

No Wrong Door Task Group

Meeting with Director – Corporate Parenting to discuss Surrey County Council’s proposed introduction of the No Wrong Door Model

Microsoft Teams
2 pm on 21 August 2020

In attendance:

Councillor Lesley Steeds (Chairman)
Councillor Barbara Thomson
Councillor Chris Townsend

Benjamin Awkal, Scrutiny Officer
Bryony Crossland Davies, Democratic Services Assistant

Tina Benjamin, Director – Corporate Parenting

Key points from the discussion:

1. The Chairman invited the Director to give opening statement outlining the progression of the project.
2. The Director stated that the two main challenges for the Service were the high numbers of children entering care after reaching 16 years of age and looked-after children (LAC) living outside of Surrey. There had been a recent improvement in the latter with 44.5% of children now living outside of Surrey. The Director explained that some of these children were placed out of county for good reasons and stated that this statistic would always be in the region of 15%. Nationally, the Department of Education monitors this statistic by looking at children outside of Surrey and over 20 miles from their home; 28% of Surrey County Council’s (SCC) placements meet these criteria (Surrey’s statistical neighbours are at 26%). Placement sufficiency and ensuring the right children entered care and returned home at the appropriate time would be key in addressing this issue
3. No Wrong Door (NWD) model aligned with the Family Resilience Model due the shared relationship-based approach and objective of preventing children from progressing to Level 4 need.
4. All of Surrey’s six community children homes were rated ‘Good’ or ‘Outstanding’ by Ofsted.
5. The existing cohort of highly skilled staff could be utilised in adopting the NWD model. The partnership approach of the model makes police involvement key to the success of the initiative.
6. The Director concluded that SCC Children’s Services were much improved and better equipped to implement the NWD model than in 2018 when the introduction of the model was first proposed by the former Executive Director of Children, Families and Learning.

7. The Director stated that external-stakeholder involvement was at around 38-40%. Stakeholder events had not yet commenced; however, there was 30% progress in engagement with young people. The governance mechanisms had been decided and the communications team was preparing to support the project. The recruitment process for a Service Manager underway.
8. The Chairman asked which key partners were confirmed. The Director stated that there had been a great deal of communication with the police and there was lots of resource within SCC. The engagement process was still underway.
9. A Member asked how the Service would work with NHS and Education in partnership. The Director informed the group that Trudy Mills, Director of Children's Mental Health, was part of leadership team and had proven very beneficial. The Director acknowledged that recruitment of a speech and language therapist could be challenging. The Director said that sign up from partners could be problematic.
10. The Director stated that a shadow model would run from two existing children's homes to help staff to understand the culture and changes needed before full implementation. Subject to planning, there would be two hubs attached to two of the new children's homes. The Director explained that managing the model was related to capital development and the rebuild of children's homes.
11. A Member referred to the underestimation of capital spend for the NWD implementation by Rochdale Borough Council. The Director stated that the capital spend agreed at Cabinet was currently sufficient and on target to meet budget.
12. The Scrutiny Officer asked whether there were any areas of risk in the project plan. The Director stated that the commitment from partners to use staff differently would be challenging and could present an area of risk; however, SCC's relationships with partners were greatly improved relative to two years previously.
13. A Member asked how recruitment of senior staff would be approached. The Director stated that people would be attracted by the opportunity to work for an improving authority. The NWD facilitates innovate and creative work which is attractive to social/youth workers and can be more professionally rewarding.
14. A Member asked how young people's views on this approach had been considered. The Director replied that work with User Voice and Participation team was underway. The whole model was based on things already known about what young people desire e.g. consistency of social worker/staff. Children would be consulted again when more tangible plans were in place and a reference group would be established with young people to help plan for the future.
15. A Member emphasised the importance of not making promises to children and young people that cannot be kept, e.g. having the same social worker for an extended period of time. The Director acknowledged that it was crucial to ensure good management of change and a seamless handover of staff.

16. A Member queried what the eligibility criteria would be to receive support from NWD. The Director stated that focus should be centred on children on the edge of care and thus would be unlikely to support children under 12 years of age. Working with adolescents requires expertise and the NWD would be a labour-intensive model, thus the right support had to be given to right children and this would be ensured by establishing clearly defined service user eligibility criteria.
17. A Member asked what the capacity of the NWD service would be. The Director explained that, with two hubs running, there is capacity to work with 35 young people at any one time on an outreach basis from each hub, including flexible support offer, and care leavers could potentially be supported; however, the main aim would be to keep children out of care. Professional judgement would be required in determining which children the model could support.
18. The Chairman asked how families would be included in the model. The Director stated that the model was about building resilience of children and the family network around them. For older young people or those with parents unable to make the changes required, NWD is about developing their resilience and helping young people to use the services they have access to compensate for the deficit in parenting. Nevertheless, there would be provision for staff to directly work with adults who want to make changes, to fulfil the wraparound approach of the model.
19. Member expressed concern that sometime children will be irreversibly impacted by their experiences before the age of 12. The Director stated that if the model had positive outcomes then it could be expanded to early care in the future.
20. The Scrutiny Officer asked how a shared culture and ethos between NWD workers from different organisations and those from SCC would be developed and sustained. The Director stated that the nature of model should attract the right people as it requires the adoption of certain ways of working that staff need to be willing to sign up to.
21. The Chairman referred to the challenge other local authorities experienced with recruitment and retention of staff. Director recognised that there was challenge with social workers; however, there were already very motivated people within the system whose expertise would be drawn upon.
22. The Scrutiny Officer asked what background a NWD key worker would come from. The Director stated that it would be desirable to recruit experienced residential/youth work staff who had a strong ability to engage with young people within a creative face-to face role.
23. The Chairman asked what the implementation timescale was. The Director stated that the interview for a Service Manager would take place in September. Some form of the model would be implemented the following year following a period of testing and providing partner arrangements were in place.

24. The Scrutiny Officer asked whether the Director was satisfied that the general quality of social work practice was such that the model would be successful. The Director stated that the quality of social work had improved but acknowledged that some areas of inconsistency still existed in Surrey. Permanence was present at a level which would enable the delivery of the model – only 2 of 57 service managers were locums, a key indicator of the ability to deliver consistency. There could be a challenge around recruiting permanent team managers.
25. The Scrutiny Officer asked whether there were enough foster carers for the model to be successful and if there would be a specific pool of foster carers for NWD service users. The Director explained that there were never enough foster carers; however, this was a national problem and not unique to Surrey. There had been success in recruiting general foster carers and there were some existing specialist foster carers, but the Director emphasised that NWD service users would require 1:1 foster care placement. There were methods for attracting foster carers with incentives such as a core and additional allowances. Salaried foster carers may be the solution and, when there is not a child in their household, they could work as part of the NWD team.
26. The Scrutiny Officer asked whether cost benefit analysis had been undertaken. The Director stated that cost analysis in relation to COVID-19 was being undertaken and the cost of LAC placements could easily be obtained. Members requested this data.
27. The Director concluded that the family safeguarding model and NWD aligned well and the resources were in place.

Actions

- i. Tina to give cost analysis of care placements to Task Group.
- ii. Share minutes from Task Group meeting with Rochdale BC with Tina Benjamin.

The meeting closed at 15:40