

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

23RD APRIL 2018, AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors S. A. Webb (Vice-Chairman), C. Allen-Jones, C. J. Bloore, S. R. Colella, M. Glass, C.A. Hotham, P.L. Thomas and M. Thompson

Observers: Councillor K. May

Officers: Ms. J. Pickering, Ms. R. Russell (Worcestershire County Council) Ms. A. Scarce, Ms. S. Wilkins (Worcestershire County Council), Ms. J. Willis and Ms. L. Morris

113/17 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES**

Apologies were received from Councillors L.C.R Mallet (Chairman) and Councillor C. J Spencer. In the absence of the Chairman, Councillor S.A Webb (Vice Chairman), chaired the meeting.

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114/17 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS**

There were no Declarations of Interest.

115/17 **TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD HELD ON 11TH APRIL 2018 (TO FOLLOW)**

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on the 11 April 2018 be approved as an accurate record.

116/17 **DISTRICTS AND COUNTY SAFEGUARDING AND EARLY HELP - PRESENTATION**

Tina Russell, Assistant Director Social Work Safeguarding Services, Worcestershire County Council and Sarah Wilkins, Assistant Director for Early Help and Commissioning, Worcestershire County Council provided a presentation.

In the course of the presentation, the Assistant Director Social Work Safeguarding Services highlighted the following;

- In October/November 2016 an Ofsted inspection had identified significant widespread failings. This was of concern to everyone.
- The Ofsted report was generally felt not unfair. There was evidence within some case files that a poor level of service had been in existence for some time.
- As the County Council's Children's Services were rated inadequate again, the Department for Education had had concerns about the ability of the Council to sustain good quality services.
- Progress monitoring visits by Ofsted were now undertaken on a three monthly basis. A Department for Education Commissioner had been appointed to monitor progress.
- There were moves towards an Alternative Delivery Model, where by the Council would remain responsible for children's services, but the services would be run by a separate entity.
- In May 2017 it had been suggested that the Council focus on one particular area of improvement and make sure that this was being done well. It was difficult however to choose which service to prioritise as all children needed quality services. Areas had been prioritised but there was continued focus on the wider Improvement Plan.
- In January 2018 inspectors had considered the 'family front door', care proceedings and quality assurance. Feedback was that there was continued progress.
- The latest monitoring visit took place in April 2018. The report was not yet available but the Council was continuing along the right trajectory and there was a whole service approach to improvement.
- The Council had demonstrated in the past that it could make improvements but needed to show that they were sustainable.
- Council Leaders could clearly articulate the improvements that had to be made and there had been significant financial investment.
- Safeguarding was not just a social work issue, everyone needed to be involved. This was understood at a strategic level but partnership working was more challenging at an operational level.
- The consistent application of thresholds was challenging for local authorities. It was difficult to get this right but it had improved. Although there was still some inconsistency this had not had an adverse impact, if social workers needed to be involved they were.
- The 'Signs of Safety' Model was a simplistic but effective way of working with families. It promoted and strengthened families.
- Staffing and workforce issues continued to be a priority. Recruiting good, experienced staff was challenging. There were opportunities for social workers to report back but this had not always been recorded adequately in case files.
- Some caseloads per staff member remained higher than what was desired. Social work teams had however reduced in size so Team Managers oversaw a smaller number of cases.
- Supervision was process and task focussed but this had not been evidenced effectively enough.
- There was fit for purpose data available at every level.
- There was support appointed for less experienced social workers.

- There were good training opportunities for social workers and more permanent staff in the workforce.
- Social workers were growing in confidence and becoming more creative. There was an improved level of curiosity. Social workers were asking why issues had arisen, identifying risk and acting on this information.
- Social workers valued supervision.
- The formal letter from the latest monitoring visit had not yet been received but it was anticipated that the findings would reflect those of the previous visit.
- There was an eight point plan to improve the lives of children and young people (see slide 9 of the presentation).
- A number of work streams had been developed. It was important to understand the whole experience of the child and how intervention had made a difference.
- There was work with partners on a range of specialist areas, but more work was needed with partners on other areas.
- It was important to get involved at the right level but not unnecessarily. The ambition was not to reduce the numbers of children in care, but support a child at home if it was safe to do so.
- The Council had Corporate Parenting responsibilities for the children in its care. It was important to ensure that there were enough local placements for looked after children and local support available so that young people could stay in Worcestershire if they wanted to when they left care.

