

# Children and Education Select Committee

## Performance Member Reference Group

6 February 2018, 3.00pm

### Record of Proceedings

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

**Present:** Clare Curran

**Officers:** Rose Durban, Sam Bushby, Richard Plummer

#### **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

None received

#### **CHILDREN'S SERVICES PERFORMANCE AND OFSTED MONITORING VISIT FOLLOW UP**

1. Members were pleased to see evidence of progress and change within services and support for children. It was noted that there were still some areas of key concern, but that the Directorate had made a positive step to provide information and data for scrutiny.
2. Officers introduced the children services self-evaluation which prioritises the need for children to be seen, safe and heard. Officers explained that self-evaluation should be open about areas that required improvement and actions to address these.
3. Members questioned the Improvement Plan that was published in 2015 in response to the Ofsted report of 2015 of Children's Services and whether there had been significant alterations to the plan to changing circumstance. Officers explained that the original plan was a direct response to the Ofsted inspection recommendations and the plan had been refreshed each year. In Autumn 2017 the plan was updated to reflect the shift to improving partnership working on behalf of children.
4. Officers explained that the original improvement plan directly referenced the Ofsted recommendations but did not identify and resolve underlying issues within the Directorate and wider partnership. It was suggested this had therefore not created and embedded the conditions for effective practice improvement. The current improvement plan seeks to do this.
5. Members questioned whether there was a disconnect between management and front line practitioners. Officers described work to improve communication between departments of the Children, Schools and Families Directorate and ongoing work to ensure no disconnects between management and front line service. Members suggested that officers look at other organisations and how they improved upon their previous siloed approach, suggesting that police partners had experience with this.

6. It was noted that there was evidenced improved communication with frontline staff through feedback sessions with senior officers and practitioners. It was highlighted that there had been approx. 2000 individual pieces of feedback received and that the majority fell within three distinct categories:
  - a. Clarity of purpose
  - b. Support to undertake the role
  - c. Tools to undertake the role

It was reported that staff clearly described what they needed to do the best job and that senior leaders were acting on this feedback.. Members questioned whether the service could helpfully categorise this feedback by priority, impact on practice and cost analysis. .

7. One important response to the request for clarity of purpose was the production of a suite of expectations for practitioners, managers and leaders.
8. Officers highlighted that there was key learning about managing change and avoiding initiative fatigue within the Directorate. Work is required to prioritise key changes to practice and ensuring that they are followed through.
9. Officers highlighted that there were mechanisms in place for understanding the impact of practice for children and noted that self-evaluations were shared with partners for feedback. An example is the way in which operation encompass feedback will be gained through regular meetings with school Dedicated Safeguarding Leads. . It was also explained that the Directorate was committed to hearing and acting on feedback from children.
10. Officers noted that there had been work undertaken in December 2017 and January 2018 to ensure the accuracy of data collected for the Children's Services Performance Compendium. It was noted that, historically, some of the data gathering questions were incorrect, and that this has now been corrected by the service to ensure data accuracy.
11. The Cabinet Member noted that there were concerns with the differences in some aspects of Surrey's performance in comparison with its statistical neighbours. While it was noted that there were mitigating circumstances in the case of Surrey in some instances, it was agreed that officers needed to understand the comparisons and any reasons for difference.
12. It was noted that the Surrey statistics raised several key concerns that the service was looking into with urgency:
  - a. Child Protection Conferences and their timeliness
  - b. Independent Health Assessments
  - c. Pathway Plans for Looked After Children
  - d. Out of County Placements
13. Members questioned the targets set, and whether targets were set by national benchmarks or service targets. Officers noted that targets were set internally based on realistic and challenging expectations, but also based on benchmarking with other statistical neighbours, central government figures and other targets to determine the

appropriate target.

14. Members questioned why there had been a drop in Initial Child Protection Conferences being done on time.. Officers explained work underway to address this including the use of administrative staff where appropriate and a a workshop event regarding ICPCs to allow practitioners to raise issues that are preventing timely completion.
15. Members questioned whether there were challenges in the north east of Surrey and whether there was a need to improve resource to reflect need. Officers noted that work was being undertaken to ascertain why there was a challenge in the north east and determine whether there was a resource issue or a demographic need for increased support.
16. It was suggested that there could be improved lines of communication with governance bodies relating to the monitoring of performance of Children's Services. It was noted by officers that the Children's Improvement Board could usefully refer items for scrutiny to the Children and Education Select Committee.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS/ACTIONS**

1. That the more detailed feedback given by staff is shared with Reference Group and regular updates provided on the impact of actions being taken in response
2. That the Performance Member Reference Group recommends that the Select Committee and the Children, Schools and Families Directorate identify ways to test the culture and communications within the Directorate
3. That the Chairman of the Children and Education Select Committee, Chairman of the Children's Improvement Board, Chairman of the Surrey Safeguarding Children's Board to work to improve lines of communication between the bodies.

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