

## **Minutes of the Meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 12 February 2019 at 7.00 pm**

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**Present:** Councillors Bukky Okunade (Chair), David Potter (Vice-Chair), Alex Anderson, Abbie Akinbohun, Garry Hague and Elizabeth Rigby

Nicola Cranch, Parent Governor Representative  
Paula Robinson, Parent Governor Representative  
Lynda Pritchard, Church of England Representative

**In attendance:** Rory Patterson, Corporate Director of Children's Services  
Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director Children and Families  
Michele Lucas, Interim Director of Learning, Skills and Inclusion  
Kate Kozlova-Boran, Strategic Lead of Learning  
Malcolm Taylor, Strategic Lead of Inclusion  
Andrea Winstone, School Improvement Manager  
Claire Pascoe, Child Sexual Exploitation Manager  
Alan Cotgrove, Thurrock LSCB Manager  
Wendy Le, Democratic Services Officer

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Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting may be filmed and was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

### **36. Minutes**

The minutes from the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 4 December 2018 were approved as a correct record.

### **37. Items of Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

### **38. Declaration of Interests**

The Church of England Representative declared a non-pecuniary interest on agenda item 11 as she was the Chair of Thameside Children's Centre.

### **39. Youth Cabinet Update**

The Youth Cabinet Representatives were unable to attend the meeting to provide an update.

### **40. Items Raised by Thurrock Local Safeguarding Children Board**

Alan Cotgrove, Thurrock Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB), provided the Committee with an update on the work undertaken which included:

#### The Walk Online roadshow

- This was taking place on 5, 6 and 7 March 2019 at the Civic Hall in Blackshots. The roadshow catered towards years 5 and 6 and out of all the Thurrock primary schools, only 4 would not be attending. Over 4,000 children would be in attendance over the 3 days of the roadshow. The roadshow aimed to raise awareness and teach children on social media and internet safety and gang related issues. Essex Police and the Youth Offending Service would be providing their support on the roadshow and Youth Cabinet had helped on the information to be given out at the roadshow.
- A goody bag would be handed out at the roadshow which was shown to the Committee. Goodies included stationery, a variety of colouring books which told a story on the issues covered in the roadshow, a 'Be Smart' on the internet game sheet and a safeguarding word search.
- A sealed adult pack was also included in the goody bag which contained a letter inviting parents and carers to the adult roadshow on 23 May 2019 to be held in the afternoon and evening. The adult roadshow aimed to raise awareness of apps and games used by young people.
- Questionnaires would be undertaken with children at the Walk Online roadshow and data to be shared with schools and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC). A similar game to 'Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?' would also be played at the roadshow to help gather data on children's knowledge on the raised issues.

#### Social care work

- LSCB had been working with the police and voluntary services on Black, Minority and Ethnic (BME) Groups safeguarding awareness sessions and were looking to roll this out across the Borough.

#### Partnership work

- LSCB had been supporting and working together with the Thurrock Community Safety Partnership on the gang related conference.
- A Signs of Safety course, Interfamilial and Safeguarding course had been completed.
- Work on the new safeguarding arrangements was ongoing.

Thanking Alan Cotgrove for the report, the Chair opened the item up to the Committee for questions.

Regarding the safeguarding information to be provided at the Walk Online roadshow, Councillor Hague questioned if the information would also be available online or if there would be an app for it. In reply, Alan Cotgrove said LSCB was looking into going digital with the information and would be changing the LSCB website to contain an age appropriate section with this type of information.

On the 4 schools that would not be attending the roadshow, Lynda Pritchard, Church of England Representative, asked if the LSCB had accepted the 4 schools would not attend and sought the LSCB's thoughts on this. Alan Cotgrove reassured the Committee that the LSCB had spoken with the schools and that the schools were running their own programmes in house. He went on to explain that the roadshow and similar events were often used by schools as a launch pad to start their own programmes. LSCB carried out quality assurance tests on these programmes through audits with schools.

