

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Children and Young People Select Committee held in the Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk on Tuesday 14th October 2014 at 2.00p.m.

PRESENT: County Councillor P. Jones (Chairman)

County Councillors: D. Blakebrough, P.S. Farley, L. Guppy and M. Powell

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

County Councillors G. Burrows, S. Howarth and V.E. Smith.

Ms. N. Jenkins - Wales Audit Office

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Mr. S. Burch - Chief Officer for Social Care and Health
Ms. J. Rodgers - Safeguarding Service Manager
Ms. T. Jelfs - Head of Children's Services
Ms. G. Cox - Service Manager, Children's Services
Ms. H. Illett - Scrutiny Manager
Mrs. S. King - Senior Democratic Services Officer

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.- Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors P. Clarke, R.G. Harris, D.W.H. Jones, A. Webb, Revd. Dr. S. James and Mr. K. Plow.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2.- There were no Declarations of Interest.

WAO REPORT ON SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN

3.- We received a presentation on Corporate Arrangements to Support Safeguarding of Children from Non Jenkins of the Wales Audit Office. The report was based on work carried out by the WAO across Wales. The scope of the study was an examination of what actions local authorities took to seek assurance that their arrangements to support safeguarding were effective.

Key questions of the study were as follows:

- Did councils' governance and management arrangements provide assurance that children were safeguarded?

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- Were there clear governance, accountability and management arrangements for overseeing whether the council was meeting its safeguarding responsibilities to children?
- Was the council monitoring and evaluating appropriate information, which provided assurance that it was meeting its safeguarding responsibilities to children?
- Was there evidence that assurance systems were operating effectively?

We were informed that the key message from the study was that there were some weaknesses in the Council's arrangements to support the safeguarding of children that must be addressed. The following proposals for improvement were made:

- Review the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy to ensure it adequately covered all Council services
- Ensure development of the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Unit enabled it to deliver its planned objectives
- Improve the range, quality and coverage of safeguarding performance reporting to provide adequate assurance that systems were working effectively

Following the presentation the following points were noted:

- In order to make a comparison between MCC and the rest of Wales we were advised to wait to receive the National Summary.

The Chairman thanked the officer for the report.

PERFORMANCE ON SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN

4.- We received three reports from the Safeguarding Service Manager, being:

- Strategic Overview – to provide a narrative on key areas of safeguarding and how these are evaluated.
- Performance Scorecard – to show evidence base on which evaluation statements are made.
- Service Improvement Plan – to show how the information is followed through.

During discussion following the presentation we noted:

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- With regards to training there was a need to identify who, across the Authority need training.
- Level 4 training would focus around leaders, governors and elected members.
- Level 3 training would focus on specific areas of interest for practitioners working with complex safeguarding and child protection.
- It was necessary to ensure there was an understanding of the importance of safeguarding. At this point the training would have the desired effect.
- Level 2 training targeted designated officers, such as decision makers within Adult Services or Passenger Transport. It would cover training needs regarding how and when to make referrals.
- Level 1 training targeted all individuals who may come into contact with children and families.
- The performance information showed a good detailed range of where issues were arising from.
- Concerns lay where a person had completed training and may still be a danger to children. The Committee were informed that any concerns referred to the Lead Officer for Safeguarding and Education would be resolved effectively. Developing a dialogue over a period of time was the best way to ensure safeguarding.
- One aim for the audit this year was to engage with voluntary organisations. There have been links developed with GAVO and TVA in Torfaen. Level one information would be accessible online for voluntary organisations.
- With regards to cross border issues, operational level links are in place. Operational processes should give warning of emerging issues.

The Chair thanks the officers for the report.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR LAC INSPECTION

5.- We received a report on the CSSIW Inspection report and the Children's Services response. The purpose of the report was to ensure effective scrutiny of the CSSIW inspection report into the "safeguarding and planning of looked after children and care leavers who exhibit vulnerable or risky behaviours".

The report provided an overview of inspection findings in respect of:

- Safeguarding and care planning of looked after children and care leavers who exhibited vulnerable or risky behaviour, within Monmouthshire County Council.

The inspection was carried out as part of Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) national thematic inspection programme. The aim of the national inspection was to assess the quality of care planning across Wales and whether it effectively:

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- Supported and protected looked after children and care leavers;
- Identified and managed the vulnerabilities and risky behaviour of looked after children and care leavers;
- Promoted rights based practice and the voice of the child;
- Promoted improved outcomes for looked after children and care leavers;
- Promoted compliance with policy and guidance

Following the presentation we noted the following points:

- Any unsatisfactory points were noted to senior officers who would be given a period of time to make improvements.
- The South East Wales Safeguarding Children's Board was a large regional board including representatives from the police service, health service and the five Local Authorities. The Board developed a strategy and identified four key areas. The Board looked at evidence and decided which area to focus on.
- It was important to give young people respect and enable their voices to be heard. Care leavers gave particularly helpful insight into progress made. An effective way to ensure voices were heard was to establish a mentoring scheme, where care leavers were trained to mentor looked after children.
- The Head of Children's Services explained that we were working with care leavers to develop new ways to engage and enable young people to tell their stories in an effective way.
- There were performance indicators that look at 19yr olds in education or employment. Each authority had looked after children who have gone on to study at university
- Progress had been made in increasing number of foster carers, but mainly for younger children. A gap remains in regards to caring for older children and those with more complex needs.
- The Head of Children's Services explained that a bespoke software system was currently being designed expecting to be in place in April 2105.
- The inspection looked to be satisfied on the arrangements in place to recruit, train, support and supervise staff. There were concerns surrounding these areas, but the Chief Officer for Social Care and Health was seen to be very responsive to concerns.

We resolved to note the report.

CSSIW REPORT ON FOSTERING SERVICE

6.- We received a report on the quality of care provided for children using the fostering service. Information for this inspection was gathered from:

- Self Assessment
- Conversation with the manager and staff
- Conversation with foster carer
- Questionnaires completed by foster carers and children.

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The CSSIW focussed inspection was part of the annual regulatory inspections of fostering agencies. The inspection looked at processes and services that would support good outcomes for children who were placed with foster carers. It followed a baseline inspection last year which highlighted areas for improvement. The inspection showed many positives, including the following:

- Positives were found regarding foster carers in terms of training.
- A big commitment from the Authority in developing and improving foster care skills.
- Management was found to be proactive, continuing to improve assessments.
- Education and attendance for LAC had a positive outcome.
- Improvements were made in listening to the foster children.

Members were invited to ask questions, during which time the following points were noted:

- A Skills to Foster course had included young people as a means of training and assessing prospective foster carers
- In terms of looked after children, the majority are in care for longer period of time. During that time the family can be supported. There could be a difficulty to find foster carers for children with more complex needs. The service looked at how foster carers could be supported, through training, in how to manage children more effectively.
- A concern was raised that there was insufficient information regarding the Corporate Parenting Panel. We were informed that as the Corporate Parenting Panel was in place and would be the focus of information gathering and dissemination.

We resolved to receive the report and noted its content.

The meeting ended at 16.15pm.

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