

Young People and Children Scrutiny Committee – Ofsted Subgroup

Minutes of the meeting held on 10 November 2015

Present:

Councillor Stone– in the Chair

Councillors Connolly, Cox, Midgley and Reid

Ms Eve Holt, Co-opted Member, Parent Governor Representative

Ms C Wibier, Co-opted Member, Parent Governor Representative

Apologies:

Mrs B Kellner, Co-opted Member, Representative of the Diocese of Manchester

Councillor S Newman, Executive Member for Children's Services

YPC/OSG/15/24

Minutes

The Chair noted that the minutes had been amended since their submission to Young People and Children Scrutiny Committee on 29 September 2015 as the decision to arrange visits to Varna Community Primary School and New Islington Free School had been omitted from the original version. He reported that the visit to Varna Community Primary School had now been arranged for 25 November 2015 at 9.30 am and asked members to confirm to the Committee Support Officer if they would be attending. He advised members that New Islington Free School had not yet responded to the Ofsted Subgroup's request and asked the Committee Support Officer to follow this up.

Decisions

1. To agree the minutes of the Ofsted Subgroup meeting held on 8 September 2015 as a correct record.
2. To ask members to confirm to the Committee Support Officer if they will be participating in the visit to Varna Community Primary School.
3. To ask the Committee Support Officer to contact New Islington Free School again.

YPC/OSG/15/25

Ofsted Inspection into Help, Protection and Care of Children: Quality of Practice and Caseloads

The Committee received a report of the Interim Director of Children's Services, which provided an update on the quality of social work practice and caseloads, including themes identified through the ongoing audit of cases. The Strategic Lead - Children's Social Care introduced the report across its main themes.

A member commented that it was a useful report which clearly set out the challenges faced. Members expressed concern over whether sufficient progress had been made. The Strategic Lead informed the Subgroup that the forthcoming Ofsted Front Door non-reportable inspection would provide a strong indicator of the progress made. She advised members that it was possible to get a positive Ofsted report with pockets of poorer practice, provided these were not serious safeguarding issues and the Council was aware of the problem, why it was occurring and was taking effective

action to tackle the problem. The Chair requested that the findings of the Ofsted Front Door non-reportable inspection be reported to members.

A member expressed her support for the recommendations in the report and emphasised the importance of focusing on how the Council could improve its children's services. A member questioned whether additional investment was needed. The Strategic Lead reported that a large investment had already been made through the Looked After Children (LAC) Investment Programme and that this should have a significant impact.

A member expressed concern that in some cases managers had failed to identify and respond to child protection cases which clearly met the threshold for significant harm. The Strategic Lead reported that training had been commissioned to address these issues.

The Interim Head of Improvement reported that social work practice was being independently audited based on file records. She advised members that the quality of recorded information was an issue for the Council and that, therefore, sometimes the information in the records did not reflect the work that had been undertaken. For example, there may have been an appropriate level of manager input and oversight of a case but this was not noted in the records. She further advised members that, in some cases, while work was taking place to ensure the child was safe, formal multi-agency strategy meetings were not taking place. She reported that discussions were taking place with Greater Manchester Police to ensure that they had resources in place to enable police officers to attend strategy meetings.

The Subgroup discussed the suitability of the MiCare system for recording social work cases. The Strategic Lead advised members that MiCare did not appear to be a good tool for this purpose but that some functions of MiCare had been switched off and this was being looked into. She further reported that officers were meeting with the Council's data team to improve the data available to enable better monitoring and scrutiny. However, she advised that improving or replacing MiCare would not resolve the recording issues as it was the information that officers entered into the system which was most important.

A member questioned whether staff had a clear understanding of what good practice was. The Interim Head of Improvement reported that the new leadership team understood what good practice was and how to build a team and share learning across the service. The Strategic Lead informed the Subgroup that the Council was making arrangements for managers to shadow staff at a local authority which had been rated as "good" by Ofsted.

A member expressed concern that the report stated that parents' self-reporting was often accepted without challenge. The Strategic Lead reported that "Signs of Safety" was being rolled out which would change practice, encouraging social workers to assure themselves of the facts. A member requested that further information on "Signs of Safety" be circulated to members.

A member requested information on social worker retention. The Strategic Lead reported that the average number of social workers leaving per month had reduced

from five to two. The Chair requested that further information on numbers of social workers, including new appointments and leavers be included in a future report.

A member advised that schools had reported receiving inconsistent advice when they made their initial call to the Council to discuss concerns about a child. The Interim Head of Improvement reported that a lot of work had taken place to improve the 'Front Door' initial contact and assessment of cases. She informed members that an audit framework tool was being used to scrutinise performance and that any issues with individual cases should be escalated so that managers could investigate any problems.