Councillor Akinbohun asked what subjects would be covered in the Walk Online roadshow. Alan Cotgrove said the event was targeted towards years 5 and 6 and raising awareness on internet safety was increasingly targeted toward the lower pupil years. The campaign had begun off the back of a case of a murdered child in Thurrock and since then, a lot of work had been undertaken in different age groups. Councillor Akinbohun followed up by asking whether feedback was gathered from children. Confirming this was the case, Alan Cotgrove went on to say LSCB communicated with schools for feedback and LSCB would contact schools 6 months later with the gathered data to address raised issues. Although the knowledge was instilled in children, it relied on self-enforcement from children.

#### **41. Thurrock New Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements**

Presented by Alan Cotgrove, the report informed the Committee that the current requirements of the Local Safeguarding Children's Boards would be dissolved and new safeguarding arrangements would need to be put in place to meet statutory requirements. For Thurrock, a new partnership would be formed consisting of 3 strategic partners which would be Thurrock Council, Essex Police and Thurrock Clinical Commissioning Group. This new arrangement would be known as Thurrock Local Safeguarding Children's Partnership (LSCP) which would come into effect on 7 May 2019. Updates on the new partnership would be brought back to the Committee.

Commenting that the changes appeared to be structural, Councillor Hague sought clarification on what the main operational changes would be and the benefits. Alan Cotgrove explained the operational changes would benefit the outcomes of the LSCB and auditing would help on quality assurance. Part of the reasons for the change to LSCBs was because some across the country had required improvement. Thurrock's new LSCP would have a business plan

in place around safeguarding and there would be scrutiny taking place on the work of the partnership.

The Chair queried on what the changes were in the management of the structure. In answer, Alan Cotgrove said the current arrangement safeguarding arrangements focused on the local authority. With the change, the focus would be on the three partnerships and each one would have equal footing. All three were accountable to their relative inspecting authorities: Care Quality Commission, the police, Committees etc. A business support team would remain in place to support the new partnership.

Paula Robinson, Parent Governor Representative, sought clarification on whether the business support team was part of Thurrock Council. Confirming this was the case, Alan Cotgrove went on to say the LSCB received an annual contribution from the local authority and once distributed, the responsibilities would remain the same. Over the coming year, the new safeguarding arrangements would be reviewed.

On the three partners, Lynda Pritchard questioned who the boss would be and if LSCB were confident that the partnership would run smoothly. Giving reassurance, Alan Cotgrove stated the current LSCB was successful and achieved good outcomes for young people. Over the coming year, with the new safeguarding arrangements, chairing of the boards would be chaired by different groups and all three partners would agree collectively on plans going forward. The partnership was an 'even blend' and there would be no one group leading another.

In the event of a conflict of interest, Councillor Akinbohun questioned what the solution would be and also who would have the power to dissolve the partnership. Alan Cotgrove explained there would be a consensus on the decisions to be made. If issues were to arise, investigation would be undertaken by an independent review board.

The Chair sought clarification that an update on the new arrangements would be brought back to Committee which Alan Cotgrove confirmed. Adding to this, Rory Patterson, Corporate Director of Children's Services, explained the Committee would continue to have a role in safeguarding arrangements and scrutiny was expected on the new LSCP. The three partners would need to work together to ensure good safeguarding arrangements and Thurrock Council was well invested in this. Safeguarding was dynamic so it was important for the service to continue to develop and improve as time went on. Strategic approaches had to be adapted with time and opportunities to engage with the local community on safeguarding issues had to be sought to enable the service to influence and shape safeguarding in a meaningful way.

With regards to Ofsted requirements, the Chair asked if the other partners would be inspected. Rory Patterson explained Ofsted would look at children's social care but not the safeguarding arrangements with the partners although there may be some commentary featured on the partnership. The Chair went on to ask if this meant the service had gained more responsibility. Answering

that there was always a lot of responsibility in children's social care, Rory Patterson went on to say developments were always required in safeguarding. Judgements on safeguarding in past Ofsted inspections may have worked in one year but may not necessarily work in the next year, hence the requirement to continually develop.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the Childrens Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered and provided comment on the new safeguarding arrangements.**

**42. Update on Recommendations from Social Care Services Review**

Rory Patterson presented the report which outlined the outcomes of the 6 recommendations that had arisen from the independent investigation into the whistleblowing allegations in 2018. Recommendations 1, 4, 5 and 6 had been implemented, recommendation 2 would be updated at the next Committee meeting and recommendation 3 would be monitored through the new safeguarding arrangements and would be reported back to Committee.

