

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday, 3 September 2020 at 6.00 pm in Remote Meeting

Present: Councillors M Boylan, I T W Fletcher, E J Greenaway, V J Holt, J Jones, A D McClements (Chair) and H Rhodes.

Also Present: Councillor S A W Reynolds

In Attendance: Jo Britton (Executive Director for Children's Safeguarding & Family Support), C Jones (Executive Director for Children's & Family Services), D Knibbs (Interim Director for Children's Safeguarding and Family Support), A Lowe (Associate Director for Policy and Governance), and K Robinson (Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer)

Apologies: L Fowler and C Morgan

2 Declarations of Interest

None.

3 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting held on 30 January 2020 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

4 Terms of Reference

RESOLVED – that the Terms of Reference be approved.

5 Scrutiny Review of the Ofsted Report and Action Plan 2020

The Committee received the report of the Executive Director for Children's and Family Services. It was noted that this meeting had been delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic; the meeting had been scheduled for April 2020. Members heard that the result of the report was thanks to the Council's dedication to young people and their families, with dedicated staff and strong yearly investment in services; the Authority had delivered improvement and investment thanks to a transformative vision. The Committee also heard that the level of improvement reported by Ofsted made it the only Local Authority in the West Midlands to receive an Outstanding rating and the only authority outside of London to improve from Needs Improvement to Outstanding.

There remained scope for improvement, with the report noting the quality of recording in children's plans and at key management decision points. This point had been addressed in the Council's Action Plan which set out how the

Authority intended to address the issue. Significant work had been undertaken since the inspection to improve, which included having formal minutes taken at meetings. Changes made under the Action Plan would remain under review to monitor the Council's progress and to ensure that the actions had the intended effect.

Members offered their congratulations to all involved in the Ofsted report and noted the significant improvement that it recognised.

Members asked a range of questions, as follows -
How do we maintain the Borough's Outstanding status?

The Council would have to maintain its relentless view to improvement. Officers were exceptionally pleased with the report, they acknowledged that they must continue to strive for improvement, which was to be achieved through a strong focus on services, listening carefully to the voices of children and young people, and working closely with staff. Officers were also working hard on new initiatives and new methods of communication.

How big a part did support from partner organisations play in the report? There had been issues with accessing support, how had this improved?

The Council had worked hard with partners to develop services and challenge each other. Children benefited from a wide range of services provided by various partners that worked together to provide the necessary report. A new partnership panel received referrals and worked to find the best solutions. Many needs could be met in schools with the correct intervention and with consultation and guidance between agencies.

What effect had COVID-19 had on progress? Had there been an increase in numbers of children in care?

There had been a significant impact on the lives of children and families due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Council had carried out a risk assessment of children's cases in a timely manner, continued contact through social care staff and social workers, and reviewed the risk rankings regularly. Before in person visits took place, risk assessments had been undertaken but the Council had also been working virtually. Engagement with children and young people via digital means had been successful with children and young people finding it a more accessible approach.

There had been a significant communications campaign from the Council targeting children and young people.

The number of children in care had been steady throughout lockdown and had not decreased. There had been a slight increase in numbers as the courts reopened but this was expected to stabilise.

Members asked Officers for more information about domestic abuse work during the pandemic.

The communications campaign had been to make the Council more accessible to young people and to allow them to contact the Council. Assessments were still taking place, the Authority had been engaging with expectant mothers as it usually would, and supporting those where there may have been concerns. Face-to-face visits had continued with risk assessments undertaken and PPE in use. The Council was expecting to hear more from young people as they returned to schools. There were challenges ahead but the Council had worked hard to maintain its services throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

It was agreed that a meeting to monitor the Action Plan would be held in the early part of 2021.

6 Chair's Update

The Chair raised the work programme and invited the Associate Director: Policy and Governance to discuss the issue. The Associate Director recommended changes to a number of items, to which the Committee agreed; the redrafted work programme incorporating the changes would be brought to the next meeting of the Committee.

The meeting ended at 7.05 pm

Chairman:

Date: Wednesday, 16 December 2020