

JOINT LIFELONG LEARNING AND SOCIAL & HEALTH CARE
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
2 MAY 2014

Minutes of the meeting of the Joint Lifelong Learning and Social & Health Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Mold on Friday, 2 May 2014

PRESENT:

Councillors: Marion Bateman, Amanda Bragg, Peter Curtis, Adele Davies-Cooke, Ian Dunbar, Cindy Hinds, Stella Jones, Phil Lightfoot, Mike Lowe, Dave Mackie, Nancy Matthews, Ann Minshull, Hilary McGuill, Ian Roberts, Paul Shotton, Ian Smith, Nigel Steele-Mortimer and David Wisinger

Co-opted members: Mr David Hýtch and Mrs Rita Price

APOLOGIES: Councillors: Andy Dunbobbin, Carol Ellis, Hilary Isherwood, Colin Legg, Brian Lloyd and David Williams
Mrs Stephanie Williams

CONTRIBUTORS: Cabinet Member for Social Services, Cabinet Member for Education, Director of Community Services, Director of Lifelong Learning, Head of Children's Services, Service Manager (Resources), Service Manager (Children's Fieldwork Services) and Advisor for Social Inclusion & Wellbeing

Ann Hood of the North East Wales Sensory Support Service (for minute no. 6)

IN ATTENDANCE: Environment and Social Care Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator, Housing & Learning Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Committee Officer

9. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

A nomination for Councillor Ian Roberts was duly seconded and on being put to the vote, was carried.

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Ian Roberts be appointed Chairman for the meeting.

10. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

Mr David Hýtch declared a personal interest on Agenda Item 4 as a school governor.

The following Members declared personal interests on Agenda Item 7: Vision Impairment Support to Children and Adults in Flintshire:

- Councillor Peter Curtis, as a Trustee of WCB and Vision Support.
- Councillor Nancy Matthews, due to a visually impaired relative and also as a former Trustee of Vision Support.
- Councillor Hilary McGuill, as her grandson was a service user.

11. CHANGE TO ORDER OF AGENDA

It was agreed that Agenda Item 5 would be considered prior to Item 4 to allow the necessary officers to be present.

12. CORPORATE PARENTING

The Head of Children's Services introduced the annual report on corporate parenting progress within the Council. She provided information on the role of the Children's Services Forum which monitored the Council's activity in this area and ensured that the views of looked after children were heard. Information was also shared on Independent Reviewing Officers who chaired children's planning meetings and had the powers to refer cases to the Welsh Government if there were concerns around the care of an individual. As part of the arrangements, a resolution protocol had been adopted to give assurance that unresolved issues were escalated to a senior officer to pursue. The Head of Children's Services advised that the outcomes of a recent CSSIW inspection would be reported in due course and went on to draw attention to a report published in July 2013 on looked after children across Wales, copies of which were available upon request.

Councillor Ian Dunbar spoke of the annual Pride of Flintshire Awards which celebrated the achievements of looked after children in the county.

Councillor Paul Shotton praised the success of the 'A2A' identification card initiative, and asked about safeguards on the use of internet sites. The Service Manager (Resources) explained that children and young people were provided with basic information on accessing websites as part of their educational experience, which included an element on protection. In addition, a foster carers' safety policy ensured that foster children had fair access to the internet with monitoring carried out by the foster carers as part of their role.

As members of the Children's Services Forum, Councillors David Mackie and Hilary McGuill spoke favourably about its important role within the Council. Whilst it was recognised that progress was being made on the format of reports and joint working with Housing on accommodation for care leavers, there were some concerns about the delay by the Health Board in rolling out the A2A card in health settings.

In response to a query regarding safe use of websites, the Service Manager (Resources) confirmed that foster carers were given the opportunity to attend school training sessions and agreed to provide more detail on this to the Committee.

The Chairman referred to concerns about the potential for misuse of social media and said that the same expectation for parents to monitor their children's safety on the internet also applied to foster parents.

The Cabinet Member for Social Services reiterated that Members were corporate parents and encouraged those present and others to take part in the corporate parenting training. As part of the recent inspection, representations had been made for this training to become mandatory.

As Chair of the Children's Services Forum, the Cabinet Member for Education expressed his gratitude to the Head of Children's Services for the positive contribution that she had made to the service and to the Pride of Flintshire Awards which placed value on the achievements of children and young people. He paid tribute to her influence in raising the profile of the Forum of which he was proud to be Chair and went on to describe the work of the Forum in providing a direct link between Members, officers and children and young people in care.

During the item, other Members took the opportunity to congratulate the Head of Children's Services on her forthcoming retirement and wished her well for the future. Warm tributes were paid for her significant contribution to the service which would be sadly missed.

RESOLVED:

That the value of the work being undertaken to ensure the Council is meeting its corporate parenting aims and obligations be recognised.

13. EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

The Director of Lifelong Learning introduced the report on the educational attainment of looked after children in Flintshire during the academic year 2012-13. Information was provided on the work of the Task Group set up to develop a series of recommendations to ensure that all children achieved their potential. As part of this, it was important that Personal Education Plans were reviewed and monitored, with training provided to those in support such as carers, social workers and education professionals. Reference was made to the significant challenges in terms of data, due to the importance of reporting outcomes for all looked after children in the county. An increase in funding to £918 per pupil, through the Pupil Deprivation Grant would provide coaching and mentoring to make a difference in outcomes of looked after children, however this was currently only available for one year.

Following a question raised by Councillor Ian Dunbar on education outcomes for Year 11 pupils, the Advisor for Social Inclusion & Wellbeing referred to the differences in data reporting methods by Councils and that Flintshire's approach to include all looked after children and young people, including those opting out of education, employment or training, was vital in order to provide meaningful data. He added that the creation of the Task Group provided an interface between Children's Services, Education and Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and had proved beneficial in helping individuals to reach their potential. The focus of the Task Group was on aspirations and achievements.

The Director spoke of changes in the demography of the cohort arising from an increase in younger children entering the care system which meant that basic support mechanisms needed to be co-ordinated to ensure that appropriate interventions could be put in place at an earlier stage.

In response to comments from Councillor Paul Shotton, it was explained that the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy would help to identify shortfalls in learning to all pupils, however looked after children were considered a priority.

Councillor Amanda Bragg referred to agreement for each school to have a looked after children co-ordinator and asked about the potential for this role to be carried out by a school governor with information on pupils remaining confidential. This would be followed up by the Director.

The Head of Children's Services asked if training on looked after children could be extended to school governors to promote understanding of why individuals were placed within the care system. The Director agreed that this would be useful, however in Wales, mandatory training for voluntary governors was limited.

Whilst Councillor Stella Jones acknowledged the need to report data, it was important to remember that the experiences of the children and young people to whom the figures related were of greater significance and to ensure that they were safe and given the best opportunities.

In response to a query from Councillor Nigel Steele-Mortimer, the Director advised that all schools tracked and monitored progress of pupils in a range of curriculum areas to identify any interventions needed. A regional system to be developed across North Wales would add to that already in place at individual schools, with tracking continuing cross-border if a pupil moved out of county.

Councillor Hilary McGuill asked if a survey was taken on post-16 education to seek views on whether looked after children felt that their circumstances had held them back in any way. The Head of Children's Services said that this type of data was incorporated in a survey collated by focus groups and that details would be shared with the Committee and Children's Services Forum.

Councillor Peter Curtis spoke of positive outcomes from the former disability sub-group at Holywell High School which he felt should be reinstated in all schools, perhaps with the potential to include looked after children (with appropriate training provided) within its remit. The Director said that support for this type of model may work better in secondary schools and could be raised with governing bodies.

In respect of Councillor Bragg's suggestion, Councillor Nancy Matthews stressed the importance of anonymity for looked after children within schools and that any training for governors to act as co-ordinators must relate to this process rather than the individuals themselves.

In support of this, the Cabinet Member for Education felt it was possible for governors to take on this role to look after the interests of looked after children within a school setting. He went on to stress the importance of using the additional funding to good effect due to its limited availability and the potential for schools to pool this money. He spoke of the excellent role that foster carers carried out and the need for them to be given appropriate training and development opportunities to enable them to continue encouraging the educational development of looked after children.

The Service Manager (Resources) explained that although attendance at training was not compulsory, there was an expectation for foster parents to assume the same responsibilities as parents in terms of homework and ensuring attendance at school.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the work of the looked after children steering group made up of Education and Children's Services staff is acted upon to increase the levels of attainment of looked after children, by developing strategies and spending plans for the School Effectiveness Grant and the looked after children Pupil Deprivation Grant which has doubled to £918 for the financial year 2014/15;
- (b) That the literacy and numeracy strategy be used to further identify and up-skill those children and young people who may not be achieving their potential;
- (c) That those children who have Additional Learning Needs continue to access specialist support to help them reach their potential;
- (d) The Directorates of Social Services and Lifelong Learning continue to work collaboratively to further enhance and embed consistent approaches with regard to looked after children;
- (e) That there is a continuation of support for looked after children from the School Effectiveness Grant from the Welsh Government;
- (f) That work to develop a database on a regional basis to reflect the needs and support provision required for all looked after children continues;
- (g) The positive collaboration across local authorities should continue to be encouraged so that cross-border working and information sharing improves;
- (h) To record the Committee's gratitude to the foster carers in Flintshire for their work; and
- (i) That a Governor Champion be appointed for looked after children / safeguarding.

