

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held at County Hall, Lewes 15 June 2015.

PRESENT Councillors Kathryn Field (Chair), Claire Dowling, Michael Ensor, Kim Forward, Roy Galley and Alan Shuttleworth

Dr Ann Holt (Church of England Diocese Representative)
Councillor Johanna Howell (District/Borough Representative)

LEAD MEMBERS Councillor Nick Bennett (Lead Member for Learning & School Effectiveness)
Councillor Sylvia Tidy (Lead Member Children & Families/ designated statutory Lead Member for Children's Services)

ALSO PRESENT Stuart Gallimore, Director of Children's Services
Liz Rugg, Assistant Director, (Safeguarding, LAC and Youth Justice)
Fiona Wright, Assistant Director (Education & ISEND)
Reg Hooke, Independent Chair Local Safeguarding Children Board
Douglas Sinclair, Head of Children's Safeguards & Quality Assurance
Ruth Szulecki, Early Years Development Manager

1 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 16 MARCH 2015

1.1 RESOLVED – to confirm as a correct record the minutes of the last Committee meeting held on 16 March 2015.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Stephen Shing and Angharad Davies; Simon Parr, Roman Catholic Diocese representative; and Parent Governor Representatives, Cathy Platten and Nicola Boulter.

3 DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS

3.1 Councillor Field declared a personal non-prejudicial interest in item 6 as she chairs an early years setting within the county.

4 URGENT ITEMS

4.1 No urgent matters were notified.

5 LOCAL SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD, SERIOUS CASE REVIEWS - REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

5.1 The Committee asked at its previous meeting for the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) to report back on the outcomes from the Serious Case Reviews it had most recently completed. Councillor Field introduced the report by clarifying it was not the role of the

Committee to revisit the subject matter of the reviews. Instead the Committee's role was to focus on and consider the recommendations and learning identified in the report.

5.2 The Director of Children's Services agreed to provide on an annual basis a report to the Committee on the LSCB's serious case reviews. The Director also agreed that amendments to the format of future serious case review reports would be considered in the light of the Committee's comments.

5.3 The Director then highlighted the LSCB's role in holding all relevant agencies to account for their learning from serious case reviews; that similarly each individual agency has its own governance structure in terms of looking at learning and actions and that the role of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee is an important part of that process. Despite the publicity the cases considered by the review process had generated, officers were still duty bound to maintain the confidentiality of the relevant parties at all times.

5.4 The key responsibilities of the LSCB with regard to serious case reviews, the processes it must follow and the constraints the Board operate under when publishing reports were then summarized by Reg Hooke, Chair of the LSCB. These points included:

- that it is a statutory duty of the LSCB to conduct a serious case review where a child has either died or has been seriously injured and it is suspected there has been abuse or neglect;
- the East Sussex Safeguarding Board has a case review sub group, of which serious case reviews form a small part of the workload. It is via this sub-group that recommendations are made to the Chair of the LSCB as to whether a serious case review should take place. All cases, whether single or multi agency are considered; and
- whilst recent serious case reviews have been published, a fundamental responsibility of the Board is to determine the content of any published report. The Board have a duty to ensure that any published reports do not contain information which may identify individuals. Reports are also not published until the full serious case review and the LSCB scrutiny role have been completed.

5.5 Douglas Sinclair, Head of Children's Safeguards & Quality Assurance then took the Committee through a presentation on the two serious case reviews that were before them. Details of these cases, learnings and recommendations are contained within the report.

Comments and Questions

5.6 The Committee welcomed the report and the opportunity to comment on the learning and recommendations. A central issue for the Committee was whether it had been provided with sufficient information to enable it to perform its scrutiny role effectively. For example, the Committee wanted more specific information about the uptake and proper implementation of individual recommendations by schools. Clarification was also sought about the mechanism via which this work was double-checked by the LSCB. The Committee also felt it was not clear how the learning from serious cases reviews was widely shared with other agencies. A number of committee members also considered that some of the recommendations did not provide clear targets which they could use to properly assess their effectiveness and levels of implementation.

