

Minutes of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday 26th April 2023 at 6.00 pm
In Conference Room 6, Saltwells Education Development
Centre, Bowling Green Road, Netherton, Dudley

Present:

Councillor P Bradley (Chair)
Councillor D Bevan (Vice-Chair)
Councillors A Aston, C Bayton, H Bills, S Bothul, R Collins, M Howard, P Lee, A Millward, S Ridney and T Russon.

Officers:

C Driscoll (Director of Children's Services), K Graham (Service Director of Childrens Social Care) and K Buckle (Democratic Services Officer).

Also in Attendance:

Councillor R Buttery (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People)

49. **Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors D Borley, A Hughes, K Lewis and S Saleem.

50. **Appointment of Substitute Members**

Councillors T Russon, A Aston and R Collins were appointed as substitute Members for Councillors D Borley, A Hughes and K Lewis respectively for this meeting of the Committee only.

51. **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor P Lee declared a pecuniary interest as he was engaged as a Dudley Foster Carer.

52. **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 13th March 2023, be confirmed as a correct record, and signed.

53. **Public Forum**

No issues were raised under this agenda item.

54. **Questions Under Council Procedure Rule 11.8**

There were no questions to the Chair pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 11.8.

55. **Exclusion of the Public and Press**

Resolved

That the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information, as defined under paragraphs 2 and 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, as amended.

56. **Call-In of Decision Sheet – The Restructure of the Children’s Services Directorate**

A report of the Monitoring Officer was submitted to respond to the call-in of the decision of the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

concerning the restructure of the Children's Services Directorate. The decision had been called-in at the request of five Members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee in accordance with the Scrutiny Committee Procedure Rules, as set out in the Council's Constitution. A copy of the exempt decision sheet relating to this item was circulated, together with the procedure to be followed at the meeting, as outlined by the Chair.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People had been invited to the meeting and would be invited to comment on matters leading to and at the time of the decision making, and any issues raised by the Committee concerning the restructure of the service.

The Chair then invited Councillor R BATTERY, the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People and the Director of Children's Services to make representations concerning the decision.

Arising from the representations made, Members made the following comments and raised questions, which were responded to at the meeting as follows: -

- (a) The average caseload for the Disability Service related to the average for Dudley and had reduced in recent months. There were now 6.5 full time equivalent qualified Social Workers and Family Support workers operating the service, and every child accessing the service had been reviewed. Work was continuing to transition those children into adult services when they reached the age of 18.
- (b) Members commented that that the proposed restructure should have been presented to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee prior to the decision sheet process.
- (c) The Social Worker posts referred to were not being permanently deleted with those being replaced by 29 Grade 11 advanced practitioner posts thereby providing career progression.
- (d) A request that the decision sheet referred to be amended to reflect the change in relation to the social workers posts being progressed to advanced practitioners.
- (e) In relation to Corporate Parenting, the Governance service within Commissioning and Support would provide consistent support and structure.

The separation of those responsibilities from Care Leavers responsibilities and oversight to children in care were referred to, recognising the increased capacity to support corporate parenting responsibilities.

- (f) There were a high number of business support staff and a refocusing and streamlining of the service was being completed to standardise and share information, as well as reducing bureaucratic processes.
- (g) Assurances were provided in relation to Minute Takers streamlining the service to provide a more productive service.
- (h) Details of the Family Safeguarding model had been referenced within the Children's Services Improvement update report that had been referred to the Scrutiny Committee by the Service Director of Children's Social Care.
- (i) In relation to career progression the number of social worker apprenticeships had been increased to fulfil the aim to 'grow your own staff' for the future.
- (j) It was proposed that Family Support Workers would be available at the front door of services to provide faster more responsive work to cover the wide spectrum of work with those families and children who required early intervention to prevent those cases from escalating.
- (k) Formal staff consultations had commenced.
- (l) As part of the Improvement Strategy a report was submitted to the Scrutiny Committee referring to the Ofsted recommendations and in accordance with those recommendations it had been agreed that a Family Safeguarding Programme be implemented to provide rapid support to children and families, to prevent crisis.
- (m) There was a national shortage of Foster Carers, with recruitment remaining challenging however there continued to be streams of work including the 'Foster Carer Fortnight' and the current consultation regarding 'Stable Homes Built on Love' which included kinship carers and special guardianship orders. Dudley had been invited to formulate their response and make representations at a national level.

- (n) There was not a guarantee that changes in social workers for children in care could be avoided, however work was being conducted to provide manageable caseloads for Social Workers to flourish within Dudley and in turn to promote staff retention. Following the Family Safeguarding work and recognition of the Hertfordshire model, two former experienced social workers had approached Dudley in relation to re-entering social work.
- (o) The Leading Judge for the West Midlands area had expressed their approval for the Family Safeguarding work that was being undertaken in Dudley and a Court Progression Manager was in post to prevent drift and delay in the Court process.
- (p) Administration support staff had been divided inequitably across services and the service review would involve a streamlining service to address that inequitable division.

Following all questions and contributions, the Chair asked for any final statements before the Committee proceeded to consider the matter.

Resolved

That the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee recommends that no objection be raised to the decision in which case no further action is necessary and that the decision of the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People be implemented with immediate effect.

The meeting ended at 7.10pm

CHAIR