

## **Minutes of the Meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 2 July 2019 at 7.00 pm**

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**Present:** Councillors Bukky Okunade (Chair), Jennifer Smith (Vice-Chair), Abbie Akinbohun and Alex Anderson

Lynda Pritchard, Church of England Representative  
Kim James, Chief Operating Officer, HealthWatch Thurrock  
Nicola Cranch, Parent Governor Representative  
Paula Robinson, Parent Governor Representative

**Apologies:** Councillors Garry Hague and Elizabeth Rigby

**In attendance:**

Adam Shea, Youth Cabinet Member  
Joshua Aldwinckle-Povey, Youth Cabinet Member  
Lucia Lucioni, Youth Cabinet Member  
Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health/Interim Director of Children's Services  
Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director of Children's Services  
Michele Lucas, Assistant Director of Education and Skills  
Sue Green, Strategic Lead of Children's Commissioning and Service Transformation  
Alan Cotgrove, Local Safeguarding Children's Partnership Business Manager  
Daniel Jones, Service Manager for Adoption, Fostering and Placements  
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.

**1. Minutes**

The minutes of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 12 February 2019 were approved as a true and correct record.

**2. Items of Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

**3. Declaration of Interests**

The Church of England Representative, Lynda Pritchard, declared a non-pecuniary interest in that she was working with SEND children on a temporary basis and she also worked with private fostering agencies.

The Vice-Chair declared a non-pecuniary interest in that she worked in primary education that involved SEND children.

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

The report was presented by Alan Cotgrove, Local Safeguarding Children's Partnership (LSCP) Business Manager. As mentioned at the last Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 12 February 2019, Alan Cotgrove reminded the Committee that the previous safeguarding arrangements that was known as Local Safeguarding Children's Board had ceased to exist. It was replaced by the LSCP and there was no longer a requirement for an independent Chair. Regular workshops were held with partner agencies.

Alan Cotgrove guided the Committee through the presentation of the new arrangements attached in appendix 1.

Regarding previous safeguarding arrangements, the Chair understood there had been regular board meetings before. She questioned what the procedures were for the new arrangements. Referring to page 30 of the agenda, Alan Cotgrove indicated how the new structure was set out and explained that different partner agencies were invited to relevant meetings and core partners were invited to all meetings.

Councillor Anderson asked if there was feedback given from the workshops for partner agencies. Alan Cotgrove confirmed that feedback was given from agencies that attended the workshops and some of these included suggestions on other agencies to include. The feedback from workshops was incorporated into the LSCP's delivery plan and was adapted when needed.

Referring to recommendation 1.4 of the report, Lynda Pritchard questioned how the Committee would be able to analyse the effectiveness of the LSCP's plan if the Committee did not have sight of it yet. Alan Cotgrove explained that the delivery plan would be signed off by partners tomorrow and the plan would be brought to the next Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be shared. The Committee would analyse the plan against the LSCP's set criteria. Lynda Pritchard went on to ask how the Committee could analyse the plan impartially if it was to be analysed against the LSCP's set criteria. Alan Cotgrove explained that the set of criteria was a result of the partnership's work and if the Committee felt the plan did not meet the requirements, the LSCP would review their delivery plan.

Youth Cabinet Representative, Joshua Aldwinckle-Povey, asked if the LSCP was satisfied with the structure of the partnership and whether it was clear enough for the Committee to understand. In response, Alan Cotgrove said the structure was clear and it had been published on the LSCP's website before it was brought to the Committee. The structure follow LSCP processes and the Council's Constitution and would test any questions raised. He was confident the structure was right and welcomed feedback from all relevant parties.

Regarding the 3 partners in the LSCP, the Chair queried if they were inspected by the relevant body. Alan Cotgrove stated that the new partnership would not be inspected by Ofsted and was looking to the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee to support the scrutiny of the LSCP to ensure it was running efficiently. As a safeguarding agency, the LSCP supported Ofsted in their inspections of the Council's Children's Services but the LSCP themselves were not part of the inspection. Adding to this, Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director of Children's Services, said that Ofsted would not inspect the LSCP but would expect the service's front line staff to understand the purpose of the LSCP. The Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health, Roger Harris, also added that the partner agencies would be inspected by their relevant bodies such as Care Quality Commission and safeguarding was a part of that inspection.

On knife crime, Councillor Akinbohun asked if there was guidance or a prevention programme from the LSCP for young people. Alan Cotgrove answered that the LSCP was reviewing statistics to obtain the required information. There were strategic and support groups in place to train young people on the dangers of knives and prevent knife crimes. The LSCP had also included this in their recent Walk Online roadshow events for years 5 and 6 to raise awareness. Councillor Akinbohun commented that the problem was the use of drugs for some young people and questioned how this could be tackled in Thurrock. Alan Cotgrove explained that this issue was within the remit of Thurrock's Community Safety Partnership (TCSP) and that drug abuse was high on the agenda for TCSP. The police was also working on the issue and worked with the TCSP on a strategy.