5.7 In response to these comments and a number of other queries regarding the wording of specific recommendations, the Chair of the LSCB and the Head of Safeguarding provided further detail about the processes followed by the Board when monitoring recommendations and the information they ask for, a summary of which is provided below:

- After a serious case review is completed an inter-agency action plan is put in place which is then monitored and scrutinized by the LSCB. In addition to the highlights and

key learnings, all agencies complete internal management reviews and make further recommendations for their own organisations to address. All these recommendations are monitored by the Board and the resultant action plan is brought back to the Board on a regular basis for update and completion.

- Ensuring recommendations are implemented is an ongoing challenge for the Board. There are a large number of schools in the county, all of who face a range of competing demands. A key goal for the Board is to ensure all schools make safeguarding a high priority - as high a priority to the school as academic achievement.
- Even when the Board sign off an Action Plan, as in the case with Child G, there is an ongoing process of monitoring and learning. This is achieved via a safeguarding tool known as a Section 175 audit which schools are expected to complete and return to the Local Authority (Section 175 of the Education Act 2002 requires governing bodies of maintained schools and further education colleges to make arrangements to ensure their functions are carried out with a view to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children). The audit is then analysed. A range of briefings for school heads and Governors and for Designated Child Protection teachers are also provided.
- The Board would not sign off any action plan until it was satisfied that its recommendations had been fully embedded within a specific agency/school/organisation. The Committee were also reminded that Councillor Tidy attends meetings of the LSCB on behalf of the Council. In response to queries about the level of detail in the reports, the Chair of the LSCB also undertook where possible to provide further information at the appropriate time which the Committee could then use to scrutinize further.

5.8 It was confirmed that a section 175 audit is not completed by all schools. There is no statutory requirement for schools to complete one, although guidance says schools should. All schools in the area, including independent ones, are written to requesting completion of this audit. The Chair of the LSCB also informed the Committee that compliance with audits at all schools is a priority for the coming 3 year period. The Director of Children's Services also sought to reassure the Committee that following on from the last school's audit, the Department took the opportunity to highlight to all schools that completing the audit was an easy and effective way to demonstrate to Ofsted compliance with the requirements on safeguarding children.

5.9 The Director of Children's Services also highlighted to the Committee that it was important to recognise the independence of the Chair of the LSCB and his impartial role in holding all relevant agencies to account for their safeguarding duties. The Director also drew a distinction between action plans which relate to a specific issue and agency and the associated learning outcomes which can be more widely applied to other agencies. With regard to the former, an individual agency will be required to report to the Board and an assessment can then be made as to whether specific recommendations have been fully implemented. However, with regard to the learning outcomes and its application to other agencies, this represents ongoing work for the Board.

5.10 With regard to Child G, two positive outcomes from the review were highlighted to the Committee. The school in this case has convened an area designated child protection teacher meeting where learning is shared on a regular basis. This practice is being adopted in other areas. So as to help sustain the focus on schools and other educational establishments around safeguarding in the area, the Department is recruiting a school safeguarding officer and is also putting together a traded service offer for schools. If a school subscribed to the service, it will be taken through a safeguarding practice review and be asked to complete a 175 audit. A team will then go to the school and challenge them to provide the evidence given in the audit.

5.11 Councillor Tidy assured the Committee that in her role as an observer on the Board she takes full part in its meetings and that the LSCB has done as much as it can to put in place the ability for different agencies to learn from serious case reviews.

5.12 Councillor St Pierre also commented that it should be kept in mind that abuse happens not only in areas of social deprivation, but also in more affluent settings; that with regard to unexplained injuries many articulate parents are skilled at explaining away such injuries; and that one of the reasons why men are hidden is because a single mother maybe claiming benefits as a single parent.

5.13 The Committee asked for clarification about what measures were being taken to increase public awareness of safeguarding issues and were informed that a number of strategies are used to raise public awareness by East Sussex County Council and the LSCB. National campaigns by organisations like the NSPCC were also cited.

5.14 The Committee discussed performance indicators and Councillor Ensor asked whether there was scope for every teacher's annual appraisal to include an element regarding safeguarding. In response to this query the Committee were informed that a check would be undertaken to see if the 175 audit includes this requirement and if not, that it would be added.

