

**Children, Young People and Family Support Scrutiny and Policy Development
Committee**

Meeting held 26 January 2015

PRESENT: Councillors Gill Furniss (Chair), Nasima Akther, John Booker, Mike Drabble, Talib Hussain, Karen McGowan, Pat Midgley, Colin Ross, Diana Stimely, Stuart Wattam and Cliff Woodcraft (Deputy Chair)

Non-Council Members in attendance:-

Jules Jones, Education Non-Council Voting Member
Joan Stratford, Education Non-Council Voting Member

.....

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Ian Saunders, and Alison Warner.

2. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

2.1 No items were identified where resolutions may be moved to exclude the public and press.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3.1 There were no declarations of interest.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

4.1 17th November 2014

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 17th November 2014, were approved as a correct record and, arising therefrom, following a query by Jules Jones, the Chair stated that arrangements were to be made for the establishment of a small sub-group, comprising Members of the Committee, to look in more detail at any gaps in performance in connection with the attainment and progress of vulnerable learners in 2014, during February 2015, with the aim of reporting back on the work undertaken to the Committee's meeting in March 2015.

4.2 15th December 2014

The minutes of the special meeting of the Committee held on 15th December 2014, were approved as a correct record, with the exception of item 1 – Apologies for Absence, which was amended by the addition of Councillor Nasima Akther and Joan Stratford to the list.

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

5.1 There were no questions raised or petitions submitted by members of the public.

6. CHILDREN AND FAMILIES ACT 2014

6.1 The Director, Children, Young People and Families, submitted a report on the implications of the Children and Families Act 2014 for Sheffield, and how the Council and its partners were responding to new legislation and any challenges posed by the Act.

6.2 Dorne Collinson, Director of Children and Families, stated that there were nine parts to the Act and presentations were made by officers in respect of the four main parts of the Act, as follows:-

6.3 Part 1 – Adoption and Contact

6.3.1 Jon Banwell, Assistant Director – Provider Services, reported on this element of the Act, referring specifically to issues related to Access to Information, Fostering to Adoption, Due Consideration, Outsourcing Functions, Adoption Support and Staying Put Post-18 Placement Support.

6.3.2 Members of the Committee raised questions and the following responses were provided:-

- If the Local Authority deemed it was not achieving its objectives regarding adoption, it had the ability to outsource its functions relating to the recruitment, assessment and approval of prospective adopters and adoption functions to an outside agency. This particular arrangement had been identified as the most contentious element of the changes set out in the new Act, and the Authority would only outsource its functions in extreme circumstances. Although the functions were outsourced, the Authority would still hold responsibility in terms of performance and costs. It was hoped that the Authority would not have to revert to outsourcing its functions, but the ability to take this course of action was available if needed.
- Whilst the Authority had to be mindful of keeping to required timescales as part of the adoption process, the first priority would always be to ensure that the process was followed correctly, and that the needs and requirements of all parties involved, as part of the process, were met.
- The Authority would continue to provide both pre and post-adoption training and its support for both the child and foster parents element of the process formed part of the work currently being undertaken with the Child and Mental Health Service (CAMHS). This ensured that any adopters were made fully aware of all the issues surrounding the child and, where necessary, efforts were made to provide additional training.
- As a way of encouraging more people to become adopters, work was currently being undertaken to review the Adoption Service's Marketing Plan,

which would include improvements to advertising material and its website. It was the aim to provide a high level of information, as early as possible, with the aim of ensuring that prospective adopters were provided with all the information they needed. The Authority received applications from all groups of people, including same sex couples, and it was hoped that any improvements made after the review of the Marketing Plan would help to maintain, or increase, the number of prospective adopters. It was hoped that Councillors would be able to generate interest from prospective adopters within their Wards, and would be welcome to comment on the various different forms of advertising literature, in terms of how it was tailored to different groups of people within the communities they represented.

- Every effort was made to contact members of a child's family, in order to see if they could look after the child, prior to registering them for adoption.
- All adopted children would be supported if they requested contact with their birth parents, with all relevant records being maintained. It was accepted that such requests would generally be made by older children and, not all such children would necessarily want to contact their birth parents straightaway. Adopted children would always be supported and encouraged to contact their birth parents, even if it was just by letter or other methods of communication. Staff in the Adoption Service would liaise with Sheffield Archives if they required any contact information.

6.4 Part 2 – Family Justice

6.4.1 Debbie Mercer, Assistant Director – Fieldwork Services, reported on Part 2 of the Act, which contained provisions relating to recommendations from the Independent Family Justice Review. She referred to the current challenges, new duties required under the Act and issues relating to workforce development.

