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MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Children and Young People Select Committee held at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Wednesday, 24th January, 2018 at 2.00 pm

PRESENT: County Councillor M.Groucutt (Chairman)

County Councillors: L.Brown, D. Jones, M.Lane, M. Powell, T.Thomas, J.Watkins and S. Woodhouse

Also in attendance: County Councillors: R Harris. J. Pratt and V. Smith

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Claire Marchant	Chief Officer Social Care, Health & Housing
Jane Rodgers	Safeguarding Service Manager
Craig Williams	Lead Commissioner Service Development
Rhian Evans	Service Manager-Managed Care and Looked After Children
Paula Harris	Democratic Services Officer

Also in attendance Mel Roach SEWSCB

1. Apologies for Absence

County Councillor Laura Jones.

2. Declarations of Interest

None.

3. Safeguarding Training Strategy - Scrutiny of South East Wales Safeguarding Childrens Board

Context:

The purpose of this report is to provide information so that members can scrutinise the work of the South East Wales Safeguarding Children Board (SEWSCB) and the alignment between local and regional activity in children's safeguarding. Information is provided regarding the contribution made by Monmouthshire County Council officers to the work of the board.

Key Issues:

1. The South East Wales Safeguarding Children Board (SEWSCB) has the statutory responsibility to provide the strategic lead in the region in relation to the safeguarding of children and promotion of their welfare, as enshrined in the Children Act 2004 and The

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Children and Young People Select Committee held at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Wednesday, 24th January, 2018 at 2.00 pm

Social Services and Well-being Act (Wales) 2014 and accompanying guidance, 'Working Together to Safeguard People' Volume 1.

2. The South East Wales region incorporates Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport and Torfaen. From April 1st, 2013, the SEWSCB has replaced the five former Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) in Gwent.

3. The SEWSCB's purpose is to lead, co-ordinate and ensure the effectiveness of multi-agency safeguarding children practice in the region, both through its own programme of activity and through the challenge it provides to partner organisations.

4. The SEWSCB vision is that: All children and young people in South East Wales are protected from abuse and neglect, live in safe homes and communities and are supported to achieve their full potential.

5. This means:

- Making sure that children are protected from abuse, neglect and exploitation;
- Preventing abuse, neglect or exploitation; and
- Ensuring that children are growing up in safe homes, schools and communities and creating opportunities to enable children to have optimum life chances so that they can enter adulthood successfully.
- Ensuring that the well-being of children and young people is at the core of all levels of service provision

6. The Board has identified four strategic priorities to focus on over the three years (2016 – 2019):

- Reducing the effects of compromised parenting on children's well-being
- Improving our work with adolescents who exhibit risky behaviours
- Ensuring the continued effectiveness of safeguarding practice during the implementation and transition of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014
- Improving the effectiveness of the Regional Safeguarding Children Board

7. Monmouthshire is well-represented across the Business structure of the SEWSCB (see annexe 2). The Head of Children's Services is a Board member, chairs the Quality Assurance Sub-Group and is a member of the Case Review Group and Business Planning Group. Members of the Safeguarding Unit are required within their Job Descriptions to participate in the work of the board at sub-group level providing the operational link and fostering alignment between the work of the board and the local activity within Monmouthshire. From its inception, Monmouthshire officers have played a key role in shaping and influencing the work of the Board.

8. The Children's Services improvement plan and the quality assurance arrangements within the social care directorate accord with the strategic intent of the SEWSCB regarding children and young people living free from abuse and neglect and living in safe homes and communities where they are supported to reach their full potential.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Children and Young People Select Committee held at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Wednesday, 24th January, 2018 at 2.00 pm

9. Under the (draft) quality assurance processes for the SEWSCB Monmouthshire County Council is obliged to undertake an audit of its safeguarding arrangements as part of its duties under section 135 Social Services and Well-being Act (Wales) 2014 and report by exception to the Board. Safeguarding issues / outcomes from regulatory inspections and reviews within Monmouthshire also must be reported to the Board.

10. Specific alignment between Monmouthshire and the work of the Board include:

- Participation in undertaking multi-agency supervision for children on the child protection register, particularly where children remain on the register at the second review;
- Participation in Multi-agency Sexual Exploitation meetings (MASE) and operation Makesafe;
- Leading training and ensuring that SEWSCB is accessible to Monmouthshire workforce;
- Establishing Safeguarding Learning Networks;
- Disseminating lessons learning from child practice reviews undertaken within the Gwent across Monmouthshire practitioners;
- Taking a lead role in young people's participation activity;
- Leading on the development of some key regional guidance;
- Working in accordance with regional processes / procedures (e.g. for the management of professional allegations).

11. Moving forward, and as part of the actions identified within the Safeguarding SIP, the Safeguarding Unit will report to Members on the work of the SEWSCB on an annual basis.

Member Scrutiny:

A Member asked if they were able to access the training offered by Gwent Safeguarding.

In relation to the Board for Strategic Priorities it was asked for specific improvements in the risky behaviour of adolescents.

The implementation of best practice was commented on with members seeing this as an important improvement tool.

A Member applauded the engagement work taking place with young people and asked what routes are used to get the information from young people.

It was asked how the group knows it is performing well and does each authority use tools such as peer assessment reviews.

A Member asked if any thought had been given at a regional level as to how Elected Members could exercise their corporate parent role.

Parallels were pointed out between the work of the board and of the EAS.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Children and Young People Select Committee held at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Wednesday, 24th January, 2018 at 2.00 pm

Committee's Conclusion:

After the scrutiny of the strategic objectives of the SEWSCB as set out within the Strategic Plan 2016 – 2019 Members were impressed with the attempt of commonality of practice.

It was felt that the alignment between local and regional children's safeguarding activity was positive.

