committee asked the Director of Children's Services for clarification of the basis upon which the savings plan was developed. The current savings plan was agreed some time ago against a set of corporate priorities. The savings plan was not based on a percentage saving applied across all budgets, but was based on an analysis of where the least impact would be. The department has sought to weight the savings to protect safeguarding and children at risk work areas. The management team does review the savings plan to ensure there is a measure of balance so that services important in the long term, such as early help, are not adversely affected.

15.5 The Committee asked a number of specific questions about the savings plan, which are summarised below.

- **Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND)**  
The 2012/13 residual savings of £754,000 identified for SEN (Special Educational Needs) will be achieved through the new model for services provided under the SEND Reforms and has been built into the budget from 1 September 2014.
- **Looked After Children (LAC) Parent & Baby Placements**  
The department recognises that it may not be able to control the number of parent and baby placements. However, the target for the numbers of sets of care proceedings has been met so far.
- **Agency Placements**  
Agency placements involve the use of non East Sussex County Council (ESCC) staff and settings and only quality providers are used. Sometimes it is not possible to use in-house residential placements due to the complex needs involved e.g. where single child placements are needed. Providers of fostering and residential agency placements are subject to inspection by Ofsted and ESCC only use those assessed as 'Good' or better.

The primary inspection responsibility rests with Ofsted. However, ESCC staff and Independent Reviewing Officers review placements to satisfy themselves that

placements are good and working well. There are also mechanisms in place for children and young people themselves to report problems and raise concerns.

Rose Cottage

- The Committee asked about the status and long term position of Rose Cottage. The staff from Rose Cottage have been redeployed to other residential services within ESCC, which has led to a saving in the use of agency staff. The department has carefully considered the future of the facility to be sure that it will not be required in the future. The department wants to have a good range of foster care options available, rather than using residential placements. If Rose Cottage is closed the reduction in running costs would lead to a revenue budget saving for the department. Any capital receipts from the potential sale of the building would go back to the Council's general funds.
- Locality Social Work Team  
The Committee asked about the impact of 'stepping down' cases on the work of the Locality and Early Help teams. The Locality teams deal with two types of work, children within care proceedings and children working with family support plans. The qualified social workers support Early Help staff to manage cases and 'stepping down' only happens when it is safe to do so. Cases are audited regularly and the department monitors the 'stepping down' and 'stepping up' process. At present the department is not seeing any adverse consequences. The Ofsted inspection also looked carefully at this process.
- Children's Centres and Parental Support Classes  
The East Sussex Hospitals Trust (ESHT) has stopped providing ante natal classes. The Committee asked whether ESCC should address this key aspect of parental education. From 2015 ESCC will be responsible for commissioning health visiting services as part of public health services. The department is in discussion with a number of health providers to look at commissioning this service. It will be important to identify how to best deliver support to parents and blend this with the Early Help offer.

The Committee expressed a concern that there will be a gap in new parenting advice/education until the health visiting service was re-commissioned. The Director of Children's Services acknowledged that there may be a need for an advice/education service for new parents and carers. However, ESCC cannot always plug the gap in services when it was not responsible for the original service.

- Management and Support  
The Committee commented that there was no description or impact statement in the savings plan for the £165,000 saving. The department is looking at the best way to achieve these savings and there are no firm proposals at present. More information will be brought back to the Committee at the November Scrutiny Committee meeting.
- Resources – Reductions in Broadband and ICT (Information and Communication Technology)  
The Committee asked for more details on how the reductions in these areas would achieve the savings described in the narrative (page 58) and what their impact would be. The Director of Children's Services agreed to provide further information to the Committee.
- Targeted Youth Service  
The Committee asked what the impact of savings to the service had been for the current financial year. The Youth Justice Board has not seen an adverse impact

resulting from the savings that have been made. The impact of the savings will continue to be monitored.