6.4.2 Members of the Committee raised questions and the following responses were provided:-

- The requirement to introduce a maximum 26-week time limit for completing care and supervision proceedings was viewed as a major challenge, particularly as the present limit was 31 weeks. The Authority would use the Public Law Outline to ensure that all aspects of the procedure had been covered prior to the Court proceedings. This would include detailed work with the parents, as well as all wider family members being assessed. It had been identified that there was room for improvement in terms of assessing wider family members before the case going to Court. Consideration also had to be given to the complexity of casework in some cases, such as the requirement to undertake mental health assessments. It was important that as much preparatory work as possible was undertaken, prior to the case going to Court.
- In terms of workforce development, the Judge needed to be confident in the social worker's actions, and the social worker's work reports must contain an analysis based on research and evidence-based practice.

- There were obvious risks in terms of reducing the maximum time limit for completing care and supervision proceedings. In order to minimise such risks, there was a need to speak more openly, and be much more interactive with families in connection with what was involved in the process. As part of this work, there were a number of different projects taking place at the present time, including the introduction of a Strength-Based Case Conference, which involved the planning of smart actions and recognising a family's strengths, alongside the improvements they needed to make. There was a need to be very clear with families in terms of action plans and timescales, and it was important that there was timeliness and responsiveness, as well as transparency, all throughout the process.
- In terms of social workers' caseloads, every attempt was made to allocate cases based on their expertise and knowledge. The maximum number of cases to be dealt with by each social worker was now capped to 18, and steps were also being taken to look at how support could be provided by their Line Managers, so that they were in a position to better support their staff. As part of the work on workforce development, management were looking at ways of improving working practices in an attempt to make social workers' caseloads more manageable and minimise the possibility of any delays being caused by them in terms of re-allocating/non-allocation, which could incur costs to the Authority. It was accepted that the process would work better if social workers had lower caseloads, but there was also a need to be realistic in terms of the level of work required.
- The provision of training for social workers was managed in a balanced way in order to ensure that they were not removed from their role for longer than was required. The Authority offered a high level of training for social workers, which was reviewed on an annual basis.
- In terms of existing caseloads and ongoing budget pressures faced by the Authority, the Executive Director, Children, Young People and Families, had given her support in terms of maintaining current levels of funding for the short-term. Although funding identified for this area of work was guaranteed only for a three-year period, it was envisaged that demand for such specialist services would decrease over this period.
- In terms of targets regarding improvements to the Service, other than meeting the required timescales, short-term targets included finding permanency for children at an early stage. Longer-term, the Service was looking to work more closely with the Drugs and Alcohol Co-ordination Team (DACT) in connection with providing support for those parents where drug and/or alcohol misuse was prevalent in the family, in order to stop regular recurrence of such problems.
- Although enquiries are made about all family members, during the initial mediation sessions, for whatever reason, the families did not always provide all the information required. As part of this process, it was important to ensure that the social worker asked the correct questions, and at the right

times. However, despite the best efforts of the social workers, there were, and always would be families who were not willing to co-operate which, ultimately, extended the process. The social workers would also obviously have to be aware of, and give consideration to, the families' predicaments.

- Social workers are required to include details regarding the child's views in their reports. For children under three, the social worker's observations of the child would be included in the report. The Court would appoint a Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) adjudicator, who would be responsible for providing their views on cases, both in private and public session.

6.5 Part 3 – Special Educational Needs

6.5.1 Dee Desgranges, Assistant Director for Lifelong Learning, Skills and Communities, gave a presentation on Part 3 of the Act – Special Educational Needs, which had a focus on improving outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities. She reported on the key changes, which included the replacement of statements with Education, Health and Care Plans, offering families personal budgets and improving co-operation between all services that support young people and their families, and referred to the timescales in terms of the transition to the new system.

6.5.2 Members of the Committee raised questions and the following responses were provided:-

- The national timeframe for dealing with children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities, following on from the date the Local Authority was first notified, to the production of the Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan, was 20 weeks. This was deemed a very challenging timescale. There were three officers whose role it was to undertake the review of the child or young person, with two additional members of staff available to assist if required. If the necessary arrangements could be made to improve outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities, it was hoped that similar work could be undertaken in respect of other vulnerable groups.
- One major challenge facing the Service was the lack of special school places in the City, although work was being undertaken to improve the infrastructure to try and accommodate this in the future. This work had involved building capacity in the system, as well as talking to parents to see what provision they wanted in respect of their children as opposed to attending special schools. During the past three years, not one post-16 child had been placed in specialist education outside the City on the basis that alternative provision had been made. Such provision had included specialist hubs across the City and staff from special schools going out to mainstream schools to teach children there.
- Personal Budgets were an element of the legislation and were discussed with families at the development stage of the EHC Plan. The Council had not

yet received any requests for an education personal budget, but already had well established processes for personal budgets for social care and health, which would be built upon.

- Children, Young People and Families was working closely with the Health and Wellbeing Board to establish joint commissioning processes and protocols. An agreement between the Authority and the Health Service in respect of data-sharing had been reached, which would establish a comprehensive understanding across all agencies of the current and projected need of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) children and young people to aid "intelligent" commissioning.

