

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
CHILDREN & LEARNING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Committee Room 2 - Town Hall
14 November 2013 (7.00 - 10.00 pm)**

- Present:** Councillors Sandra Binion (Chairman), Gillian Ford (Vice-Chair), +Pam Light, Robby Misir, Pat Murray, Frederick Thompson, +Linda Van den Hende, Melvin Wallace and Keith Wells
- Co-opted Members:** Phillip Grundy (Church of England), Jack How (Roman Catholic Church), Anne Ling (Primary Schools), Margaret Cameron (NAHT) and Ian Rusha (NUT)
- Officer Attendance:** Joy Hollister, Group Director Children, Adults and Housing, Kathy Bundred, Head of Children's Services, and Lorraine Hunter-Brown, Committee Officer
- Apologies:** Julie Lamb (Special Schools), Garry Dennis (Secondary Schools) and Keith Passingham (NASUWT)
- +Councillor Pam Light was substitute for Councillor Wendy Brice-Thompson and +Councillor Linda Van den Hende was substitute for Councillor Nic Dodin.

62 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND ANNOUNCEMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were noted and the Chairman welcomed Councillor Pam Light as substitute for Councillor Wendy Brice-Thompson and Councillor Linda Van den Hende as substitute for Councillor Nic Dodin.

63 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

None declared.

64 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman announced details of the arrangements in case of fire or other events that might require the meeting room or building's evacuation.

It was announced that the next Children and Learning Overview and Scrutiny meeting would take place on 19 November 2013 and would commence at 7.00 pm.

65 **MINUTES**

The Committee considered and agreed the amended minutes of the meeting held on 19 September 2013 and the minutes of the meeting held on 29 October 2013 and authorised the Chairman to sign them.

It was noted that the Committee had yet to receive an update from officers on issues raised about the transport service to and from Dycourts School that had been highlighted at the September meeting.

66 **OFSTED ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN**

The additional meeting had been called to receive a progress update on the recommendations made in the OFSTED Report reviewed previously at the Committee meeting on 19 September 2013. At this meeting, members had raised a number of concerns that not all recommendations in the report had been fully implemented and had requested that an action plan to deal with the outstanding items be presented to the Committee.

Officers reported that all the actions had been included in the Service Plan which was now on the website under the Council's Service Planning Process. Most actions had been fully or partially implemented and that only two remained incomplete. The actions that had been fully implemented were as follows:

- **Review the functioning and membership of the London Borough of Havering Safeguarding Children Board (HSCB) to ensure it is fully constituted and provides sufficient scrutiny and oversight of the effectiveness of child protection practice and the effectiveness of arrangements for children in need .**
- **Review the governance responsibilities and accountabilities to ensure there is communication and a formal link between HSCB and the Chair of the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee**
- **Continue to develop and adopt a more consistent approach to supervision in order to ensure that it provides the right level of critical challenge and opportunity for reflection and is a vehicle for driving up practice standards**
- **Ensure work is progressed to enable children and young people to access advocacy services which support them to attend child protection conferences**
- **Ensure that the tracking system for all referrals in the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) service is embedded and that timescales for response outlined in the threshold to services document are met**

- Undertake a detailed analysis and evaluation, following the implementation of the newly formed MASH, to formally consider any early lessons to define the service and forward plan
- Complete the roll out of the children's case management system (CCM) in order to ensure that managers and staff have the tools to do their job properly
- Complete the overarching service plan for delivering against the corporate and strategic priorities for children's services and make clear through aligned operational plans the journey ahead for staff, members and partners

The actions that were partially completed were:

- Complete the proposed re-commissioning of the emergency duty team (EDT) with minimum delay and as part of that process set clear and unambiguous performance and quality standards for the new service
- Ensure effective consideration is given to a child or young person's ethnicity, culture, religion and language in assessments so as to inform planning
- Develop a more robust approach to quality assurance in order to be able to track qualitative improvements over time, for example the percentage of child protection plans that are outcome focused and/or measurable
- Review and refine the performance management framework to include key indicators, including measures that are currently missing, as well as comparative data, trend information and projections, with commentary and key information broken down to team or pod level
- Ensure the collation and analysis of performance management information to effectively interpret and monitor the quality and impact of all aspects of child protection practice and processes, and the effectiveness of help and support for children in need
- Record and analyse contact, referral and re-referral patterns in order to be better able to evaluate how effectively children's social care and its partners are applying the threshold criteria, meeting needs and reducing risks
- Ensure the timely completion and review of core assessments to ensure that children and young people are receiving the appropriate level of services when they need them
- Ensure chronologies are clear, recorded and fit for purpose

- **Ensure that the common assessment framework (CAF) is sufficiently embedded in the reconfigured early help services within a required time frame and that this is evaluated by the HSCB**

Actions that remain at the planning stage:

- **Ensure the development of a workforce action plan in line with the transformation agenda and workforce strategy that can be monitored, reviewed and evaluated.**
- **Feedback from children, young people, parents and carers are used to plan and improve service delivery. This includes implementing a system for the analysis of service user feedback in early help and preventative services.**

Committee members enquired about the definition of immediate and when was this action to be implemented. Officers stated that it was down to interpretation and that it could be less than 3 months but not necessarily. Some actions, by their very nature, will take longer to put into place however the provision of planning would be sufficient evidence to satisfy OFSTED.