The Chair thanked Councillor Akinbohun for bringing up the issue of drug abuse and said it was disheartening to hear about the knife crimes that had been happening in London.

#### **RESOLVED:**

- 1.1 That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the changes to multi agency safeguarding children arrangements in Thurrock. From 7 May 2019.**
- 1.2 That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee receive a quarterly report from the Thurrock LSCP.**
- 1.3 That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee receive an Annual report from the Thurrock LSCP.**
- 1.4 That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered and provided comment on the new safeguarding arrangements effectiveness.**

#### **5. Youth Cabinet Update**

The Youth Cabinet gave the following update:

- That the Youth Cabinet had been in talks with intu Lakeside on the creation of a hub in the shopping centre for young people.
- The Youth Cabinet had been raising awareness on knife crime.
- The Youth Cabinet had participated in a conference competition and came runner up to first place.
- The Youth Cabinet had been working with Parliament on 'Make Your Mark' papers and would be sending these out to schools in September.

Paula Robinson, Parent Governor Representative, queried how the Youth Cabinet was encouraging other ethnicities to join and whether there were any black children in the Youth Cabinet. The Youth Cabinet answered that the vast majority of the Youth Cabinet was elected by the school communities. The elected were chosen based on personalities and the Youth Cabinet was quite diverse. There were a few black children in the Youth Cabinet and welcomed more to join.

Michele Lucas, Assistant Director of Education and Skills, asked if the Youth Cabinet had decided on their conference themes for their yearly conference yet. The Youth Cabinet Representative, Adam Shea, answered that conference planning would begin in September and the themes would be considered then.

Mentioning a recent large youth hub opening in London Barking and Dagenham, Paula Robinson, questioned whether a similar sized hub would also open in Thurrock. Joshua Aldwinckle-Povey answered that this type of project was for the youth services team as a whole.

Councillor Akinbohun asked how the Youth Cabinet could increase awareness of their work. The Youth Cabinet explained that awareness was raised through the yearly Youth Cabinet conference and that they had been doing well in engaging with schools over the past few years. They relied on the good will of schools to promote the Youth Cabinet to their students and the Youth Cabinet promoted themselves as best as possible with the resources they had.

## **6. SEND Inspection Outcome**

Presented by Michele Lucas, the report outlined the recent Ofsted inspection of the SEND services in Children's Services. The inspection had identified a number of strengths but also the weaknesses listed on page 43 of the agenda. The service had already begun the Draft Written Statement of Actions (WSOA) to address these weaknesses and would be sent out to the relevant partners for review before submission to Ofsted which was due for 12 August 2019. Once the WSoA was agreed by Ofsted, the service would be within the 18 month timeframe for Ofsted to come back for inspection.

Pointing out paragraph 2.4, the Chair sought clarification on whether it was already within the rights of parents to request Education, Health and Care

Plans (EHCP). Confirming this was the case, Michele Lucas went on to say that in reviews, the EHCP may not be required at that point because additional support was needed. Through discussions with parents, it would be identified whether an EHCP was needed or whether the child could benefit from additional support from other services.

Noting the increased creased staffing capacity mentioned in paragraph 3.4, the Chair asked if enough training was provided to staff. In response, Michele Lucas said there training opportunities in place for staff and new staff members were trained. The service also looked into the plans of how other Local Authorities undertook EHCPs and the service was willing to invest in training to ensure staff were ready and fully trained.

On the quality of EHCPs, Paula Robinson queried how an EHCP could be corrected if it was not of a certain standard. Explaining that not all EHCPs had been identified as of a poor standard through the inspection, Michele Lucas went on to explain that some areas within the plans did not meet expectations. These may have been due to a transfer of plans such as when a child had additional support in primary school but parents were concerned on whether the support would still be there when their child transferred into secondary school. There was a robust process in place but if SEN support was needed, then an EHCP was needed. She continued on saying that there was a culture shift in parents who recognised when support was needed for their child and this was a part of the service ensuring they engaged with communities to raise awareness.

On the Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Service (EWMHS), Joshua Aldwinckle-Povey asked if there were plans in place to protect this service for SEND. Michele Lucas replied that the service was looking to develop the EWMHS further and despite focussing on the 3 areas of weaknesses identified by Ofsted, the service would not be losing focus on other areas within the service. The identified strengths from the Ofsted inspection would continue to develop, for example, Early Years had been identified as a strength and the service could look into this to see where the strength was and if it could be developed further to work across the phases from Early Years to Primary education.