In response to a member's question, the Interim Head of Improvement informed members that work was taking place to ensure that care plans were completed, relevant, up-to-date and met the child's needs. She advised members that improvements would be achieved by setting a standard and putting in place effective mechanisms to ensure this standard was met. The Strategic Lead reported that there was currently no independent scrutiny of Child In Need (CIN) plans. She also reported that some 'good' authorities had Audit Teams comprised of social workers.

A member requested that the Subgroup receive a report on the progress of the Early Help strategy, including the Early Help Assessment, at a future meeting.

Decisions

1. To request that the findings of the Ofsted Front Door non-reportable inspection be reported to members.
2. To request that further information on "Signs of Safety" be circulated to members.
3. To request that further information on numbers of social workers, including new appointments and leavers be included in a future report.
4. To request a report on the progress of the Early Help strategy, including the Early Help Assessment, at a future meeting.

YPC/OSG/15/26

Ofsted Reports for Schools, Children's Centres and Daycare Providers

The Ofsted Subgroup considered a selection of Ofsted Inspection Reports that had been circulated to members in advance of the meeting.

The Head of Schools Quality Assurance and Early Years informed the Subgroup that a number of the inspections had taken place in June or July of the last academic year but the reports had only recently been published. She advised members that Ofsted had since introduced a new Common Assessment Framework. However, she informed the Subgroup that very few inspections of Manchester schools had taken place since its introduction and only three of the reports being considered at the meeting related to inspections under the new framework.

The Subgroup welcomed the 'outstanding' rating achieved by Ashbury Meadow Primary School. They praised the excellent work to move the school from 'good' to 'outstanding' and welcomed the involvement of governors in school life. They noted

the strong partnership working and the outstanding early years provision, including the availability of part-time early years places.

Members welcomed the 'outstanding' rating achieved by Green End Primary School. They noted the strength and depth of the leadership team and the high quality teaching. They recognised the important role of the governing body in the school's success. They noted that the provision of a breakfast club ensured that pupils were punctual and ready for school.

Members considered the report for Crab Lane Primary School which had been assessed as 'good'. Members welcomed the improvements made, in particular that the leadership and management of the school and the behaviour and safety of pupils were now outstanding. They noted that the head and leadership team had provided support to other schools. They further noted that further focus was required on improving writing skills but that this was an achievable aim for the school.

The Subgroup considered the report for Our Lady's RC Primary School which had been assessed as 'good'. They welcomed the excellent progress made by the school, working in partnership with Holy Name RC Primary School, to take the school from being in special measures to achieving the 'good' rating. They recognised the commitment and hard work of the leadership team, the governing body and the school staff in achieving such significant improvements.

Members considered the report for St Kentigern's RC Primary School which had been assessed as 'requires improvement'. The Head of Schools Quality Assurance and Early Years informed the Subgroup that this inspection had been carried out under the new inspection framework. Members were pleased to note that the school had improved from being rated as 'inadequate' to 'requires improvement' with several areas assessed as 'good'. The Head of Schools Quality Assurance and Early Years reported that the new Headteacher had started in April 2015 and the impact of changes would start to show in pupil outcomes.

The Subgroup considered the report for Barlow Moor Community Association Nursery which had been assessed as 'requires improvement'. Members commented that the provision was well-respected locally and popular with parents but that the outcomes for children needed to improve. They noted that a new manager had been appointed who had made significant improvements to the nursery. The Head of Schools Quality Assurance and Early Years assured members that the new manager was focused on continuing to improve the quality of provision. The Subgroup agreed to continue to monitor the situation.

Members were concerned to note the 'inadequate' rating given to Happy Bears Nursery. They noted that the inspection had identified a number of failings which had resulted in the rating. The Head of Schools Quality Assurance and Early Years outlined the action that would be taken by Ofsted and the Council as this was the second time the provision had been assessed as Inadequate. The Subgroup agreed to continue to monitor the situation.

Decisions

1. To write to Ashbury Meadow Primary School congratulating them on their recent 'outstanding' inspection result.
2. To write to Green End Primary School congratulating them on their recent 'outstanding' inspection result.
3. That visits be arranged to Ashbury Meadow Primary School and Green End Primary School for members of the Ofsted Subgroup in the new year.
4. To write to Crab Lane Community Primary School congratulating them on their recent 'good' inspection result.
5. To write to Our Lady's RC Primary School congratulating them on their recent 'good' inspection result.
6. To write to St Kentigern's RC Primary School congratulating them on the improvements made.
7. To note the report of Barlow Moor Community Association Nursery which received a 'requires improvement' rating. The Subgroup will continue to monitor the situation.
8. To note the report of Happy Bears Nursery which received an 'inadequate' rating. The Subgroup will continue to monitor the situation.

YPC/OSG/15/27 Terms of Reference and work programme

Decision

To approve the work programme.