Giving thanks for the report, the Chair asked for a flowchart of the dispute resolution process that was undertaken in recommendation 3.

Councillor Hague said it was reassuring to know that the whistleblowing allegations had been unsubstantiated. He questioned whether there were any concerns on the outcomes that had come out from the investigation. In reply, Rory Patterson said there was always a concern on how people were working 'on the ground'. The service had an effective multi-agency service hub (MASH) who worked closely together and concerns were addressed on differences of opinions. Following up, Councillor Hague sought confirmation on whether the service was confident in 'keeping on top of issues' following the investigation. With a firm yes, Rory Patterson reassured the Committee that the management team had been strengthened to ensure oversight of the service which was important and front line staff were well supported as always. A recent focused visit had also reported that the service was performing well.

On recommendations 2 and 3, Lynda Pritchard noted these would be reported back to Committee. However, she sought clarification on how the Committee would be able to scrutinise the actions within the report as per paragraph 4.1. Rory Patterson explained that the Committee was expected to look at the impact of the service and maintenance required of the service. A rigorous quality assurance programme was in place to audit cases to ensure the service was working well. The Committee was provided with data and performance details of the service to help give the Committee an idea of what was working well in the service enabling them to perform scrutiny duties.

Following up, the Chair suggested the Committee be provided with key performance indicators (KPIs) which would point the Committee to what needed to be looked at. Instead of just reading reports, charts would be useful

to give a clearer picture of the service's performance. Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director of Children and Families, invited the Committee to visit the social care team and suggested the Committee speak with staff. She thought this idea would enable the Committee to gain a deeper understanding of Children's Services and identify what other reports they would wish to see in future committee meetings.

On recommendation 3, Paula Robinson commented that partnership working between social workers and managers required the balancing of needs and working creatively on difference of opinions. She asked how confident staff were in using the dispute resolution process and how well supported they were. Sheila Murphy answered that a number of staff briefings were held in different parts of the building to ensure confidentiality. Sheila Murphy attended these and asked staff to openly raise concerns and issues that they had. Drop-in sessions and listening services were also held and support was offered through her blog. She went on to say staff had approached her with ideas and issues so was confident staff had a number of different ways to contact senior staff members.

On Liquidlogic Children's System (LCS), Paula Robinson agreed that it was a difficult system to use. Rory Patterson explained that the system needed developing but there was no upgrade available. There had been improvements made but work flows within the system could cause delays. The service had tried to cut down on bureaucratic levels to provide more support for social workers and the service was working with colleagues in the eastern region to improve on systems although LCS was one of the better systems.

Referring to paragraph 2.5(b), Councillor Akinbohun questioned whether the service checked if staff read and understood the mini booklet on learning reviews. Alan Cotgrove answered the mini booklets were provided because the learning reviews were usually 30 – 40 pages long so the mini booklets were a summary of these. Booklets were sent to frontline staff and it was the responsibility of the MASH to cascade these. The service could ask for evidence that the mini booklets were cascaded to staff as a way to check that they had read the booklets.

Agreeing with Lynda Pritchard's earlier point on scrutinising actions, Councillor Hague asked how performance management process would be shown as undertaking best practice within KPIs. Rory Patterson replied that comparative exercises were undertaken against neighbouring authorities and local authorities in the eastern region. The results of these exercises encouraged the service to develop further and the service had just agreed to send data to the Department for Education to show how well the service was performing. The gathered data could help the Committee to ask questions and gain an idea of the technical issues within the service. Quality assurance was carried out through audit programmes, the performance of social workers and the success of workshops.