The Assistant Director for Early Help and Commissioning explained that;

- Early help had an impact on children's lives in Worcestershire but the offer to families and professionals, and the pathways to access help, had not been clear.
- An Early Help Strategy had been drafted and shared. This clarified and simplified how support could be accessed to avoid interventions later on. The Council was working with partners and commissioned services.
- There was continued work with Bromsgrove District Council and Redditch Borough Council around the provision of parenting support and community capacity building.
- It was important to build good partnerships so that when social work interventions came to an end, the case could transfer back to Early Help services in a seamless way. There also needed to be good step up process if issues escalated.
- It was important to work closely with District Councils, schools and community services in Worcestershire. There was a good offer of early help in the county but this had not been well co-ordinated.
- A number of strategies, including the Early Help Strategy, fed into the Children's and Young People Plan which was owned by all agencies working with children, young people and families in Worcestershire.
- Opportunities to work with District and Borough Councils were being explored as they provided a rich resource of early help.

The Assistant Director Social Work Safeguarding Services confirmed that she had met with all of the District and Borough Council Safeguarding Leads as there was a desire to rebuild links. More partnership events were planned from May to July 2018.

Members' referred to the complexity of the services being delivered and the commitment to make improvements. The rationale behind the introduction of an Alternative Delivery model was queried.

The Assistant Director Social Work Safeguarding Services elaborated that the Council did not have a choice regarding this matter, as this was the direction set by the Secretary of State. The thinking behind this approach was that if Children's Services were delivered separately to the rest of the Council's business this could offer the service a level of protection as it could be prioritised. This would give the longevity to improvements which had not been seen before. The Department for Education were concerned that once they stepped back, services would decline again. It was anticipated that the required improvements could not be made within the Council however the Council was evidencing that improvements were being made.

Members' queried if other Councils had taken this approach and the Assistant Director Social Work Safeguarding Services responded that around six other Councils were going through a similar process. One had been inspected and was delivering a good service but there was not the evidence necessarily that this was as a result of taking the service out of the Council.

Members' queried how the resilience of social workers could be built in a new outside body, if the money set aside for children's services was secure and for how long, and how a positive culture could be built when there was a lack of consistency in senior leadership?

The Assistant Director Social Work Safeguarding Services explained that the culture had turned around significantly in a short time. Additional funding had resulted in more staff and the opportunity to provide useful tools for staff, enabling them to, for example, pick up their emails outside the office. The Chief Executive was committed to this work. The workforce had been a priority in the improvement plan from the beginning. Changing the culture was also a priority but this was not a task and finish type of exercise. The way in which staff were spoken to was part of this process. It was important for Directors to set expectations for staff and value staff. The intention was now for responsible management. There had been successful team and group manager recruitment and it now felt like a different place to work. Staff were surveyed every quarter and the results were improving each time. For example, initially only around thirty five percent of social workers knew who the Principle Social Worker was but this had increased to ninety eight percent of staff. The Principal Social Worker met with frontline staff and passed back any challenges to management. The Chief Executive had committed to a five year plan of investment in Children's Services.

Members' queried the governance for the Alternative Delivery Model and the Assistant Director Social Work Safeguarding Services explained that it would be a company of the Council. It was anticipated that there would be a Chairperson, Board of Directors and Board of Non Executives who would hold the Board to account. The Board would be made up of people from different backgrounds but not solely of Councillors. The Secretary of State would oversee the appointments with the Commissioner reporting back to the Department for Education.

Councillor K.J May, Cabinet Member for Transformation and Commissioning, Worcestershire County Council and Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, The Town Centre and Strategic Partnerships, Bromsgrove District Council commented that the appointment had to be made with the agreement of the Department for Education and the appropriate procedures would be followed.

In response to Members' queries the Assistant Director Social Work Safeguarding Services confirmed that although the new company could say what budget it required, it would need the County Council's agreement.

