

Children and Education Select Committee

Performance Member Reference Group

11 December 2017, 3.00pm

Record of Proceedings

Attendees: Mark Brett-Warburton, Jeffery Harris, Tim Evans, Chris Townsend, Charlotte Morley

Present: Mary Lewis, Clare Curran

Officers: Rose Durban, Sam Bushby, Paula Chowdhury, Richard Plummer

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None received

CHILDREN'S SERVICES PERFORMANCE AND OFSTED MONITORING VISIT

1. Members noted the background to the review of Children's Service Performance following the Ofsted Monitoring visit and the implications that this has had on service delivery. Officers noted that the visit reflected a poor outcome for the service. It was stressed that officers were working on rapid improvement to create better outcomes for children within the system.
2. Members noted that there was a requirement to adopt a data led approach within Children's Services to monitor, track and identify improvement and deficiencies within service delivery. Members noted the five key objectives highlighted by the service in response to the Ofsted Monitoring visit and noted that the Performance Member Reference Group would look to help define measureable objectives to help monitor progress of these objectives before the planned Ofsted inspection.
3. Officers noted that the Monitoring visit reported significant concerns regarding practice. It was stressed that there had been internal monitoring of cases; particularly noting difficulties with recording data. It was stressed that the service concurred with the issues raised by Ofsted.
4. Members questioned whether staff had been informed of the contents and implications of the Monitoring visit report and what the reactions of staff were. It was noted by officers that there had been a mixed reception of the message by practitioners. It was noted that the vast majority of practitioners had fully accepted the concerns, but did highlight that there were concerns raised by some practitioners with regard to the volume and complexity of their caseloads.
5. Officers noted that response and change was more holistic at the strategic level in Children's Services, however, it was noted that there was a need to ensure a less siloed approach at all levels of the service and across all stages of the child's journey.

6. It was noted by officers that there was a concern that the practice concerns were only identified when OFSTED identified the records to be reviewed, and that internal quality assurance processes and management oversight had not identified them. This therefore left the concern that there could be other children where there are not sufficient plans in place to safeguard them, It was stressed that there needed to be significant culture change in the ways of working, and in improving supervision and management oversight so that this drives safe practice and children's plans
7. Officers noted that practice within the service needed to be more consistent, particularly noting that more consistent performance measurement was needed. It was also noted that risk needed to be better identified and managed within the service.
8. Officers noted that children on Child Protection Plans (CPPs) were not being seen often enough, and that it was a statutory duty to be seen within 10 days. Officers explained that practice on child visits, including record keeping, had to improve significantly. Members questioned the action taken as a result of the identified problem. Officers noted that new record keeping systems were in place to note visits and issues.
9. Members questioned how escalation of problems identified in Children's Services, was being done, particularly querying how children not being visited in a timely manner was monitored. Officers noted that the new recording system, Tableau, was being used to create live datasets of these issues, which could be easily accessed by managers and actioned appropriately. It was noted that this information was input into the Children's Services Performance Compendium for review by officers and Members of the Improvement Board.
10. Officers noted that compliance in reporting was a systemic issue within the service. It was stressed that the new reporting system and a change in the culture of working was underway to ensure that this would be mitigated.
11. It was noted that there needed to be improved recording and management oversight. Members questioned what was preventing managers from undertaking this effectively. Officers highlighted that managers were to receive training on child focused supervision. Officers also noted that there was now a consistent message about practice expectations across the service.
12. It was noted by officers that there was more work to undertake regarding non-statutory visits to children in need, and that children were being left too long without a visit. It was explained that the speed of first meetings for statutory visits was also unsatisfactory and required improvement.
13. Concerns were raised by Members regarding effectiveness of Child Protection Conferences. Members stressed the need to raise and escalate concerns and challenge decisions effectively, as well as identify areas of good or bad practice. Officers noted that there was some backlash from team managers regarding the effectiveness of Child Protection Conferences and their chairing and that there was a need to change the culture of these and ensure shared ownership of problems within Children's Services.

14. It was noted by officers that danger statements were written in the service to highlight key issues for children at risk. These needed to be matched by safety goals to ensure that children are safeguarded effectively.
15. Officers noted there needed to be an acknowledgement of shortcomings in practice. It was stressed that barriers to good practice needed to be identified. It was also highlighted that there needed to be a safe culture of working to allow practitioners to raise any practice concerns.
16. Members questioned how the service was assessing performance against targets and goals identified. It was noted that the service was compiling data of children's visits by Social Workers, and the timeliness of visits, and monitoring records and actions identified by practitioners with regard to practice concerns.
17. Members questioned the "front door" decision making process and how this affected children's wellbeing. Officers stressed that there was a need for the service to focus on the needs of a child. It was noted that significant work had been undertaken in reviews of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and the Early Help stream to improve upon the child's experience within the system.
18. Officers noted that caseloads needed to be kept under review to ensure they were manageable, and that there were some increases of cases of Children in Need and Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC). It was also noted that numbers of older children were increasing.
19. Officers stressed that the service needed to improve its means of, where appropriate, ensuring that children remain with parents to improve outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That the service present a report on progress achieved regarding the five key priorities identified in response to the Ofsted monitoring visit of Surrey local authority children's services to the Children and Education Select Committee Performance Member Reference Group in January 2018.

To this end the Performance Member Reference Group asks that the service:

- a. Shares the latest self-evaluation against the key priorities outlined by the Ofsted monitoring visit letter and explain how the service plans to measure success against these objectives.
2. That the service presents information which suggests improvement in the identification of children at most risk in January 2018.

To this end the Performance Member Reference Group asks that the service:

- a. Provides data regarding the timeliness of Children Visits by Social Workers for Looked After Children, Children on Child Protection Plans and Children in Need.

- b. Reports on work undertaken to review danger statements and safety goals for all children subject to a Child Protection Plan (CPP).
- c. Reports on numbers of return home conversations taking place and any key themes emerging that the service can use to improve outcomes for children.

CHILDREN, SCHOOLS & FAMILIES DIRECTORATE DRAFT MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2018-22 PRESSURES/CHANGES AND SAVINGS

1. Members questioned what the implications of the pressures, changes and required savings detailed in the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) would be upon the improvement of Children's Services as outlined. Officers noted that approximately £48 million will have been invested in Children's Services between 2015-2018. It was noted that this would be unlikely to change or be affected significantly by the requirement to improve Children's Services.
2. Officers noted that the increasing complexity of the needs of children and the service practice response to these needs had significant financial implications for the service. Officers noted that the service had changed how it worked with adolescents and the increased volumes of UASC, noting that the impact on the care leaving service would increase as a result.
3. It was clarified that funding for UASC was mainly on legacy rates, which are significantly lower than the new rates. There was increasing lobbying of the government to end the two tier funding and pay all UASC at the new rates. It should be noted that the new rates, although higher than the legacy rates, still do not cover the full cost of care for UASC.
4. Officers explained that the high needs block DSG funding was insufficient to cover the current cost of service provision for children with SEN. It was noted that the service was working with schools to help rationalise spend in the high needs block and ensure that the service is getting the best value for money. It was noted that some savings proposals were underway.
5. Officers stressed that they were looking to work with schools more effectively to work towards increasing inclusion of SEN pupils in mainstream schools.
6. The Cabinet Members noted that the increasing complexity of Children's Services and increasing volumes of children with SEN EHCP's/statements was a national trend.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That the group notes the update.

MEETING CLOSE: 5.08pm