

Minutes of the Meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 9 October 2018 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors John Kent (Chair), David Potter (Vice-Chair), Alex Anderson, Garry Hague and Bukky Okunade

Nicola Cranch, Parent Governor Representative 1
Paula Robinson, Parent Governor Representative 2
Lynda Pritchard, Church of England Representative

Apologies: Kim James, HealthWatch Thurrock

In attendance: Rory Patterson, Corporate Director of Children's Services
Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director Children's Care and Targeted Outcomes
Joseph Tynan, Strategic Lead for Child in Need and Child Protection and Principal Social Worker for Children's Social Care
Keeley Pullen, Head Teacher for Virtual School
Andrea Winstone, School Improvement Manager
Lee Henley, Strategic Lead, Information Management
Alan Cotgrove, Business Manager, Local Safeguarding Children's Board
Temi Fawehinmi, Contract and Performance Manager
Adam Shea, Youth Cabinet Member 1
Joshua Adwinckle-Povey, Youth Cabinet Member 2
Lucia Lucioni, Youth Cabinet Member 3
Wendy Le, Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting may be filmed and was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

10. Apologies

Before taking apologies, the Chair stated there would be an extra item added after 'Items raised by Thurrock Local Safeguarding Board'. The extra item was 'Youth Cabinet Update' which was a regular item on the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee but had unfortunately been missed off in error.

An apology was received from Kim James, HealthWatch Thurrock.

11. Minutes

The Chair noted that Councillor Redsell was missing from the attendance list.

Under item 6, Youth Work Presentation, the Chair pointed out his comments in the last paragraph and asked that it be corrected. It should be amended to as follows:

...He also commented that out of the 95% of the money the government spent on youth services on the National Citizen scheme, only 12% of eligible youths received this. He believed the money would be better spent if it was devolved down to local government who would know where the young people were and how it could be spent locally.

Under item 7, Children's Social Care Development Plan, the Parent Governor Representative 1, also asked for an amendment to be made which would be amended as follows:

...The Committee went on to comment on the 7 children suitable for adoption which some Members felt needed more context on why they were suitable. The Parent Governor also felt it would be useful to have the figures of the number of available adopting parents.

Referring to item 9, Work Programme, the Chair asked why there had been no report for the Youth Offending Service as had been requested at the last committee meeting. The Corporate Director apologised for the error in not bringing the report forward.

The minutes from the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 3 July 2018 were approved subject to the changes made.

12. Items of Urgent Business

The Chair brought forward one item of urgent business, an Ofsted letter which regarded the recent Ofsted visit on Thurrock's Children's Services that had been made available a few days prior to the meeting.

Before going through the Ofsted letter, the Corporate Director mentioned that the letter was a result of the recent inspection from Ofsted. It had begun from the annual review with Ofsted earlier in the year where Ofsted had suggested a focussed visit with Thurrock's Children's Services. The inspection had begun from that point and included an onsite visit for 2 days which had taken place recently.

The focus of the inspection was on children in need and those on a child protection plan. Inspectors looked through case records and social workers were asked questions. Further inspection would be required if the service received priority actions which would mean an immediate re-investigation within 3 months, however that was not the case in this inspection.

As there was no national set standard for social workers' caseload, Thurrock's Children's Services set their own standards. The Ofsted letter had identified 3 areas that required improvement:

- 1) The quality and purposefulness of plans and written agreements;
- 2) Children's access to advocacy services and opportunities and mechanisms for children to feed back their views and wishes in order to inform practice and service development; and
- 3) Workload pressures in some teams which was reducing.

Referring to the mentioned locally set capacity levels, Councillor Hague queried if there was a framework in place which included benchmarking and assessing what the service actually needed. The Strategic Lead said the threshold was set to 25 children in the assessment teams. The assessment team at the front door would do the initial assessment to identify what support, if any, was required. From this, cases were identified as requiring no further input or could be better supported through other tier services such as prevention support services or longer term solutions. In the last year, the service had restructured areas to ensure control of capacity levels.