Noting that Ofsted had identified a repeat of Level 1 courses in young people with SEND between the ages of 19 – 25 years old, Joshua Aldwinckle-Povey questioned how this issue was being addressed as it was concerning to the Youth Cabinet. Michele Lucas answered that the Council had agreed for the service to hire 2 additional members of staff to help young people into adulthood. These staff members would liaise with organisations such as Inspire and into the wider community to ensure all resources were available to help young people. Joshua Aldwinckle-Povey asked how young people could be involved in the decision making process of the services that they were a part of. Announcing that the service had just developed an engagement and participation plan, Michele Lucas went on to say that the plan was a part of the Bright Futures Network and could bring this to the Youth Cabinet for discussion.

In regards to record keeping, Nicola Cranch, Parent Governor Representative, asked whether the technology used was sufficient enough for this task. Michele Lucas answered that the service was looking at the systems and programmes used across the service and training and issues with systems would form part of the WSoA.

On the main findings on page 50, the Chair noted that bullet number 2 highlighted a lack of response or no response from the team. She mentioned that she had experience of this as well in the past and parents had contacted her with these issues too. The Chair went on to question how this issue will be resolved. Answering that there would additional capacity in staff to cover calls, Michele Lucas said that the education and skills team had undertaken training to ensure the response times were improved. She sympathised with parents' frustration and had increased the staff numbers to cover the phones and the service ensured the website was up to date with response timelines.

Regarding the WSoA, the Chair suggested holding an extraordinary meeting for the Committee to have sight of the draft before its submission to Ofsted on 12 August 2019. The Democratic Services Officer, Wendy Le, proposed the date of 25 July 2019 to hold this meeting to which the Committee agreed on. Roger Harris explained that the WSoA would not be a final document for the 25 July 2019 meeting date but would be in its draft form. The progress of the WSoA would also be brought back to Committee on 8 October 2019 and it would become a standing item on the work programme going forward to ensure the Committee was monitoring the progress.

#### **RESOLVED:**

- 1.1 That O&S to note the work that has been undertaken to prepare our statement of action as a result of the result SEND inspection.**
- 1.2 That O&S to monitor the progress of the statement of action in preparation for our re-inspection.**

#### **7. Semi Independent Supported Accommodation Sufficiency**

The report was presented by Sue Green, Strategic Lead of Children's Commissioning and Service Transformation which outlined the work that had been undertaken to ensure that the placements provided were of a good quality. As a part of the ongoing work to increase the sufficiency of provision, the service had identified the following commissioning intentions highlighted in paragraph 3.10 of the report.

Noting that there had been an increase in the use of accommodation 30 miles away from Thurrock, the Chair questioned the reason for this increase. Sue Green answered that the increase was due to an increase in needs and a lack of availability and providers in Thurrock to meet those needs.

Referring to page 63, the Chair noted that out of 53 potential providers, 40 of these had failed. She asked why these providers had failed and what the service was doing to resolve this. In response, Sue Green said that the providers may not have been local providers because the advert for providers was sent out nationally with a set criteria. The failed providers would have failed because the set criteria was not met and some providers were identified as set up for financial gain e.g. moving from one unrelated industry into the care industry. In the past, other local authorities may have accepted these providers but Thurrock had set their standards high and for genuine providers who wished to move into the industry, Thurrock would be able to provide support if needed.

Pointing out paragraph 5.2 of the report, the Youth Cabinet Representative, Lucia Lucioni, questioned which young people's views would be gathered and what these would entail. Sue Green replied that views were gathered from young people who may not be in accommodation yet and it could be from young people who were leaving accommodation. Consultation responses were used to analyse what was working well in accommodation and where improvements were needed. The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) was reviewing the needs of Children Looked After (CLA) that linked into health and a range of other areas to learn what was important to young people.

To further understanding of semi-independent accommodation, Lynda Pritchard asked if she could obtain more information on the topic. She understood young people leaving care would require support and questioned if a CLA could remain in care such as in their current foster home if the foster carer agreed. Sue Green replied that she could circulate further information on the different types of accommodation for young care leavers. Adding to this, Daniel Jones, Service Manager of Adoption, Fostering and Placements, said that for young people in placements, it was not fostering but a young person could stay in that placement until 21 or 22 years of age if they were still in education and if the carer agreed to it.

Referring to paragraph 3.8, Councillor Anderson noted that in serious cases, a young person would be moved and he questioned if there was a particular issue in this area. Sue Green answered that particular months has had a high number of terminations of providers but this was due to the high standards set by the service. The last 5 months had a lower number of terminations of providers and there was a robust process on quality issues.