6.6 Part 4 – Childcare Reform

6.6.1 Dawn Walton, Assistant Director, Prevention and Early Intervention, reported on the key changes under Part 4 of the Act, which included new mechanisms for the registration of childminders via childminder agencies, the option for early years childcare providers to request, and pay for, inspections, the repeal of the duty to conduct a childcare sufficiency assessment every three years, and the removal of the requirements for governors to consult on offering childcare and wrap-around support.

6.6.2 In response to a question raised by a Member of the Committee, Ms Walton stated that, at the present time, there was capacity in terms of childcare provision for all three to four year olds. A significant proportion of childcare provision was not in schools, so there was a need for the Authority to encourage flexible options as to how such provision was offered. This could include private provision relocating to schools or collaborating with schools to provide responsive options. It was accepted that the Authority would have to be more proactive in the future in terms of how it managed the supply of Sheffield's childcare provision.

6.7 Part 5 – Welfare of Children

6.7.1 This part of the Act comprised mainly amendments that had been requested by the House of Lords, and the report set out details of the new duties required.

6.7.2 Members of the Committee raised questions and the following responses were provided by the officers present:-

- Steve Mathers had been in the post of Virtual School Head for around five years, and was responsible for championing the education of children in the Authority's care.
- The Young Carers Strategy Board, which linked into the Carers Board, had young carers representation. The voluntary sector was also well represented on the Board, but there was not currently any carer representation. The Young Children's Strategy Board informed the Action Plan and, although this was initially slow in development, it was now starting to take forward some actions on this.

- There were plans in place to undertake assessments in relation to young carers as there was an automatic assessment route through to Social Care.
- A response to the query as to how the Authority plan to put safeguards in place to protect children from nicotine would be produced and circulated to Members of the Committee. It was indicated, however, that there was a level of uncertainty in law with regard to this issue, and it was not clear how the Act stood on this.
- The recruitment process in terms of foster parents had been set up to ensure that placements succeeded. There would obviously be a small number of placements which were not successful, and investigations would be made into the reasons for this. Details of the number of placements which had not succeeded would be forwarded to Councillor John Booker.

6.8 Part 6 – Children’s Commissioner

6.8.1 This part of the Act reinforced the role of the national Children’s Commissioner, taking forward recommendations in John Dunford’s 'Review of the Office of the Children's Commissioner (England)', including giving the Commissioner a statutory remit to promote and protect children’s rights.

6.9 Parts 7, 8 and 9 - Statutory Rights to Leave and Pay, Time Off Work and Right to Request Flexible Working

6.9.1 Part 7 of the Act delivered the legislative commitments made in the Government response to the modern workplaces consultation (November 2012), including a new employment right to shared parental leave and statutory shared parental pay for eligible working parents.

6.9.2 Part 8 created a new right for employees and qualifying agency workers to take unpaid time off work to attend up to two ante-natal appointments with a pregnant woman.

6.9.3 Part 9 provided for the expansion of the right to request flexible working from employees who were parents or carers to all employees, and the removal of the statutory process that employers must currently follow when considering requests for flexible working.

6.9.4 The report set out the key dates in respect of the above.

6.10 Financial Pressures Generated by the Act

6.10.1 The report set out details of the financial pressures generated by the implementation of the Act.

6.10.2 In response to a question on this issue, it was reported that the financial pressures would most likely increase over a period of time, so there would not be an immediate impact following the implementation of the Act. Although the level of grant income would taper off over time, this provided the Authority an opportunity

to review the new duties and working arrangements required, following the implementation of the Act, and provided an opportunity to deliver the service differently in order to make savings.

- 6.11 RESOLVED: That the Committee notes the contents of the report now submitted, together with the responses provided to the questions raised.

7. WORK PROGRAMME 2014/15

- 7.1 The Policy and Improvement Officer, Diane Owens, submitted a paper containing the Committee's draft Work Programme 2014/15.

- 7.2 The Deputy Chair (Councillor Cliff Woodcraft) requested that the issue of how the Council, by working with its partner agencies, could assist families with disabled children, be added to the Work Programme.

- 7.3 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes the draft Work Programme 2014/15; and
- (b) agrees that the issue now raised by Councillor Woodcraft be added to the Committee's Work Programme as a possible topic for consideration for 2015/16.

8. BUILDING SUCCESSFUL FAMILIES PROGRAMME - UPDATE

- 8.1 The Committee received, for information, a report providing an update on the Building Successful Families Programme, attaching, as an appendix, the Phase One Interim Report – July 2014, which contained an evaluation of the Programme undertaken by Ecorys, a leading European research and consultancy company.

- 8.2 Reference was made to a further interim report of Ecorys being available in January 2015, and the Policy and Improvement Officer stated that she would circulate this report to Members of the Committee.

- 8.3 RESOLVED: That the Committee notes the contents of the report now submitted.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 9.1 It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Monday, 9th March 2015, at 1.00 pm, in the Town Hall.