

At a meeting of the CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in COMMITTEE ROOM 1 of the CIVIC CENTRE, SUNDERLAND on THURSDAY 5th JULY, 2018 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor P. Smith in the Chair

Councillors Bell, Francis, Hunt, O'Neil, Rowntree, Samuels, Scullion, Tye and K. Wood together with Mrs J. Graham

Also in attendance:-

Mrs. Charlotte Burnham, Head of Member Support and Community Partnerships, Sunderland City Council

Mr. James Diamond, Scrutiny Officer, Sunderland City Council

Mrs. Jayne Ivory, Director of Performance and Quality, Together for Children

Mr. Thomas Newton, Sunderland Youth Parliament

Ms. Gillian Robinson, Area Coordinator, Sunderland City Council

Ms. Joanne Stewart, Principal Governance Services Officer, Sunderland City Council

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors F. Miller, O'Brien and DE Snowdon and of behalf of Ms. A. Blakey

Minutes of the last ordinary meetings of the Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee held on 12th April and 28th March, 2018

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last ordinary meetings of the Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee held on 12th April and 28th March, 2018 be confirmed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

There were no declarations of interest made.

Together for Children Performance Update

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with performance information in relation to Together for Children and the commissioning arrangement in the Council, offering assurance over progress and any issues that had arose, in the context of the scope of service and performance indicators as set out in the service contract.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Ms. Jayne Ivory, Director of Performance and Quality, Together for Children, presented the report advising that the Operational Commissioning Group and Chief Executives Clinic met on a monthly basis to consider information and progress made and the information contained within the report included all nine of the Key Performance Indicators (KPI's), the supporting measures that were not meeting target and some areas of management information. The tolerance level for each of the measures was also included in the report as previously requested by the Committee. The performance information contained within the report submitted at this meeting related to the period April, 2017 – March, 2018.

The Committee were advised that after the first year of operation a full review of the operational commissioning group and the key performance indicators had been undertaken. Revisions had been made and finalised with Together for Children to the Key Performance Indicators and Supporting Measures contained within the contract and appropriate challenging targets had been set for 2018/19. The data set would be reviewed further throughout the year and quarterly information would be received by the operational Commissioning Groups regarding audits and complaints to themes and trends and this would be enhanced with independent audits of case files.

Mr. Newton referred to the change in methodology of the rate of first time entrants to the criminal justice system supporting measure and asked if the Officer felt this was purposeful. Ms. Ivory commented that she could not comment on this particular measure and the change but she could look to get further information from the relevant Officer and circulate it to Committee Members.

Councillor Smith asked Ms. Ivory for her views on the Liquid Logic system and was informed that the front line practitioners of the system such as Social Workers loved it. The Liquid Logic system was very simple to use and the way in which users recorded their work was done so in a very proportionate way. As a case management tool it really promoted the core of the social work service. She felt that Together for Children had done incredibly well during the roll out of the system and the staff had coped admirably. Coming to terms with any new system took time and since Liquid Logic had gone live there had been a robust plan in place and staff had worked hard to implement the plan; ironing out any problems as they arose.

Councillor Wood referred to the 24 case file audits that were carried out in April, 2018 and asked if the service were concerned that 17 of those were rated as requiring improvement or inadequate as this was quite a high proportion of them. Ms. Ivory commented that it could simply be one small aspect of the case file that would move it from the 'requires improvement' to 'good' rating and that this could be something as minor as a visit having not been made within the set timescales. She advised that Together for Children have a requirement to make visits every fortnight whereas in other local authorities this would be every month, so in essence Together for Children were having to undertake visits twice as many times as would be usual.

Ms. Ivory commented that Together for Children acknowledge that they need to get better and that it was not good enough to have case file audits rated as requires improvement but they have an improvement plan in place and each case file was given clear feedback on the outcome of the audit and the reasons for the rating. In

closing she commented that case file auditing in itself can be a way of improving performance by identifying key areas or issues to address.

Councillor Tye referred to the new set of Key Performance Indicators which it had been said had been agreed and set by Together for Children and the Council and commented that he found this peculiar as the Member Reference Group did not meet until 19th July, 2018 where they were to be considered and also that they had not yet been approved by Council. Ms. Ivory commented that she may have spoken in error and apologised if that was the case. She commented that she was aware that there had been further negotiations around the indicators but if they had not yet been signed off and agreed formally then she had been mistaken. Councillor Tye asked if further clarity could be sought on the matter and Members advised accordingly.