Following up, Councillor Hague said the Committee wanted to be sure that they were performing good scrutiny. Rory Patterson suggested that reports could be brought to Committee on certain subject areas. Further training on KPIs and the service could be provided to the Committee in the new municipal year.

Noting the amount of time spent on data accumulation, Councillor Rigby questioned whether social workers 'crunched numbers'. Giving assurance, Rory Patterson confirmed social workers did not 'crunch numbers'. Social workers would input data into the LSC and other staff members would build a narrative on the given data. Each manager was provided with a dashboard with this narrative and data in their areas of work and social workers were to focus on their work.

#### **RESOLVED:**

**That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the progress made in implementing the recommendations from Whistleblowing Review.**

#### **43. Post - 16 Landscape in Thurrock**

Presented by Kate Kozlova-Boran, Interim Strategic Lead of Learning, the report provided a positive picture of the post-16 landscape. Post-16 year olds included young people who were not in education, employment or training (NEET). The service had made substantial progress in reducing the number of NEET from 13.8% in 2008 to 1.7% in 2018 and young people differed in this timeline. Additional resources may be needed to support the 1.7% NEET.

Councillor Akinbohun questioned how the service was realigning to meet the needs of the NEET in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In answer, Kate Kozlova-Boran said careers advice was provided in 85% of schools which would prevent young people from falling into NEET.

On paragraph 3.1, Councillor Anderson questioned why the figure of 2.0% in August 2018 had increased significantly to 8.8% in one month. Kate Kozlova-Boran explained that it had been due to the arrival of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) in which the service had lost sight of. Local authorities had an obligation to report UASC on their systems within 24 hours and although the UASC had run away and not returned, they would still remain on the system, thus contributing to the jump in percentage.

Councillor Akinbohun asked if students had gone on gain placements in prestigious universities. Kate Kozlova-Boran announced that two young people had received placements in Oxford University and Cambridge University. One had been given a confirmed placement following their A Level results and the other one had been offered a conditional placement dependent on their A Level results in August 2019. Pleased to hear this, Councillor Akinbohun went on to say young people who were not doing so well should also be encouraged and supported. Kate Kozlova-Boran stated

children from the 9 identified disadvantaged wards of Thurrock were supported and the National Outreach Programme also supported these children.

The Chair questioned whether additional funding had been sought yet. Michele Lucas, Interim Assistant Director of Learning, Skills and Inclusion answered successful funding had been secured through the service's 'On Track Thurrock' programme. The service wanted the best for Thurrock's young people and external funding was sought on a regular basis. A report would be brought back on high level apprenticeships.

Lynda Pritchard queried how the Committee could help to further the service's cause in the post-16 landscape and for looked after children (LAC). Kate Kozlova-Boran answered the service had been adding to and realigning services to LAC as well as encouraging them to join the Duke of Edinburgh programme. Specialist tutors were brought in to support LAC who was underachieving. There was also a 'Next Steps' programme for LAC which supported LAC into getting ready for the working world and a range of other programmes were in consideration for LAC.

Following up, Lynda Pritchard asked whether there was 'joined up thinking' on starting the process of LAC programmes earlier and if funding was an issue. Andrea Winstone, School Improvement Manager, replied that the 'Brilliance Club' took disadvantaged children to visit universities. Lynda Pritchard felt that LAC should be high on the priority list and asked for a report to be brought back to the Committee on 'joined up thinking' on LAC programmes.

Councillor Akinbohun suggested the service work with other bodies such as fitness instructors to enable young people to channel their energy to prevent them from committing anti-social behaviour acts. Kate Kozlova-Boran answered that youth clubs were available for young people and there was the Prince's Trust programme for 16-25 year olds. Councillor Akinbohun questioned if youth clubs and the Prince's Trust Programme was promoted enough to young people. In answer, Michele Lucas confirmed that the Youth Offending Service helped with promotion. The service was aware of certain groups of young people and was trying to target these groups to encourage them to progress and move on. There were a range of programmes available to young people through Inspire which could be brought back to the Committee for an update.

