

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee – Ofsted Subgroup

Minutes of the meeting held on 12 September 2017

Present:

Councillor Stone – in the Chair
Councillors Alijah, Collins, Lovecy, Reid and Taylor

Mrs B Kellner, Co-opted Member, Representative of the Diocese of Manchester
Ms M Neall, Co-opted Member, Parent Governor Representative

Councillor S Newman, Executive Member for Children's Services

Apologies:

Councillor Taylor

CYP/OSG/17/12 Minutes

Decision

To agree the minutes of the Ofsted Subgroup meeting held on 27 June 2017 as a correct record.

CYP/OSG/17/13 Ofsted Monitoring Visit Feedback and Action Planning

The Subgroup considered a report of the Strategic Director – Children's Services, presented by the Deputy Director – Children's Services, which provided further commentary and detail on the progress of action plans and strategies to address the issues and areas for improvement which had been highlighted in the most recent letter from Ofsted following the Monitoring Visit undertaken in June 2017.

The report detailed the service's response and action plans to address those areas that Ofsted had identified as required improvements being made.

A Member commented that there was a need to improve the clarity of reports and use Plain English within reports, especially where the content of reports was complex or where the information contained within the report could be interpreted out of context.

A Member praised the action plans that had been put in place to address the challenges identified by Ofsted and asked whether any of the challenges were of a higher priority than others?

The Deputy Director – Children's Services advised that all the areas identified were a priority to the Council. Some areas involved structural activities and partnership thresholds and other areas had specific impact on social workers. As such the improvements required were of different types and needed to be appropriately managed.

The Executive Member for Children's Services commented that the three previous

monitoring visits had been much more positive and this most recent visit had identified the need to improve consistency of the quality of practice, including more frequent strategy meetings, chronological records of events, including the voice of the child, SMART planning and contingency planning.

The Chair enquired as to whether there had been any indication as to when Ofsted were due to come and inspect Children's Services.

The Deputy Director – Children's Services advised that Ofsted only gave 24 hours notice of their intention to undertake an inspection and this could take place anytime between September and January 2018.

A Member commented of the need to put the voice of the child at the centre of everything, noting that this would require a change in culture. The Member enquired as to how this was being developed.

The Deputy Director – Children's Services advised that one of the challenges facing the social worker profession was the need to work as part of a Children's Services structure and the co-dependence on colleagues and partners. Managers wanted to ensure there was a culture of strong support and challenge to practices, professional judgement and perspectives, which manifested in the auditing processes.

The Chair sought clarification as to what support was in place for Head Teachers to seek help and guidance.

The Executive Member for Children's Services advised that there was an established Early Help Hub that Teachers had access to which was having a positive impact especially at primary school level. The Deputy Director – Children's Services also reported that Manchester's Safeguarding Children's Board had taken the lead in determining where and how improvements could be made for Teachers to access support

A Member asked what work was being done to identify deficits within case work and how were practices being improved.

The Deputy Director – Children's Services acknowledged that there needed to be a strong focus on children in need and service managers had increased the dip sampling of cases to ensure a high and consistent level of service was being delivered. A range of additional resources had been implemented which included the recruitment of 180 new social workers since July 2016, improved liaison arrangements with the Safeguarding and Improvement Unit an support provided to Social Workers on a regular basis. It was acknowledged that further work was need to train and empower Social Workers to challenge to family report in association to child safety along with improved chronological recording of events.

A Member asked for an update on the position regarding the number of children that were currently placed in accommodation deemed unsuitable.

The Deputy Director – Children's Services advised that there was now only one young person classed as residing in unsuitable accommodation, this had fallen from

five. In regards to the individual concern, he reported that the individual had had a series of unsuccessful tenancies and had declined two offers of accommodation from the Council. The Council would continue to engage and support the young person in trying and secure and sustain a suitable tenancy.

A Member asked how the average case load for a social worker of 20 cases compared nationally.

The Executive Member for Children's Services advised that this figure was slightly above the national average but Council was aiming to reduce this to 18 cases per social worker. She reported that what was worth noting though was that the caseloads for Social Workers had been as high as 30 cases so this average of 20 cases needed to be taken in context.

Decision

To endorse the steps taken within the action plan to address the areas of concern raised in the post monitoring visit report

CYP/OSG/17/14 Terms of Reference and Work Programme

The Subgroup reviewed the terms of reference and work programme for the next meeting which was schedule for Tuesday 17 October at 10:00am

Decision

To agree the work programme.