14. SAFEGUARDING AND CHILD PROTECTION REPORT

The Director of Community Services introduced the report providing statistical information in relation to Child Protection and Safeguarding, which was a priority area for the Council. He said that the new structure may provide an opportunity to consider safeguarding reports for both children and adults together and went on to thank the Head of Children's Services and her team for their response to the increase in child protection referrals, together with support from the Cabinet resulting in the provision of additional resources to maintain the quality of the service.

The Head of Children's Services highlighted the activity within the report along with positive corporate responses to reaffirm the Council's commitment on child safety. In highlighting earlier comments that children were behind each

statistic in the report, she pointed out that removing a child from their parents was not a decision taken lightly but was unavoidable in some cases.

Councillor Ian Dunbar referred to the increase in child protection registrations during the latter part of 2013 from 58 to 158 but acknowledged the need to sanction this for the children's protection. He recognised the work carried out by the service and asked what measures were being put in place to meet the increasing demand. The Service Manager, Children's Fieldwork Services, reported that the figure had since reduced to 126, with 18 on the temporary register. Over the last quarter, there had been 138 child protection investigations of which 19 had proceeded to case conferences. He explained that a multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) approach was taken and believed that the improvements in the service provided assurance of a robust process.

On children's safeguarding, the implementation of the Public Law Outline had presented challenges in terms of a much tighter deadline for completion of Court hearings, however progress was being made.

RESOLVED:

That the report be accepted as information in relation to Child Protection and Safeguarding for the period 1 October 2012 to 31 December 2013.

15. VISUAL IMPAIRMENT SUPPORT TO CHILDREN & ADULTS IN FLINTSHIRE

The Director of Lifelong Learning introduced the report outlining current provision of support to children and adults with a visual impairment in Flintshire.

Ms Ann Hood provided an overview of the work of the North East Wales Sensory Support Service for children and young people across Wrexham, Denbighshire and Flintshire. The key driver for the service was derived from national policy of a collaborative approach and enabled specialist services to be delivered with increased flexibility and shared resources.

In response to a query from Councillor Paul Shotton, the Director of Community Services confirmed the availability of the Talking Book service and explained that services for adults could involve referrals to partner Ophthalmologists to provide various necessary equipment. The report outlined the support and advice provided by Vision Support who played a key role in the service.

Clarification was given to Councillor Hilary McGuill on 'Loan to Learn' books which could be downloaded from the website and the provision of textbooks available through the sub-regional service or schools. On the availability of software to help those with visual impairments, the Director of Lifelong Learning explained that software licences would need to be paid for by schools as this was a delegated responsibility. Ringfenced funding to schools would need to be allocated to any equipment required, such as handrails, however equipment for young people with a Statement of Educational Needs would be provided by the Council.

Councillor Peter Curtis thanked the team for the report, particularly in relation to the psychological effects arising from the loss of sight with which he empathised, but felt that more could be done to encourage others to become more aware of those with visual impairments. As examples, he suggested the provision of computers to those who could not afford them, the use of 'talking' buses and encouraging retailers to think more creatively about their customers' needs by providing visual aids. He went on to refer to his request to reinstate the disability sub-group mentioned earlier in the meeting as this had generated a great deal of positive work about visual impairment.

Ms Hood advised that the sub-regional service provided mobility support for young people and helped them to understand travel timetables.

The Director of Community Services agreed with Councillor Curtis' comments on encouraging awareness of the wider business community and agreed to raise these with the Local Service Board sub-group on health, independence and well-being. However, administrative capacity issues continued to be an issue in reinstating the disability sub-group.

Councillor Nancy Matthews referred to an increase in cases of age-related macular degeneration and felt that a central equipment store was needed. Ms Hood explained that a central budget was held by the sub-regional service for equipment to help young people in school environments, however it was acknowledged that some pupils would opt not to pursue this.

When asked by Councillor McGuill about raising awareness of services available, Ms Hood said that information was displayed on Moodle and could also be accessed through officers in the service working with families.

The Director of Community Services advised that an equipment budget for adults with sensory impairments was easily accessible via Occupational Therapy.

Councillor Amanda Bragg gave an example of a situation where a residential home had lacked some of the necessary equipment for Talking Books and asked if funding was available. The Director of Community Services advised that equipment for those with visual impairments would need to be sourced from the overall equipment budget and that resources would need to be creatively managed in the current climate. He referred to the need to work with partners for effective use of limited resources and suggested that it may be useful for the Council to hold an event to publicise the services on offer.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the continued provision of services to those with a visual impairment within Flintshire be supported; and
- (b) That officers raise the profile of sensory impairment through the Council and external bodies of which it is part.

16. **MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE**

There was one member of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 2.00 pm and ended at 3.55 pm)

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Chairman