#### **RESOLVED:**

- 1.1 That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee endorsed and supported the current approach to the Post-16 provision in Thurrock.**
- 1.2 That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed and evaluated the current approach around the current services to vulnerable, SEND, LAC learners through an innovative**

**individualised, young person led and sustainable targeted support programme.**

#### **44. Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Update**

The report was presented by Malcolm Taylor, Strategic Lead of Inclusion which provided the Committee with an update on the services for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). A self-evaluation on the work undertaken by the service in conjunction with the Thurrock Clinical Commissioning Group had helped to identify the following key areas:

- SEND Population;
- Placement;
- Participation in Decision Making;
- Identifying Children and Young People's Needs;
- Making High Quality Provision; and
- Transition to Adulthood.

Councillor Akinbohun asked for examples of the opportunities available to post-16 SEND children. Malcolm Taylor answered the opportunities included continuing on to college and support to go onto an apprenticeship or other identified training. Education Health and Care (EHC) Plans would ensure needs were met which focused on more than just education as plans included access to employment and other opportunities.

Following up, Councillor Akinbohun queried whether the service spoke with employers to encourage them to give employment opportunities to young people with SEND. Explaining that this was covered in the Equality Act 2010, Malcolm Taylor went on to say this increased opportunities for young people with SEND. The service also worked with Lifestyle Solutions and had local employers who were supportive.

Noting the key priorities were just actions, Lynda Pritchard felt the report was difficult to read and follow as each action point was not set in the next paragraph following a key priority. Malcolm Taylor explained that the key priorities related to the strategy and the report gave a summary of the self-evaluation with identified action points.

Praising the service on the overall good improvement, the Chair asked if there was a performance target for the service to work toward. Malcolm Taylor answered that Thurrock has always been a high performing local authority and there had been some concern on completing a high target figure with the 20 week timeframe for children and young people with SEND on EHC plans. Parents and carers wished for plans to carry on beyond the 20 week target and the service worked with parents and young people to ensure a positive outcome.

**RESOLVED:**

**That Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the self – evaluation of the support for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.**

**45. Update on Brighter Futures Children's Centres Service**

Prior to the start of the report, Wendy Le, Democratic Services Officer, gave a brief outline of the Committee's site visits to the Tilbury Children's Centre on 21 January 2019 and 11 February 2019. In both site visits, the Committee was given a tour of the centre and had observed a Stay and Play session taking place. Play workers were on hand to support children and parents playing together. Tilbury Children's Centre was the biggest Children's Centre but other Children's Centres were just as busy despite the size.

The Update on Brighter Futures Children's Centres Service report was presented by Andrea Winstone which focussed on the improvements made to the Children's Centres service following a review in January 2017. Services had always been available to parents with children up to the age of 5 but the new delivery model extended support to parents with children up to the age of 11. New services were designed as a result. There are a number of services that could be developed within the Children's Centres and the service continued to look for new partners to deliver these services.

Nicola Cranch, Parent Governor Representative, mentioned that she had used Children's Centres in the past and had attended short term courses which had resulted in poor retention rates. Andrea Winstone explained that Children's Centres had improved in the last couple of years. Continuing on, Nicola Cranch thought it was shocking that 69% of parents felt confident in giving their children a healthy snack after attending a course on healthy eating. Paula Robinson said that this could be due to people's understanding as everyone understood learning differently. Andrea Winstone added that parents attended the course without much prior knowledge on the topic so for 69% of those that had attended to have gained confidence through the learning was good.

The Chair declared a non-pecuniary interest due to her being a member of the Thameside Advisory Board.

Lynda Pritchard was pleased to see an improvement on the structure of programmes run and the buildings of Children's Centres. There was a good relationship between schools and Children's Centres. Agreeing with this, Councillor Hague felt it was important for Children's Centres to support parents with children from birth to provide them with support and skills. Councillor Hague went on to ask how people were signposted to a Children's Centre. Andrea Winstone explained that once children were registered with a health visitor, this would also register them with a Children's Centre. Monthly timetables were sent out with the month's scheduled programmes and Children's Centres worked with 45 different partners. Referrals also came from schools, doctors and MASH.