Nicola Cranch asked if young people in supported accommodation were supported and taught how to manage finances and budgets. Daniel Jones confirmed that young people were given support in managing their finances and support was provided until they were no longer in care and it would be dependent on how much support a young person needed.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1.1 That members noted the progress made to date to increase the provision of good quality semi-independent accommodation.**
- 1.2 That members agreed the commissioning priorities outlined in paragraph 3.10.**

## **8. Fostering and Adoption Annual Panel Report**

Presented by Daniel Jones, the report provided an update on Thurrock's Adoption and Fostering Panel which was attached as appendix 1.

The Chair mentioned that she used to be on the fostering panel and it was good to see the fostering and adoption panel had merged as one. She questioned if the merger had increased capacity and if it was cost efficient. Daniel Jones replied that there was an increase in capacity but the merger did not necessarily save much on costs.

### **RESOLVED:**

- 1.1 That the members of the Committee were informed about the function and activities of Thurrock's Adoption and Fostering Panel.**

## **9. Children's Social Care Performance Report**

The report was presented by Sheila Murphy and outlined the performance in Children's Social Care which has been good and continued in areas such as assessments despite an increase in demand.

Regarding an article that was released in a local newspaper today, Sheila Murphy gave assurance to Members that Thurrock did not have 700 CLA and have never had 700 CLA before, there were around 290 CLA in Thurrock. Referring to paragraph 3.4 of the report, she explained that this referred to the number of incidences that CLA went missing and not the number of individual children. The number of missing incidences was 670 for 2018/19 and would often be the same children that had repeat missing incidences and each missing incident was recorded which added to the number of missing incidences. She understood the article had changed the headline from number of missing children to missing incidences which for number of incidences was correct.

Sheila Murphy went on to say that the graph showed the number of missing incidences had been decreasing throughout the year and the service had been working hard on this by looking into why CLA went missing. CLA usually went missing for an hour or an hour and a half, not days but carers were required to follow the Council's procedures if CLA went missing e.g. if a child was not home by an agreed time and 10 minutes after this time, the carer was expected to report them as missing and to continue to update until the child was found or returned home. Once a child returned home, a return home interview would be held with the child through a commissioned service.

Continuing on, Sheila Murphy said the service received reports and updates everyday on the number of children that was missing and the number of children that had been found or returned home. The statistics of Thurrock's missing children for that day (2 July 2019) was none missing. The average national missing incidences rate was 6.1 and Thurrock was at 6.6 which was slightly higher than the average national but even where CLA had only been missing for half an hour, the service still wished to know where their CLA had been. Carers were also reminded to be aware of a child's surroundings and appearance when they returned home e.g. if they might have obtained new clothing or items, if they looked tired or unkempt etc.

The Chair was pleased to hear that carers were trained, particularly in areas such as Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE). She questioned if carers had previously informed the service of concerns of CLA. In answer, Daniel Jones said the importance of missing procedures were highlighted to carers who were expected to follow these. Carers should also be feeding back to the emergency team and raise concerns to the CLA's social worker as well.

Councillor Akinbohun asked if there had been incidences where a child had not been found or did not return home. Sheila Murphy replied that there had been no such incidences and CLAs were usually missing for short periods of time. Following up, the Chair asked if any Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) had gone missing before and not been found. Sheila Murphy answered that in the past, this had been the case on a few occasions where all efforts to find the missing UASC had been exhausted but was still not found. Currently, there were no missing CLA UASC and any that had come into Thurrock had been moved to the eastern regions following the protocol that the service had in place.

#### **RESOLVED:**

**1.1 That members commented on the areas of improvement in Children's Social Care and work undertaken to manage demand for statutory social care services.**

### **10. Work Programme**

Wendy Le announced that the work programme had received extra reports for the meeting for 8 October 2019 which were:

- 2018/19 Annual Complaints and Representations Report
- Written Statement of Actions Progress Review
- Education Attainment.

This brought a total number of 11 reports for the 8 October 2019 meeting.

The Committee discussed reducing the amount of reports and moving some to later dates. It was agreed that:

- The Improving Primary School KPIs report be incorporated into the Education Attainment report which would be moved to 3 December 2019; and
- The Items Raised by LSCP and the LSCP Business Plan report be merged into one report.

The work programme was also updated to include the Written Statement of Actions Update as a standing item to enable the Committee to monitor these actions.

The Extraordinary meeting for 25 July 2019 to review the Draft Written Statement of Actions was also included in the work programme.

**The meeting finished at 9.00 pm**

Approved as a true and correct record

**CHAIR**

**DATE**

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact  
Democratic Services at [Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk)**