In response to a query from Councillor Tye as to whether the findings of the recent Ofsted visit shared the same optimism around the progression of Together for Children, Ms. Ivory advised that it was not appropriate for her to make comment at this time as the report was not yet published. Once the Ofsted report was in the public domain the Scrutiny Committee would be given the full opportunity to discuss it in full and she was aware that it was already set out within the work programme.

Councillor Tye commented that it was his understanding that informal feedback had been given to Headteachers and staff at schools in the city and he felt that Elected Members, as corporate parents, such be treated equally and given the same level of detail. Ms. Ivory commented that she was aware that some staff had asked for headline information but no level of detail had been shared, just that Ofsted had feedback that they noted improvements had been made in service provision. No further detail could be given and had not been shared as far as she was aware. Councillor Smith also commented that as Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee she would like to know why she also had not been party to the information shared to others and asked for further information to be reported back to Members.

Councillor Samuels referred back to the 17 case file audits and asked if a further breakdown could be provided as to the reasons for the rating? Ms. Ivory advised that the information may be available as assessments would have been carried out but reiterated that it could be that visits had not been completed to the relevant timescales, even when attempts to visit may have been made. She advised that she would be more worried if all of the audits were rated as good or outstanding as this may not reflect accurately on the actual case files. Together for Children was a service working towards improving and they would expect audits to reflect this. Members asked if in future, reports could set out in more detail the reasons for the ratings that were given in case file audits.

Mr. Newton asked if there was a reason why Sunderland were expected to make visits every two weeks instead of monthly and was informed that this was set out within the improvement plan and was aimed at a desire to make sure that the children with a protection plan were seen even more regularly than before and ensure a more robust service.

Councillor Bell raised concerns over how families would be affected once Universal Credit was rolled out in the city, which was expected to be in July, 2018, and Ms. Ivory commented that they were seeing statistics which demonstrated an increase in

families needing support from services in areas where Universal Credit was introduced. She felt that it would be significant for the Scrutiny Committee to keep a very careful overview on the impact of further welfare changes on service provision in the future.

In response to a query from Councillor Hunt around support given to existing foster carers and work being undertaken to recruit new foster carers, Ms. Ivory commented that foster carers in the city carried out a brilliant service and that through Together for Children they were confident that they could build on this to recruit and retain more foster carers by making the foster service more attractive to prospective carers. She advised that Together for Children were recognised as an independent fostering agency so the potential was there for them to build further on the great work already being carried out. The foster carer long service awards had recently been held and she informed Members that the event had been a huge success and that Officers were keen to continue to get partners involved in future events to help roll out training and recruitment.

Councillor Hunt referred to paragraph 3.24 of the report and commented that the number of children in the city being electively home educated had significantly risen and asked if the service were working closely with schools to ensure that those young people remained in the system. Ms. Ivory commented that specific information around the elective home education could be provided to Members but that Councillor Hunt was correct in that the service should be there to support families in ensuring that the young person has access to a good education albeit that it is parental choice to elect to home educate their child(ren). Members were informed that their support had to be given to ensure that those young people were appropriately safeguarded and that it was clear as to how they were being home educated but she would ask the Director of Education to provide the Committee with information on the processes around electively home education children in the city directly.

Councillor Rowntree referred to paragraph 3.8 of the report and asked how the targets were agreed and whether there was a particular formula that was followed or what the rationale behind the set targets were. Ms. Ivory advised that targets had been set and agreed by the Council and Together for Children and were in line with neighbouring authority targets.

Councillor Rowntree also referred to paragraph 3.7 of the report and the number of referral with a decision within 24 hours and noted the rise in referrals at June and December and then a decline immediately after those dates and asked if this could be in correlation to summer and Christmas holidays and annual leave, or was it the case that there were simply fewer referrals during August and January? Ms. Ivory commented that the service were currently undertaking a review of ICRT and working with partners to ensure that they were supportive and responsive to children in need or who may be at risk of and ensuring that where referrals were made robust responses were provided in a timely fashion. The piece of work that was to be carried out would take on board those aspects Councillor Rowntree had raised and look into the reasons behind any trends that may be identified when the service were below performance targets.