Commenting on the success of the Children's Centres, Paula Robinson advised the service not to overload staff with work. Andrea Winstone answered that Parental Outreach Workers (POW) were able to share the workload to ensure no referrals were turned away. For people waiting for a POW, they were assigned to someone until a POW was available.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the improvements to the Brighter Futures Children's Centre Services.**

**46. Update Report On Child Sexual Exploitation and Missing Children**

Claire Pascoe presented the report which outlined the actions being undertaken by Thurrock Social Care in their response to child sexual exploitation (CSE) and associated exploitative harm. The service had taken significant steps to identify and tackle CSE through awareness training within the Council and local community. For young people and children who decline to engage with statutory services, Operation Goldcrest will, as of April 2019, be piloted to support these young people aged 13 – 18. The pilot is planned to run for 12 to 18 months and if successful, it would be rolled out throughout Essex and potentially nationally. Claire Pascoe recommended that the Committee read the embedded link in paragraph 8.

Councillor Akinbohun queried the percentage of children that confided in the service. Claire Pascoe answered that the statistics were hard to gather because children may confide in different people and help services. People had to be aware of the type of language used towards children and their responses to children who were confiding in them which was what the service was focusing on. This could set the conditions in how children felt in confiding in people.

Councillor Hague asked how information was shared nationally. Responding that the government system had no method to track information, Claire Pascoe went on to say this was a concerning issue. She could only speak on a local level in that the service shared information through the relevant pathways and reported to the National Crime Agency who provided annual statistics around trafficking referrals to the National Referral Mechanism, (NRM), from public bodies, including Local Authorities. Councillor Hague went on to ask what procedures were being looked at to share information nationally. Claire Pascoe answered that the government was aware of the issue and was looking into a solution. There were issues in a procedure particularly in the area of county lines.

*The Committee agreed to suspend standing orders to 21.45 to enable the Committee to finish the agenda.*

On the figures given on paragraph 3.3.1, Councillor Anderson questioned how the figures had fared historically. Claire Pascoe replied that the given figures was an area to develop on and had appeared to have increased. A CSE

assessment tool was used to assess CSE and child criminal exploitation (CCE) and currently, the main point was to ensure risks were spotted and perpetrators were targeted.

On spotting risks, Rory Patterson stated that young social workers were taught to identify the signs of abuse. He went on to say that there was a positivity behind the gathered data as it helped agencies to identify issues and trends which could be joined up to missing children data. Risks were no longer looked at within families only as was the traditional method but instead peer groups, external surroundings and other families had to be looked at. Referring back to an earlier point, Rory Patterson reiterated that safeguarding approaches had to be dynamic and other factors had to be taken into consideration.

Councillor Akinbohun asked how the service could benefit non English speakers. Claire Pascoe explained that translators were used and with the project on raising awareness with hotel staff, interpreters were being considered as local hotels had a diverse employment of staff who spoke different languages. Councillor Akinbohun went on to suggest the service consider employing staff within the service who spoke the same language to ensure trust and to encourage the hotel staff to speak openly with people working within the service. Claire Pascoe answered that this could be considered as the Council had a diverse workforce. Adding to this, Paula Robinson explained that social workers were trained to build relationships and despite cultural and language differences, they were still able to build trust.

The Chair felt it was reassuring for the Council to have a dedicated CSE Officer employed. She went to ask if the service worked together with the LSCP. Alan Cotgrove answered that Claire Pascoe attended MASH meetings and also linked in with the Southend, Essex and Thurrock group and pan Essex. Rory Patterson added that he chaired the gang related group in the Council, the operational arm of which Claire Pascoe also attended.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the work being carried out by Children's Social Care to tackle Child Sexual Exploitation and Missing Children.**

**47. Work Programme**

The Committee discussed reducing the agenda down in future meetings in the new municipal year to enable the Committee to spend more time on items to be covered and analysed. It would be best to focus on key areas.

**The meeting finished at 9.38 pm**

Approved as a true and correct record

**CHAIR**

**DATE**

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