The Strategic Lead went on to state that an additional team had been created to support and supervise social workers to ensure risks were assessed appropriately. In the family support team, another 6 social workers were in place along with a team manager to manage demand and cases ensuring support for social workers, children were seen and the quality of work. This was being reviewed on a weekly basis. The Strategic Lead also mentioned that in the longer term, the family support services aimed to get to a 'good' rating which was currently under review. In the assessment service, the service was looking at 25 children and they were working to 22 children at the family support service which would be the longer term work.

Referring to the first bullet point on the last page of the letter, Councillor Okunade expressed concern on the issue on 'management oversight' as this had been highlighted by Ofsted on the last visit. She queried what could be done to get the service to overcome this issue. Referring to the same paragraph, she also asked why all social workers were not using the supervision format.

The Strategic Lead replied that Ofsted had looked at a case where the manager had said 'I agree' to the social worker's recommendations. However, Ofsted had reported that the service's quality of supervision had improved over cases. Strengths were recognised and signs of safety supervision forms had been in place since 1 August 2018 which assessed strengths as well as risks in families. Managers were also supported through supervision training to ensure they had the skills to support staff. The service ensured that a manager only supported 5 social workers so they were able to provide a good quality of support and give supervision on a monthly basis. For complex cases, group supervision was used and looked at with a different approach. Over time, the supervision quality had improved particularly in the last couple of years since the last Ofsted inspection.

Councillor Okunade queried on when the new case supervision format would be used to which the Strategic Lead answered that it had been in use since 1 August 2018. It would be reviewed through feedback to see what could be improved and would be evaluated in the next 4 weeks.

The Parent Governor Representative 1 explained Ofsted visits within her school and queried whether the service felt they were in a position of never achieving a 'good' rating as the rating moved with each visit. The Corporate Director explained the Children's Services framework would differ to a school's framework. When Ofsted inspected Children's Services, they would check on their recommendations.

The Youth Cabinet Member 2 queried on the number of children outside of care that were offered advocacy services. The Assistant Director explained that looked after children were offered advocacy regularly. There had been no formal separate advocacy for children in need or on child protection plans as they were living at home with families. However, they had allocated social workers who would listen to their views. This had now been changed and the service now provided advocacy for children in need or those on or subject to child protection plans if children wanted it.

In response, the Youth Cabinet Member 2 felt this was a serious oversight of the service and questioned why advocacy had not been offered to children in need or on protection plans previously. The Corporate Director answered that there had been an assumption that the parents were the advocates and that it was a delicate issue. The reason being that many parents felt they were the advocates for their children. This was a new area as it had always been the case that immediate advocacy was available for children away from home.

Referring to the bottom of the first page of the letter, the Vice Chair sought clarification on whether it was the 2016 or recent visit the paragraph referred to. The Corporate Director confirmed it was the recent visit.

Referring to the Parent Governor Representative 1's earlier comments, the Chair commented that the previous Ofsted visit (2012) at Thurrock's Children's Services had received a 'good' rating. The last inspection (2016) had been based on a 'tougher' framework and Thurrock along with many local authorities had been rated down from 'good' to 'requires improvement'. However, inspectors had said children were safe which was most important. The Chair went on to ask Officers how the recommendations from the recent Ofsted visit would be implemented into the development plan. The Corporate Director stated the 3 points would be implemented immediately into the body of the development plan.

13. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

14. Items Raised by Thurrock Local Safeguarding Children Board

The Thurrock LSCB Manager gave an update of the work undertaken within Thurrock's Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB). As part of the Children and Social Work Act 2017, Safeguarding Children's Boards would be dissolved but it was the Local Authority's responsibility to have a new safeguarding structure in place to match the new arrangements.