Members asked whether officers had held discussions and made comparisons with their counterparts in neighbouring boroughs. Officers advised that there would be difficulties as there are different inspectors and they are not always consistent.

It was confirmed by officers that *if* there was a further OFSTED inspection today, the outcome would remain at adequate however they were striving to achieve good. The Committee were asked to note that OFSTE had made a lot of changes to the inspection framework and that there were also budgetary pressures. The right things were being done going forward but financial management will be very tight. Budget reductions were being made by all councils although officers were clear that this should not prevent Havering achieving a good from OFSTED in the future. It was noted that within the Inner/Outer London zone, there were 3 or 4 councils who had achieved outstanding. Committee members were advised that the Action Plan had been budgeted, however, the new Framework had yet to be resourced.

Following the installation of a new administrative system – the Electronic Chronology Populator which marks off case notes that are significant, there was a need to audit and check that staff/social workers know how to utilise the system. Technology was important as social workers needed ownership and accountability. Officers advised the Committee that core assessments could be better and it was anticipated that there would not be a good outturn at the end of the year for either workforce or administrative reasons. Half of the Core Assessments were overdue for sign-off on the system however Officers gave assurances that this did not affect any emergency actions taken for children and that there remained a fairly low caseload. Committee

members expressed their concern and requested officers provide information on the current situation with the Core Assessments.

Workforce has been one of the more challenging areas, especially as there is a London wide and to an extent a national shortage of experienced social workers who are willing and able to undertake child protection work. Social work was a difficult job not helped by media coverage of recent child protection cases. Experienced social workers will often move on after five or six years as they are ambitious. Officers advised they were due to attend a recruitment fair and were working with local colleges and universities as well as HR. With regards to agency social workers, the LGA were looking at forming their own social worker agency so as to reduce costs. The ratio of agency workforce in Social Care in Havering was 25% as opposed to 80% in other boroughs.

With regards to feedback, progress has been made in this area but there was still a lot to do. Since the inspection, Viewpoint had been launched with Looked After children and more recently for children aged over 8 years who have a child protection plan. However, this is not yet at the stage where it can be claimed that it is impacting positively on service delivery. There is not yet a comprehensive system for analysing service user feedback in Early Help although there are elements of this in the Troubled Families programme and Early help audits. The Committee requested further analysis of this area in 6 months.

Overall the Committee felt that the meeting had been productive, however, they were not happy with the report structure as the answers were not visual or measurable. Committee members wanted to know the current “state of play” on a number of issues and requested the Service Plan is RAG rated and that the recommendations made by OFSTED are noted and that these are cross referenced to the Service Plan with timelines and performance indicators where appropriate. The committee requested that they have regular updates, the first being within 2 to 3 weeks and that the reports continue as a regular agenda item at future Overview and Scrutiny meetings. The Chair expressed her disappointment that measurable data had been requested at the September meeting and yet this had not been followed through by officers. Officers apologised and confirmed that a report would be circulated as soon as possible.

67 **MASH UPDATE**

The main progress since the inspection has been evident in addressing MASH timescales, reviewing the LSCB and its links to Overview and Scrutiny and the establishment of the Children’s Society service for advocacy and for following up on Missing Children.

Officers informed the Committee that they had checked today and that there was no backlog at MASH. It was acknowledged that Councillor’s visits gave conflicting views about the backlog which was actually with the police. Officers assured the Committee that timescales and response times were

being met and that the new system was currently being tested. This system would provide management information for reports as currently staff still used manual systems.

MASH had only been in existence for 6 months when the Inspectors came and there had been issues around the IT systems which were new. Overall, the Inspectors were happy although concerns were raised and these have now been dealt with.

MASH was fully staffed with ten new staff currently being recruited and Officers were generally pleased with staffing levels as other London boroughs were having difficulties in recruitment. It was important to retain good permanent staff but the department also used temporary staff, some good and some bad. The standard of newly qualified staff was high but they did not have the experience and therefore management oversight had to be in place. Officers advised that there is likely to be an overspend on staffing so as to ensure that statutory responsibilities are carried out. It was suggested by one of the members that retention of staff be looked at. The Chairman would be meeting with Councillor Paul Rochford on this and will report back to the Committee.

68 **FUTURE AGENDAS**

A member requested that officers provide a report on the safeguarding issue at the next Children & Learning Overview and Scrutiny meeting on 19 November 2013.

It had been agreed that an extra meeting would take place on December 5 commencing at 7.00 pm to discuss the Self Evaluation Form Training in preparation for OFSTED.

The Chair of the LSCB would be invited to the meeting in January.

Councillor Pam Light affirmed that there would be a member development programme next year after the elections.

69 **URGENT BUSINESS**

Members of the Committee requested a copy of the Terms of Agreement and Constitution be circulated.

The next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny meeting would be held on 19 November 2013.

Chairman