5.15 In response to a query about whether a better system could be put in place for tracking families, the Committee were informed that East Sussex County Council had been a pilot authority for developing a national children's index. However, it was decided at national level to not roll out the index across the country.

Concluding remarks

5.16 The Chair summarised the Committee's main focus was on how the learnings and recommendations arising from serious case reviews were being implemented and monitored and whether more could be done to provide the Committee with sufficient data and measures which would enable it to perform its scrutiny role effectively.

5.17 RESOLVED to:

- 1) request an annual serious case review report to be provided to the June meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee. The report to include where appropriate more information about the measures taken to ensure recommendations are complied with.
- 2) provide the Committee with data regarding which schools within the county have completed a section 175 audit.

6 SCRUTINY REVIEW OF EARLY YEARS ATTAINMENT - REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

6.1 This is a six month monitoring report of the scrutiny review that reported to the Committee on 15 September 2014. The Assistant Director for Education and Inclusion Special Educational Needs and Disability (ISEND) introduced the item by drawing the Committee's attention to the many positive outcomes contained within the report and to ask the Committee to note this progress. The report contains an action plan which is divided into seven sections. The Committee were then provided with a summary of the some of the key outcomes within these seven recommendations, these points included:

- **Recommendation 1.** This recommendation relates to Home Learning and Children's Centres. The Committee were informed levels of co-ordination between different teams working within early years has improved and that the de-designation of children's centres was incorporated into the department's plan for the most vulnerable 2 year olds.
- **Recommendation 3.** This target focused on improving communication with parents and making it easier for them to identify high quality pre-school provision. The Department undertook a number of strategies to improve this area. Although one aspect of this work is in abeyance because of a wider website update that is programmed to happen in the autumn. A communication marketing campaign aimed at 2 year old entitlement was also undertaken. Uptake in this area is now above the national average, and this has had the benefit of increasing 3 year old uptake.
- **Recommendation 4.** This target focused on the quality of transitions, assessment and early years teaching practice. The Village project which is now moving into its 4th phase has been key to improving transitions and has had a very positive impact. For example, the outcomes for children within the project have increased at a rate above the rest of the local authority. The increased level of interest and engagement from schools and their commitment to early years is also viewed as very encouraging. Increasing numbers of schools are coming forward to take over the early years provision which is on their site. Similarly, a number of schools have also indicated they wish to lower the age range of their school to take in this early years group. There is also increased interest from Head-teachers looking to work together in this area – as evidenced by the fact that there are now 10 early years hubs across East Sussex. With regard to the quality of early years provision, there is very strong improvement as recorded in Ofsted outcomes.
- **Recommendation 7.** With regard to funding, the scrutiny review board recognised that it would not be possible to bring additional resources to this area. However a question was raised by the review board as to whether resources could be reprioritised. As a result of this, reports were taken to the Schools Forum which approved allowing some funding that sits within the 'school's block' to be transferred across to the 'early years block'. This meant that the higher level of payment for a highly vulnerable two year old (designated as a child in local authority care) could be continued to be paid at an hourly rate which is significantly greater than the normal rate. With regard to other areas of activity, particularly relating to training the Department have re-prioritised funding across the division's budget. For example, the department have granted 30 bursary supports for levels 3 and 5 training.

6.2 The Committee welcomed the positive outcomes identified in the report and debated a number of issues which are summarized below.

6.3 In response to a query as to why there is an increase in the number of primary schools lowering their age range, the Department commented that it was confident this was the result of schools recognising the advantages of engaging with children at an earlier age, particularly with those children who are most vulnerable to poor outcomes. It was also clarified to the

Committee that whilst language checkers are not universally distributed without support, these are available to parents.

Transfer of responsibility for Health Visitors to the Local Authority

6.4 With regard to the wording in the action plan relating to 'very vulnerable pregnant women', Councillor Forward asked whether this term could cover all women who are pregnant for the first time. In response it was explained that colleagues in Children's Centres and the 0-5 Commissioning Group were currently looking at the service specification for Health Visitors as it moves to Local Authority control. As a result it was not possible to clarify in the meeting the current position, although an undertaking was given to look into this matter and respond in due course.

