

# Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Thursday 28 January 2010

## **PRESENT:**

Councillor Purnell, in the Chair.  
Councillor Mrs Bragg, Vice Chair.  
Councillors Mrs Beer, Bowie, Delbridge, Reynolds, Roberts and Vincent.

Co-opted Representatives: Ms Alison Kearnes, Mr Jake Paget, Miss Kate Taylor and Mr Kevin Willis

Apologies for absence: Councillor Mrs Stephens and Mrs Maggie Gee and Mr T Lyddon (co-opted representatives).

The meeting started at 10.00 am and finished at 1.05 pm.

*Note: At a future meeting, the committee will consider the accuracy of these draft minutes, so they may be subject to change. Please check the minutes of that meeting to confirm whether these minutes have been amended.*

## 44. **APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR**

Resolved that Councillor Mrs Bragg be appointed as Vice-Chair for this meeting.

## 45. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest in accordance with the Code of Conduct.

## 46. **MINUTES**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 19 November 2009 be confirmed as a correct record.

## 47. **CHAIR'S URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no items of Chair's urgent business.

## 48. **TRACKING RESOLUTIONS**

Members considered a schedule of tracking resolutions and those present commented as follows –

- regarding minute 3, those present considered that it was not acceptable to merely reimburse co-optees for parking costs and not issue them with parking passes; this resolution could not be considered to be closed;
- regarding minute 7, the 'Tellus' survey had not yet been received but was expected by the next meeting;
- regarding minute 11(1), Chair advised that although she had met with the Director for Children and Young People, she had not, as yet, held discussions regarding education related matters; this resolution could not be considered to be closed;
- regarding minute 26, Child Protection Plans, the intention was to bring Safeguarding Board information to the next meeting;
- regarding 27(1), Role of Corporate Parenting Group, officers would investigate the annual report's progress and it was anticipated that it would be available in the new municipal year;

- regarding 27(5), full appraisals should be completed by July 2010;
- regarding 27(6), Members requested reassurance that Children's Services' issues were included in the induction pack.

#### 49. **CAREFIRST**

The Assistant Chief Executive, the Assistant Director of Services for Children & Young People (Children's Social Care) and the Children's Social Care/Human Resources Consultant Project Manager reported as follows –

- (i) it was recognized nationally that there was a problem with the efficiency of the Carefirst software package and the Council was taking steps to change the system to improve recording and quality of output;
- (ii) a project team had been set up, chaired by the Assistant Chief Executive, and it was anticipated that governance arrangements would be signed off next week;
- (iii) a team of 15-20 people to deliver the project had been set up and would be adequately resourced with a budget allocated for 2009-2011 of approximately £700,000;
- (iv) a systems team would be put in place to maintain the system;
- (v) Carefirst was a system for both adult and children but the decision had been taken to give priority to children which would enable the improved system to be in place for Children Services within 12 months and then for Adult Services 18 months after that; there would be no detrimental impact on Adult Services because of this prioritization.

In answer to questions, Members were advised that –

- (vi) the technical platform being built should ensure that there was no downtime;
- (vii) 50-75% of issues currently causing problems should be addressed and project officers were working with the workers;
- (viii) the software had the capability of managing the data in a number of different ways and it would depend on protocols how other agencies could access it;
- (ix) the training provided to new workers continued to improve and including floor walkers and 'Me learning' on-line tuition;
- (x) the electronic telephone directory which recorded details of all children and young people in the country, could be accessed by approved practitioners and this had a strong interface with Carefirst.

Resolved that a bullet point synopsis of the 50-75% issues causing problems and how the new system would address them be provided to the Panel.

#### 50. **SCHOOL ATTAINMENT RESULTS**

The Assistant Director of Services for Children & Young People (Lifelong Learning) submitted a report containing school attainment results. Further attainment statistics were circulated at the meeting (see [www.plymouth.gov.uk/democracy](http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/democracy) Children & Young People OSP agenda supplement 'additional information').

In response to questions, Members heard that –

- (i) disruption caused by rebuilding/moving schools was an issue for younger children;
- (ii) historically there had been a dip in performance between year 6 and 7 and this was part of the reason for the government to rebrand the KS3 curriculum which would be looking at a more thematic approach to improve transition from primary to secondary schools;

- (iii) there had been slippage by 10-15% in respect of GCSE English language results in some schools which could be attributed to the exam board issue;
- (iv) a 14-19 advisor had been appointed to support 6<sup>th</sup> forms, especially those that were underperforming;
- (v) teacher assessment had replaced SATs at KS3 and were to the Department for Children, Schools and Families;
- (vi) personal/social/emotional education was measured against clear criteria in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Resolved –

- (1) further, more detailed information be provided on how underperforming 6<sup>th</sup> forms were to be addressed;
- (2) thanks be extended to staff who had contributed to the positive outcomes achieved by Children in Care and the support of the Panel for the concept of 'virtual head' be noted.

(This item was moved up the agenda in order to facilitate good management of the meeting.)

51. **OFSTED REPORT**

The Assistant Director of Services for Children & Young People (Social Care) submitted the Ofsted's response to the annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Plymouth City Council's Children's Services, and CIP7 'keeping children safe' information. She reported on actions that needed to be put in place -

- (i) Carefirst was integral to the improvement plan;
- (ii) due to the media coverage of highly sensitive cases, there was an increase in demand and children in care numbers had increased to 410;
- (iii) foster carers' recruitment was good but needed to be accelerated;
- (iv) Ofsted judgements were now more critical nationally;
- (v) three main areas to address were –
  - clarification of thresholds for children in need;
  - management overview, recording and documentation – this related to Carefirst;
  - CRB checks – nearly all were now completed;
- (vi) with regard to case recording, consistency and timelines were being addressed; the majority of assessments were done within 8 days.