Members' discussed the recruitment process for social workers and the Assistant Director Social Work Safeguarding Services gave reassurances that there had been positive progress in terms of recruitment but acknowledged that there was still too many agency staff. Social workers needed to earn competitive pay but also wanted to have safe, experienced management and the opportunity to make a difference. A good training package was also important. Anecdotally the profile of working at Worcestershire County Council had changed with social workers wanting to work there. Nationally however there was a lack of experienced qualified social workers. Recently the Council had attracted an additional fourteen newly qualified social worker applicants.

Members' also discussed sickness levels for social workers and the Assistant Director Social Work Safeguarding Services explained that there was work with Human Resources to gather this data but it was not a major issue. There had been an improvement in the ratio of permanent staff to agency staff. Where children experienced regular changes in social workers, this reflected the strains in the profession.

Councillor K.J. May provided data in respect of sickness absence at County Council.

Members' discussed a number of other areas;

- The sickness policy at the County Council.
- The County Council's comparative expenditure on roads and infrastructure.
- The importance of consistent leadership at the County Council.

- The findings of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA) report into Worcestershire County Council's Financial Resilience.
- Funding pressures in adult social care.
- The County Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.
- How the money required for the Alternative Delivery Model would be guaranteed?
- The transparency regarding the matter.

Councillor K.J. May reiterated that the Alternative Delivery Model was the decision of the Department for Education and that the County Council had no choice in the matter.

The Assistant Director Social Work Safeguarding Services clarified that the Ofsted report was not available until it was made public.

Members' thanked Officers for the work carried out to date.

The Head of Community Services, Bromsgrove District Council explained that;

- Safeguarding training had been rolled out to staff and Members. All were aware that they were the eyes and ears to the public.
- A report to Cabinet on the Children and Young People's Plan had highlighted a range of services and activities to improve the lives of people available in the District.
- The District Council had an important role to play in working with the voluntary sector and had supported the sector to access the relevant training.

The Assistant Director for Early Help and Commissioning confirmed that she had visited both Bromsgrove District Council and Redditch Borough Council. District/Borough Councils were key in taking improvements forward and evolving locality partnerships to develop creative and localised services. She was looking forward to working with the Head of Community Services going forward.

RESOLVED: That the progress in relation to the Children's Services Ofsted be noted.

117/17

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT 2017/18

RESOLVED: That the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report be approved for submission to Council subject to the acronym on page 5 of the report being amended from F&BWG to read FBWG.

118/17

FINANCE AND BUDGET WORKING GROUP - UPDATE

The Senior Democratic Services Officer confirmed that at the last meeting Members had reflected on what the Working Group had done before and

what could be done better. The Work Programme going forward had also been considered.

119/17

MEASURES DASHBOARD WORKING GROUP - UPDATE

Councillor S. Webb, Chairman of the Working Group confirmed that the Group had met the previous week and discussed with the Chief Executive the vision for the Measures Dashboard going forward. A number of suggestions had been made for consideration, including reviewing the terms of reference and inviting the Heads of Service and Portfolio Holders to the meetings. The Work Programme was being revised as a result.

120/17

TASK GROUP UPDATES

CCTV Short Sharp Review

The Senior Democratic Services Officer explained that the work had been delayed due to external factors. The Group was likely to report back to the Board in July.

Parking Around Schools Task and Finish Group

Councillor C. Bloore (Chairman of the Group), confirmed that first and middle schools in the District had been written to regarding the issue. There had been a good public response to the Press Release regarding the matter. An Officer from the County Council would be attending the next meeting of the Group to discuss possible parking restriction measures outside schools.

Hospital Carparking Task and Finish Group

Councillor C. Bloore (Chairman of the Group), confirmed that a representative of Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust had sent through some details and had offered to attend the next meeting of the Group which would be arranged shortly.

Task and Finish Group Proposal

Councillor C. Bloore explained that he had sent a Task and Finish Group proposal regarding the Sports Hall to Councillor Baxter for consideration.

121/17

WORCESTERSHIRE HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - UPDATE

The Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee had not met since the previous Board meeting so there were no further updates.

122/17

CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

There were no items suggested for the Work Programme.

RESOLVED: that the Cabinet Work Programme be noted.

123/17

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME

There were no comments or suggestions for additional items to be added.

RESOLVED: that the Overview and Scrutiny Board's Work Programme be noted.

The meeting closed at 19:20

Chairman