15.6 The Committee agreed to establish a Review Board to consider the department's portfolio and savings plan and to make comments to Cabinet. The Chair of the Scrutiny Committee emphasised how important this process was, and invited all members of the Committee to attend RPPR Review Board meeting on the morning of Monday 8<sup>th</sup> December 2014 in meeting room CC1, County Hall.

15.7 RESOLVED:– It was resolved to:

- 1) Note the report;
- 2) Seek further information where indicated in the minutes of the meeting and;
- 3) Establish a Review Board to consider the department's portfolio and savings plan and to submit comments on them to Cabinet.

## 16. INSPECTION OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN IN NEED OF HELP AND PROTECTION, CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER AND CARE LEAVERS

16.1 The Director of Children's Services introduced the report on the Ofsted inspection and action plan. The outcome of the inspection, (which gave an overall judgement of 'Good' with the Adoption Service judged as 'Outstanding' and the service to care leavers as 'Requires Improvement') is a testament to a lot of hard work by the staff and management of the department. The majority of local authorities that have been inspected under the new, tougher joint inspection framework have been assessed as 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate'. Only a minority have been judged as 'Good'.

16.2 The response to Ofsted's recommendations is contained in the action plan in appendix 2 of the report. The main area identified for improvement is the service and arrangements for care leavers. This is being tackled by a task and finish group chaired by the Director of Children's Services.

16.3 The Committee noted the achievement of the management and staff in obtaining a 'Good' judgement from Ofsted. The Committee thanked all those involved with the service. The Chair of the Scrutiny Committee also endorsed the thanks of the Committee. The Committee recognised the excellent nature of the report, but necessarily had to focus on the parts of the service that require improvement.

### Care Leavers

16.4 One of the aspects of the service that was identified as requiring improvement was supporting care leavers into employment. Like all young people at present, care leavers face challenges in finding employment. Some are successful, but others face greater challenges. The report is a timely reminder to re-double the Council's efforts, as corporate parents for Looked After Children (LAC), to get them into the world of work. ESCC has helped by using its apprentice scheme and its influence, to encourage employers to help this group of young people.

16.5 The Committee suggested the use of an individual mentor/advocate for each care leaver to ensure they get the skills they need, and are aware of their employment and training options. At present each care leaver has an allocated social worker who draws up an individual Pathway Plan. This is regularly monitored and is reviewed at least every six months by an Independent Reviewing Officer. Care leavers also have access to an advocate.

#### Adoption and Fostering Service

16.6 In point 26 of Ofsted's inspection report, it recommends that care leavers receive appropriate independence training to equip them with sufficient skills to help them live independently. The Committee questioned whether Foster Carers should be providing this support. The department does expect stable foster placements to provide this support, but not all young people are in stable placements. Where there is a gap in provision it will be filled with extra services for care leavers.

16.7 The Committee noted that ESCC has a good set of Foster Carers who are the "heroes" of the system and who also enable the later adoption of some children. The Committee wished to record its thanks to the Adoption Panel for their work. The department is organising a Foster Carers recruitment and retention event to thank them. A Foster Carer recruitment drive is about to start and it would be helpful if all Elected Members could spread the word about the recruitment drive.

#### Monitoring

16.8 The Scrutiny Committee requested that an update on the implementation of the action plan be given to them at an appropriate time in the future.

#### Safeguarding and Child Sexual Exploitation

16.9 In the light of recent cases in Rotherham, Rochdale and Oxford, the Committee asked whether there was a need to update safeguarding practice for missing children and absconders from children's homes. In addition, they asked if there are any policy issues for children who are multiple absconders e.g. for handling or restraint, to keep them in a place of safety.

16.10 This is not an issue that has arisen suddenly, and the department has already put in place measures to look at this issue. There are resources to carry out prompt investigations if necessary. There is a need for greater vigilance and the department has been working with the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) to monitor this situation. The Assistant Director (Safeguarding, Looked After Children and Youth Justice) is reviewing the type of service ESCC would like to commission in this area of service.