In response to questions, Members were informed that –

- (vii) the issue of new social workers not being adequately trained was a national one and two years was insufficient training time for generic work;
- (viii) leaflets/posters that were provided to partners could be provided to the Panel;
- (ix) one agency worker had been in place long term, principally because he/she had good mentoring skills for new social workers.

An update on 'Little Ted's' was provided as follows –

- (x) a great deal of support work had been provided by the Council and partners for families affected;
- (xi) initial assessments in June had gone up by 500%;
- (xii) meetings had been held with parents throughout the process and afterwards;

- (xiii) there had been sessions held with parents recently as part of a Serious Case Review and a view of strengths and shortfalls of the procedures had been gained;
- (xiv) Early Years guidance would probably emerge as an outcome once the Serious Case Review executive summary was published;

In response to questions, Members were informed that -

- (xv) each agency had given a report and an action plan was developing;
- (xvi) mobile phone use was a complex issue and a group was looking at development of comprehensive advice, to be launched in April;
- (xvii) there was no intention to remove mobiles at present but there was a need to ensure mobiles were used appropriately; staff issues of behaviour, attitudes and value base;
- (xviii) good practice, including a poster, was contained within Ofsted guidance and it was good practice not to have mobiles;
- (xix) the Local Authority's role was to support Early Years providers in adhering to statutory guidance;
- (xx) the voluntary sector was under-regulated at the moment and the only regulatory body was Ofsted;
- (xxi) alternative provision had been found for those parents who wanted it; not all parents wanted placements elsewhere;
- (xxii) there had been few reported incidences of parents withdrawing children from nursery placements.

Resolved that –

- (1) a presentation on thresholds and Common Assessment Framework be provided to the Panel;
- (2) a copy of the 'e-safe guidance' due to be launched in April be provided to the Panel.

## 52. **PERFORMANCE REVIEW**

Human resources comparison figures as at February 2007 and December 2009 were submitted, as requested at the last meeting. A case load summary was circulated (see [www.plymouth.gov.uk/democracy](http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/democracy) Children & Young People OSP agenda supplement 'additional information'). The Assistant Director of Services for Children & Young People (Social Care) advised that –

- (i) last year, some cases had not been properly closed and between October and November caseloads had reduced;
- (ii) the aim was to move Children in Need cases and lower level referrals to partners;
- (iii) up to date human resource figures showed that –
  - for 'Looked After Children' 22 social workers for 329 children and the average case load was 14.9;
  - for Children in the Community 28 social workers with 577 cases, 20.6 average;
  - the Advice and Assessment service had 39 social workers;
  - not all social workers were 'full time equivalents' (FTE);
  - the aim was to have workloads under 20 for FTE;
- (iv) the area of biggest challenge was Children in the Community;

- (v) management oversight was getting smarter;
- (vi) Advice and Assessment pressures had been alleviated.

In answer to questions, Members were advised that -

- (vii) there had been a decrease in agency staff with vacancies filled by permanent staff and it was, essentially, a stable staff group;
- (viii) it was hoped that the increase in referrals was a temporary situation and that it would level off once national anxiety was alleviated;
- (ix) staff morale –
  - was impressive and there was a real level of enthusiasm; staff communications focused on celebrating the successes of 2009;
  - staff had worked very hard to address the Little Ted's situation and had managed to keep the 'day job' on track.

Resolved that –

- (1) the thanks of the Panel be extended to staff in Children's Social Care for their achievements;
- (2) an invitation to Children's Services staff briefings being held in the Council Chamber be extended to all Members;
- (3) the Panel's regret that the system was not able draw off historical statistical data further back than be 2007 be noted.

(This item was moved up the agenda in order to facilitate good management of the meeting.)

## 53. **CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES**

The Assistant Director of Services for Children and Young People (Learner & Family Support) re-submitted the report received at the last meeting for consideration of the section on 'overview of education provision for disabled children', together with an addendum providing information on short breaks, pooled budgets and independent living.

In response to questions, Members were informed that –

- (i) with regard to funding for children who were not statemented but did have special needs -
  - schools did have funding which was not ring fenced;
  - there was a strong drive to support children in schools without statementing; approximately three years ago the Audit Commission had estimated that statementing cost £15,000 – £20,000 per child;
  - it was suggested that where parents were being told by schools that there was no funding to support their children, parents should work with the Parent Partnership to achieve progress.

Resolved that the following information be provided to the Panel –

- (a) the criteria for statementing;
- (b) information on whether children with life limiting illnesses had immediate access to assessment;
- (c) information on how long it took to assess for adaptations.

54. **FORWARD PLAN ITEMS REFERRED FROM OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD**

As requested by the Overview & Scrutiny Management Board, the Panel received the Forward Plan item on Information Advice and Guidance Service for Young People (FP 40 09/10). Members were advised that this Forward Plan was being withdrawn and would be re-issued in February.

55. **COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS**

The Acting Assistant Director of Services for Children & Young People (Performance & Policy) submitted a briefing note providing comparative data on how the service was performing in relation to neighbouring Local Authorities, as requested at the last meeting.

56. **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Panel considered its work programme for 2009/10.

Resolved that –

- (1) the next meeting on 25 March be an all day meeting;
- (2) the Panel host an NSPCC workshop on the subject of sex offenders, to be provided for all Members before May 2010;
- (3) 'Music in Schools', for which there was to be no sustainable grant, be added to the work programme for the new municipal year;
- (4) the following items be included in the agenda for the March meeting
  - Joint Strategic Needs Assessment be considered at the March meeting;
  - 'teenage pregnancies' update.