The contribution made by the officers of Monmouthshire County Council to the work of the board was highlighted.

4. Corporate Parenting Strategy - Pre-decision scrutiny

Context:

The purpose of this report is to provide members with the opportunity to scrutinise and contribute to the development of the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2018 – 2021.

Key Issues:

1. Under the Social Services and Well-Being Act (Wales) 2014, it is a statutory requirement for every council to safeguard and promote the welfare of each child it looks after, and every care leaver. The Corporate Parenting Strategy and Action Plan sets out how the Council understands this responsibility and proposes to meet the statutory requirement over the next three year period.
2. In Monmouthshire County Council, "Our aspirations for the children and young people that we look after are the same as any good parent would want for their children. Where they need it children and young people will receive the very best possible standards of care and support" (Where I am Safe Strategy 2016).
3. This is the second iteration of the Corporate Parenting Strategy and builds on a review and appraisal of the first. The strategy is based on an overview of the current context including the profile of our Looked After Children, young people and Care Leavers.
4. This is the initial stages of consultation for the revised strategy, with the intention to seek final approval at Cabinet in April 2018. Following CYP select further consultation is proposed including:
 - o Corporate Panel Members
 - o Young people's participation group
 - o Foster carers
 - o Operational social work teams and placement & support team

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Children and Young People Select Committee held at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Wednesday, 24th January, 2018 at 2.00 pm

o Senior Leadership Team.

5. The Corporate Parenting Strategy and Action Plan will be delivered and monitored through the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Member Scrutiny:

The Chair advised that the Cabinet Member had offered to attend the meeting, but it was felt that the discussion would be better placed with Officers. The Chair praised the positive relationship that Members have with the Cabinet Members in regard to safeguarding and education.

It was asked if different types of problems were apparent with children who remained with their families compared to children placed out of their family.

It was asked if fostering within the family were forced decision due to a lack of foster placements or a calculated decision to keep the child within the family.

It was asked if there is a cut off age for care.

A Member who sits on the Corporate Parenting Committee thanked Officers for taking previous comments on board as it was obvious that the draft had moved on since sighted at Corporate Parenting Committee.

Committee's Conclusion:

The Committee scrutinised the draft Corporate Parenting Strategy and made a number of recommendations as to its further development.

They endorsed the development of the strategy including the plan to seek further consultation with other key stake-holders.

The Committee spoke of their responsibility as corporate parents and applauded the commitment from Officers.

5. Childrens Services Placements - Scrutiny of the action plan to manage child placements and associated risks

Context:

The purpose of the report is to provide information so that members can scrutinise the response and activities undertaken following a review by Internal Audit into the use of

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Children and Young People Select Committee held at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Wednesday, 24th January, 2018 at 2.00 pm

external placements for Looked After Children (LAC) and young people by Monmouthshire County Council's Children's Social Services.

Key Issues:

1. The internal audit of external placements was carried out as part of the 2016/2017 Audit Plan agreed by the Head of Finance and by the Audit Committee at their meeting on the 26th May 2016. The field work was subsequently undertaken in October 2016 / March 2017 with a final report being issued in October 2017.

2. The audit was undertaken following concern within Social Care and Health that the absence of commissioning capacity over a number of years meant that this was a high risk area. The objective of the audit was to provide a risk based audit of External Placements within Children's Services, with a view to providing an overall opinion on the internal control environment in place. The audit focused on the commissioning and contract arrangements when LAC and young people are placed in externally provided fostering and residential placements.

3. Overall, the External Placements system was assessed as providing a 'LIMITED' level of assurance which reflects that the financial and administrative systems reviewed were found to be poorly controlled, with unacceptable levels of risk. In summary 4 significant risks, 15 moderate risks, 9 minor risks and 9 areas of strength were found.

4. In headline terms, overall improvements were needed included:

- The interface operationally between child care teams and commissioning and contracting
- Clearer systems and processes for commissioning and contracting within Children's Services
- Improvement to the interface between regional (4cs) and local systems regarding commissioning arrangements, with increased clarity of respective roles
- A clear process for accreditation of providers
- Improvements in contract monitoring placements.

5. The report recognised that there had been an historical lack of commissioning resource within Children's Services.

6. Since the audit Children's Services has taken key steps to rectify the problems identified:

- A lead commissioner for Children's Services initially employed on a temporary basis is now permanent. The post is located in Commissioning and the Social Care and Health Commissioning Team now covers children's as well as adult services.
- A review of all high cost placements was undertaken in February 2016 so that any immediate risks regarding contracts / monitoring arrangements could be addressed.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Children and Young People Select Committee held at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Wednesday, 24th January, 2018 at 2.00 pm

□ A senior practitioner from the Placement and Support Team was commissioned to develop the internal processes for Children's Services around the placement process which were in line with the Social Services and Well-Being Act (Wales) 2014).

□ An independent 'stock-take' was undertaken in October 2017 which cross-referenced with the Internal Audit Report action plan and additionally supported further improvements of internal processes and practice around placement searches.

7. Activity in regards to the Internal Audit action plan is on-going and has entailed a joint approach between Commissioning and Children's Services.

Member Scrutiny:

Officers were asked to clarify who monitors a placement out of County.

In regard to monitoring externally commissioned placements a Member expressed interest how we monitoring in comparison the internal fostering arrangement at MCC.

The Chair praised the Internal Audit and Social Care officers for working so closely together and for putting steps in place to move things forward.

Committee's Conclusion:

The Committee scrutinised the improvement actions undertaken by Children's Services as set out within the action plan presented to the Committee.

The work was found to be substantive and a positive direction for the service.

The collaborative work of Officers from Internal Audit and Social Care was praised by Elected Members.

The meeting ended at 15:33

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