

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday, 17 March 2021 at 6.00 pm via Remote Meeting

Present: Councillors C Cassar, I T W Fletcher, E J Greenaway, J Jones, A D McClements (Chair), H Rhodes and K T Tomlinson.
Co-optees: S Fikeis and M Ward

Also Present: Councillor S A W Reynolds

In Attendance: F Bottrill (Partnership Manager), A Lowe (Associate Director: Policy and Governance), A Mason (Independent Chair, Telford & Wrekin Safeguarding Partnership), P Mitchell (Democracy Officer), K Robinson (Democracy Officer (Scrutiny))

Apologies: Councillors L Fowler and V J Holt

14 Declarations of Interest

None.

15 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting held on 16 December 2020 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

16 Telford & Wrekin Local Safeguarding Children Board Annual Report 2018/19

The Committee received the report of the Independent Chair of the Telford & Wrekin Local Safeguarding Children Board. It was noted that the body no longer existed and had been succeeded by the Telford & Wrekin Safeguarding Partnership.

The report was for the 2018-19 and was the final report under the previous safeguarding arrangements. It was a retrospective report and had been approved by the Board in May 2020. For twelve months, the Safeguarding Partnership had been focussed on ensuring safeguarding during the pandemic.

One of the key takeaways from the report was the implementation of a West Midlands wide approach to safeguarding. Consistent procedures had been implemented across the region; this was helpful for the Police who often had to work across areas and had previously had to tailor their work to suit each

local safeguarding board. The region wide consistency helped to reduce workloads.

The Board was also proud of the work it had carried out in schools; involving children in safeguarding and ensuring their voices were heard. This scheme had been nationally recognised for its child centric, child led, approach. Work with designated safeguarding leads in school had been extended to include designated governors.

The report also recognised the importance of early support; the earlier work was done with families the better. This initiative had led to the adoption of the family safeguarding model in Telford & Wrekin.

Following the 2018-19 year, a legislative change meant that the Board was abolished and a safeguarding partnership established in its place. The new arrangements ensured that the three constitutive partners held equal responsibility for running and funding the partnership. The next annual report would reflect the new arrangements.

Members posed a number of questions:

The lay member of the Board had stepped down, were there any others?

The Board had attempted to find other but had been unsuccessful; they had then waited to find out what the new arrangements for the Board would be following the change in legislation. Under the new arrangements, a lay member was not required.

The number of looked after children had increased, how was the situation? Had the pandemic played a role in increasing the figures?

There was no evidence at that time that the pandemic had led to an increase in the numbers of looked after children. Reducing the numbers was important and was one of the reasons that they had committed to the family safeguarding model. When it had been introduced in Hertfordshire the number of looked after children had decreased significantly. The key aspect of this was bringing people together to support families at an early stage, engaging with them. The policy was about working with families; families welcomed this and would benefit from it. If Telford & Wrekin could replicate the Hertfordshire's results then it was hoped that the number of looked after children would fall.

Was Telford prepared for the challenges that would come as a result of the pandemic?

From the start of the pandemic, the Safeguarding Executive had asked all partners to provide updates on how they were coping with safeguarding in the changed circumstances. There had been a significant amount of work within education to contact at risk children. There was evidence that many children returning to school had mental health issues, schools had prepared for this. At the beginning of the pandemic, the Independent Chair had been asked by the Executive of the Partnership to carry out research on schools preparedness. He had been reassured and impressed by his findings.

The report was based on figures from 2017, was there a risk of the Committee losing touch with reality?

The report was only given final approval in December 2020 because of the pandemic; the 2019-2020 report would be timelier and was expected to be published in May 2021.

Members sought information on domestic abuse throughout the pandemic.

The Partnership was aware that that local contact with domestic abuse services had increased but there had not been an increased demand for services. This was at odds with the national picture but it may change. There was often a time lag in reporting with incidences reaching 20 cases before being reported.

What work was being done to build confidence in services?

Social workers were acutely aware of the challenges posed by reluctance to come forward. It was hoped that the new family safeguarding model would encourage families to engage, the model started from the premise of raising confidence in Authorities and working in cooperation with families. Family safeguarding would encourage a positive form of engagement and help to reach cases that did not meet legal thresholds for court proceeding.

Was the mechanism for temporary refuge and safety working?

There was capacity through Family Connect, where people were struggling to get through to services it was imperative to find out who it was they had spoken to. Family Connect were a service that could and did help people, they help and they did not let people fall through the cracks.

Had there been an increased number of young people in the justice system during the pandemic?

The Independent Chair did not have an up to date figure but would be happy to discuss this at a later meeting.

The Committee thanked the Independent Chair of the Telford & Wrekin Safeguarding Children Board and the Partnership Manager for their attendance and answering Members' questions. Members would be interested in hearing from the TWSCB's successor in the coming municipal year.

17 Chair's Update

Members were informed that the School Street Working Group had now been established and was expected to meet for the first time on 30 March 2021.

The meeting ended at 6.49 pm

Chairman:

Date: Wednesday, 14 July 2021