6.5 On a more general level the Committee were very interested to learn more about the transfer of responsibilities from the NHS to the Local Authority for the Health Visitor service. The Committee also asked whether more data could be provided regarding the level of visits undertaken as part of the Hastings pilot project. In response, the Director explained that increasing pressures on the Department's budget would impact on its ability to provide such data in future - although this area would be looked into.

6.6 In response to a request from the Committee, an undertaking was given to suggest to the Schools Forum that a letter is sent on its behalf to the DfE regarding the mechanism for calculating funding and to ask that if such a letter was sent, that it should cite the Scrutiny Committee's interest in this matter (re the first bullet point in the 'summary of progress' section of Recommendation 7).

6.7 Councillor Whetstone highlighted the importance of good quality teaching in Reception. The Department agreed that this is an important area and commented that one of the benefits of the Village Project has been to raise the profile of this issue and that this has had a direct impact on the quality of teaching in Reception.

6.8 The Committee questioned whether the increase in the number of schools seeking to lower their age range was at the expense of high quality independent providers. In response the Department explained that it carefully assessed the level of need in a given area before seeking to lower a school's age range and only did so where there were high levels of demand.

6.9 Councillor Forward asked for clarification regarding the Department's comment in Recommendation 7 that it will need to be mindful of the impact of changes in assessment and the Early Years inspection framework and that it will need to work to ensure that the improvement in East Sussex EYFS outcomes is not adversely affected. In response the Committee were informed that the new common assessment framework for Ofsted inspection is due in September, although at the time of the meeting the DfE had not released details. The Department is very aware this is a vital issue for both schools and pre-schools. However, it is the Department's belief that those who are doing well now will continue to be assessed as doing well under the new inspection framework.

6.10 Cllr Shuttleworth highlighted the importance of language and communication particularly for families in deprived areas and asked for a progress report on this matter. The Department accepted that this is a crucial issue and that the ability of pre-schools and schools to work together to support language was having a direct impact on entry to school. The Department hope to see additional evidence of this improvement over the summer period.

6.11 RESOLVED to:

- 1) note the recommendations in the report;
- 2) request an update report in 6 months.

7 SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

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

7.2 The Chair of the Committee informed the meeting that following a discussion with the Director of Children's Services, it was agreed to postpone having a position statement on CAMHS at the June meeting (following a request for such an item at the March meeting of the Committee). The decision to postpone this report was taken with the advent of the East Sussex Better Together transformation programme and the Better Care Fund money in mind and the impact these items might have on the service. It was therefore agreed that a position statement should be provided as appropriate to either the September or November meetings of the Committee.

7.3 The Committee requested a report on the Thrive programme be brought to the Scrutiny Committee being held on the 21 September 2015 to update the Committee on the end of the programme and to examine any financial implications for the budget setting process.

7.4 The Committee agreed to continue with its rolling programme of attainment reviews and decided to conduct a review of attainment in Key Stage 1.

7.5 The Committee were informed that the Raising the Participation Age Scrutiny review was nearing completion. It is anticipated that a final report will be provided to the meeting taking place on 23 November 2015.

AWAY DAY

7.6 The Committee discussed the subject matter and arrangements for an Away Day, which it was agreed would take place on Friday 24 July 2015. The purpose of the Away Day would be to provide an informal training opportunity to ensure the Committee is prepared for the 'RPPR' challenges ahead. In advance of the Away Day it was also agreed that arrangements would be made for Members of the Committee to visit various teams within the Children's Services Department.

7.7 RESOLVED: It was resolved that the work programme will be amended in line with paragraphs 5.17, 6.11, 7.2, 7.3, 7.4, 7.5 and 7.6 above.

8 FORWARD PLAN

8.1 The Committee noted the Forward Plan for the period 1 June 2015 to 31 October 2015.

The meeting ended at 12.10 pm.

The date of the next meeting is Monday 21 September 2015.

COUNCILLOR KATHRYN FIELD
Chair