In response to a question from Ms. Graham in relation to paragraph 3.9 of the report; whereby children had not had a statutory visit within 10 working days but that this

may be down to the social worker having attended but the family not being home and whether these attempts were recorded; Ms. Ivory advised that any attempted visits would be recorded on the young person's case file so this information could be collated. She informed Members that she did not know if this information could be provided in future reports but it would definitely be recorded. Members were advised that on occasion it could be families who did not want to cooperate with their social worker and purposefully not make themselves available and that this information would also be recorded in case files.

Councillor Smith referred to the issues around recruiting and retaining to Social Worker posts and was informed by Ms. Ivory that this was a regional and national issue with a lot of local authorities having difficulties in filling positions. Together for Children were doing an amazing job of improving performance in this area, having improved from 44% of social worker posts being filled by agency/interim staff but recognised that there were still further improvements to be made.

Ms. Ivory commented that it was challenging but that there was a lot of work being undertaken to try and address the issue locally and regionally through schemes such as providing a teaching partnership. Together for Children had increase the ways to 'grow your own' social workers through offering apprenticeships and working with the University of Sunderland in supporting and training students to carry on to be the next generation of social work staff. They continued to look at how they could improve the offer for social work staff to look to retain the good staff already in post and attract further interest from new applicants but it would continue to be a real challenge should the number of children in need, or subject to protection plans and looked after children continue at a higher rate.

Councillor Scullion referred to the apprenticeship scheme and asked when they would likely be ready and was informed that they were hopeful that they would be in place early in 2019. In a follow up question as to how many apprenticeships would be taken up locally, Ms. Ivory commented that they were looking to offer 3-4 positions in the first instance.

There being no further questions or comments for Ms. Ivory the Chairman thanked her for her report, and it was:-

2. RESOLVED that:-

- i) the contents of the report be received and noted;
- ii) the Director of Performance and Quality, Together for Children, provide further information on the change in methodology of recording the rate of first time entrants to the criminal justice system to Committee Members;
- iii) the Director of Performance and Quality, Together for Children, provide further clarity to Members around the new set of Key Performance Indicators having been agreed by the Council and Together for Children;
- iv) the Director of Performance and Quality, Together for Children, provide further information to the Committee around the sharing of the feedback on the recent Ofsted report;
- v) future performance reports have more detail set out in the reasons for ratings which were given during case file audits; and

- vi) the Director of Education, Together for Children, be asked to provide the Committee with more information around Elective Home Education.

Complaints, Compliments and Feedback

The Director of Quality and Performance submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided the Committee with information regarding compliments, complaints and feedback received by Together for Children.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Ms. Jayne Ivory, Director of Quality and Performance presented the report and addressed questions and comments thereon.

Councillor Samuels referred to paragraph 3.9 of the report whereby it stated that significant improvement had been made from April, 2017 in relation to reducing the number of agency staff across all teams in social care and commented that it would have been beneficial to have the figures set out to see the comparisons and improvement made between then and now. Ms. Ivory advised that the information would be readily available as it would have been in the previous report and she would look to provide a copy to Committee Members.

Councillor Wood sought clarification as to whether the figures in the report were complaints from families or external professionals and was advised that it was a record of all complaints that are received by Together for Children from any source.

There being no further questions or comments the Chairman thanked Ms Ivory for her report and it was:-

- 3. RESOLVED that the information contained within the report be received and noted.

Annual Work Programme 2018/19

The Head of Member Support and Community Partnerships submitted a report (copy circulated) attaching for Members' information, the work programme for the Committee's work for the 2018/19 municipal year.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Mr. James Diamond, Scrutiny Officer, presented the report advising that the work programme could continue to be developed and changed as Members wished and that this was simply the framework to be built upon.

Councillor Francis commented that the Committee had spoken a number of times about technical schools and apprenticeships and in particular the quality of those that were offered and how they were delivered and asked that the item be included for a future meeting.

Councillor Smith advised that they were looking to meet with some young people and parents who had used the social work service. She commented that they would aim to have the meeting in the early evening to allow as many Members to be able to attend as possible but further details would be circulated in due course.

4. RESOLVED that the information contained in the work programme be received and noted and the items as discussed be included.

Notice of Key Decisions

The Head of Member Support and Community Partnerships submitted a report (copy circulated) providing Members with an opportunity to consider those items on the Executive's Notice of Key Decisions for the 28 day period from the 19th June, 2018.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

5. RESOLVED that the Notice of Key Decisions be received and noted.

The Chairman then closed the meeting having thanked Members and Officers for their attendance and contributions to the meeting.

(Signed) P. SMITH,
Chairman.