

## **Young People and Children Scrutiny Committee – Ofsted Subgroup**

### **Minutes of the meeting held on 11 November 2014**

#### **Present:**

Councillor Stone– in the Chair

Councillor Reid

Mrs M Gadian, Co-opted Member, Teacher Representative

Mrs E Holt, Co-opted Member, Parent Governor Representative

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

Councillor S Newman, Executive Member for Children’s Services

#### **Apologies:**

Councillors Cox and Midgley

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

#### **YPC/OSG/14/23**

#### **Minutes**

#### **Decision**

To agree the minutes of the Ofsted Subgroup meeting held on 22 July 2014 as a correct record.

#### **YPC/OSG/14/24**

#### **Ofsted Inspection into Help, Protection and Care of Children Action Plan**

The Committee considered the action plan in response to the issues raised in the recent Ofsted inspection of the Council’s safeguarding arrangements. The Director of Children’s Services reported that the Council had not yet received the improvement notice from the Department for Education (DfE) but expected to receive it by the end of November 2014. She informed members that the requirements of the improvement notice would need to be incorporated into the action plan but it was not anticipated that this would require significant changes.

A member queried why there were blank sections in the action plan. The Director advised members that the action plan was still being developed and that partner agencies were being asked to contribute as the improvement plan was for partner agencies across Manchester, not just the Council. She emphasised the importance of sustainable improvements and ensuring that there was evidence of the impact of changes.

The Director suggested that members consider inviting the Chair of the Operational Improvement Board to a future meeting and to arrange visits to frontline services. Members supported these recommendations and agreed that it would be beneficial to visit frontline practitioners. The Director reported that she had visited frontline staff who felt frustration and disappointment at the Ofsted judgement but were still working

hard, committed to achieving positive outcomes for Manchester children and wanted quick improvements to be made.

The Director further recommended that members meet with the Independent Chair of the Improvement Board and receive the minutes from the Improvement Board. The Subgroup supported these recommendations. The Subgroup further agreed to mirror the key themes considered at the Improvement Board.

The Strategic Director reported that the biggest, immediate challenge was to reduce social worker caseloads. She informed members that there was a high number of referrals, including referrals which did not meet the threshold for social work intervention, and this would be tackled by screening referrals through the Multi-Agency Public Services Hub (MAPSH) and through the Early Help Offer. In addition, she informed members that some cases remained in the system because social workers did not have the time to bring them to a resolution and, therefore, greater social worker capacity was needed to deal with these cases and bring caseloads down to more manageable levels. She reported that when a child entered the looked after system, social workers should be seeking a resolution, either working with parents to enable the child to return to the family or applying for an order for the child to be adopted. However, she advised that many children were remaining in the looked after system for years and, once they were over five-years-old, it was more difficult for them to be adopted. Members expressed concern at the numbers of older children who were entering the looked after system, including young people who became Looked After at the request of their parents, under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989.

The Director reported that good supervision and support from managers were also essential in making improvements. In addition, Independent Reviewing Officers, as Chairs of child protection conferences, needed to provide challenge, ensuring plans were meeting the child's needs and were being delivered. She further informed members of plans for interim and permanent appointments to senior manager roles and that the former Head of Revenue and Benefits and the Shared Service had been appointed to improve the back office and IT systems to enable social workers to see performance information.

The Chair asked what key issues the Director had identified. The Director advised that demand for social work intervention had increased significantly over recent years due to a number of factors, including reduced resources across the public and voluntary sectors, deprivation, a greater awareness among other agencies of child abuse and more families with complex needs moving into areas with cheap housing stock. She reported that the size of the social work and social care workforce had not increased in line with the increased demand and that more work was needed to prevent families from reaching the stage where statutory intervention was needed. A member reported that the Early Help Strategy was key to this.

A member asked whether devolution to Greater Manchester would impact on children's services. The Director reported that increased control and buying power across Greater Manchester would be beneficial. She informed members that raising aspirations and improving GCSE results were important in enabling Manchester young people to benefit from increasing wealth in the region. The Executive Member

for Children's Services informed the Subgroup that the gap between Manchester's GCSE results and the national average was narrowing but further improvement was needed. The Subgroup discussed the importance of Early Years learning in providing all children with a good start and narrowing the gap in achievement levels for children from different backgrounds.

The Subgroup discussed the Early Help Strategy. A member expressed concern that schools felt overloaded. The Director acknowledged that the lead professional role tended to fall to the same organisations and ownership needed to be shared across partner agencies. The Executive Member reported that the Early Help Co-ordinators would be a useful resource for partner agencies.

### **Decisions**

1. To invite the Chair of the Operational Improvement Board to a future meeting.
2. To arrange visits to frontline services.
3. To meet with the Independent Chair of the Improvement Board.
4. To request that the minutes of the Improvement Board be circulated to members.

### **YPC/OSG/14/25**

### **Work Programme**

The Chair noted that a proposed additional meeting had been added to the work programme for 27 January 2015. However, due to the availability of other members, he recommended that this meeting be held on 20 January 2015. The Subgroup agreed to hold the additional meeting on 20 January 2015. The Subgroup agreed that this meeting would focus on local authority safeguarding. They further agreed that, if the Head of Schools Quality Assurance and Early Years identified any Ofsted Inspections of schools or children's centres which she felt the Subgroup should consider at this meeting, these could be added to the agenda.

### **Decision**

To agree the work programme, subject to the amendments above.