16.11 RESOLVED:– It was resolved to note the report.

### 17. SCRUTINY REVIEW OF EARLY YEARS ATTAINMENT

17.1 Councillor Field introduced the report in her role as Chair of the Review Board. The Review Board was comprised of Councillors Kathryn Field, Kim Forward, Alan Shuttleworth, Francis Whetstone and Cathy Platten, Parent Governor Representative. The review was established to look at education attainment levels and it was decided to review Early Years attainment, as this provided the basis for later educational attainment. Councillor Field has met with the Lead Member for Learning & School Effectiveness to discuss the report, and he has expressed his support for the recommendations of the report.

17.2 The perspective of the review was to start at the beginning of a child's education and to look at how the Council could strengthen links between schools and pre-schools. There is a key role for schools to strengthen these links. The review also focussed on the qualifications of staff, which are linked strongly with levels of attainment. The recommendations contained in the report are workable and get to the heart of the issue.

17.3 The Committee were invited to comment on the report and the recommendations. The following points were discussed.

- Councillor Whetstone was supportive of the recommendations and highlighted that the problems East Sussex has with attainment in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) may not necessarily be a problem of pre-school provision. It may also be an indication of the work that needs to be done in the reception year of primary schools.
- There were inconsistencies with the statistics quoted in paragraph 37 of the report and those on page 48, section 3.5 of the portfolio plan in appendix 2 of the RPPR report. The Scrutiny Lead Officer was requested to liaise with the Assistant Director for Schools, Youth & Inclusion Support and to amend the figures accordingly.
- Both Children's Centres and PVI (private, voluntary and independent) settings are covered in the report. The aim is to encourage all settings to improve and Children's Centres are one part of a mixture of solutions to improve attainment. The majority of pre-school settings in East Sussex are run by PVI providers.
- The report does not deal directly with the problem of recruiting primary school head teachers. However, there are recommendations under recommendation 5c for school management teams and governing bodies.

17.4 The Assistant Director for Schools, Youth & Inclusion Support thanked the Scrutiny Committee for a thorough piece of work that looked across all the early years sectors. The recommendations are realistic but challenging, and will build on the work to improve outcomes and attainment as well as the qualifications of early years practitioners.

17.5 The Committee agreed the report of the Review Board for the Scrutiny Review of Early Years Attainment. The Committee agreed to send the report to Cabinet on the 14 October 2014 for their consideration.

17.6 RESOLVED:– It was resolved to agree the report of the Review Board and send it to Cabinet on the 14 October 2014 for consideration.

## 18. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

18.1 The Committee discussed the work programme and the potential areas for future scrutiny reviews.

18.2 The Committee agreed to add a report to the agenda for the November 2014 Scrutiny Committee meeting to look at the Ofsted inspection of arrangements for School Improvement and the resulting action plan.

18.3 The Committee also agreed to receive a report on school results and attainment at the March 2015 Scrutiny Committee meeting.

18.4 The Committee noted that review of Raising the Participation Age (RPA) was underway and discussed future areas of work for review. It was agreed that the Committee should continue to look at educational attainment and it was suggested that it should work chronologically through the various stages of education. The Early Years Attainment Review focussed on the transition from pre-school to primary school. The Committee could review the transition between primary and secondary school next (i.e. between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3).

18.5 RESOLVED:– It was resolved that the work programme will be amended in line with paragraphs 18.2 and 18.3 above.

## 19. FORWARD PLAN

19.1 The Committee considered the Forward Plan for the period 1 August 2014 to 31 December 2014.

19.2 RESOLVED:– It was resolved:

To note the Forward Plan for the period 1 August 2014 to 31 December 2014.

## 20. URGENT ITEMS

20.1 None received.

The meeting ended at 11.45 am

The date of the next meeting is Monday 17 November 2014.

COUNCILLOR KATHRYN FIELD  
Chair