Earlier in the year, the new Working Together 2018 was published with the expectations of the new safeguarding arrangements. This included:

- Moving the current accountability of 5 statutory partner agencies comprising of the Local Authority, Police, Health, Probation and Children and Family Court Advisory Support Services down to 3 to include the Local Authority, Police and the Clinical Commissioning Group;
- The new category of 'relevant agency' would play a role in safeguarding children; and
- Changes to the current serious case review process and accountability in the Child Death Review process.

To ensure a smooth transition, Thurrock LSCB has done the following:

- Setup a new strategic board to prepare an implementation plan which would be published 3 months prior to the change to the new arrangements that needed to be in place by September 2019; and
- Converse with the Essex and Southend Boards to see which areas could be improved on the 'Working Across Essex' approach.

As the existing Board was already doing well, the aim was to keep a similar process in place.

The Thurrock LSCB Manager stopped at this point to take questions from the Committee. Councillor Okunade sought clarification on what would become of the other 2 partner agencies that would be removed from the current 5 statutory partner agencies. The Thurrock LSCB Manager answered that they would form part of other services and over time, would see if they would become part of the relevant agencies. The existing partners would remain but the Board hoped to gain more.

Continuing on with the update, the Thurrock LSCB Manager referred back to the earlier committee meeting of 13 February 2018, where Members had queries on monitoring internet searches particularly suicide methods. To address those queries, he stated in internet safety for children:

- Each school already had a high quality security software system in place that monitored the usage of school IT and media equipment;

- A prevention self-harm toolkit was available on Thurrock LSCB's website for schools to support teachers and young people going through challenging times. A similar approach was also being taken toward suicide ideation; and
- The updated Department for Education's "Keeping Children Safe in Education" document detailed schools' responsibilities in online safeguarding.

Additionally, Thurrock LSCB had been highlighting risks and benefits of the internet to their children in years 5 to 11 through "Walk On-Line" roadshows. An adult version was also available to parents and carers. The next roadshow dates are as follows:

- 14 November 2018 – for parents and carers.
- March 2019 – covers years 5 and 6 with 5,000 pupils due to attend.

The Thurrock LSCB Manager stopped at this point to take questions from the Committee. The Church of England Representative asked if there were plans to move the roadshow programme down to years 2. She felt it was quite late to start the programme for years 5 as many children younger than that were already accessing media and internet. The Thurrock LSCB Manager explained the plan was to roll the programme out to years 5 but it would be reviewed next year and would see if it needed to be moved down to a younger age group.

The Thurrock LSCB Manager continued with the update by saying they were currently undertaking two serious case reviews. The Board had also completed a series of multi-agency training and learning events covering child protection procedures, interfamilial abuse and psychology of the offender and prevent. There would be further learning events and the Thurrock LSCB continued to support Children's Social Care in the signs of safety model and graded care profile2 tool for supporting cases of neglect.

15. Youth Cabinet Update

Since the last quarter, the Youth Cabinet had been busy and had almost finished the preparations for this year's Youth Conference which would be different to previous years. This was where students came together to discuss politics and other issues important to them. More work had been carried out on the Curriculum For Life programme and had been sent out to schools. Students would be able to pick out the topics they wanted to learn and receive lessons ranging from 5 minutes to 1 hour. Ballot papers termed 'Make Your Mark' had also been sent out to encourage students to sign up as these would be sent to Parliament upon closing. Youth Cabinet Member 1 had gained over 480 signed papers alone so far.

The Chair queried how the Youth Conference would differ to previous years and where it would be taking place. The Youth Cabinet Member 1 explained that this time round, there would be no normal workshops. The event would

be held on 13 December 2018 and take place in High House Production Park, Purfleet.

16. Short Breaks and Support Services for Disabled Children

As the current Short Breaks and Support Services for Disabled Children contract would expire in March 2019, the report outlined the procurement of a new contract. A procurement exercise would be undertaken to increase the number of providers as there were currently two delivering the service under the current contract. Quality of the service was the main criteria but savings may be possible due to increased competition. The Contract and Performance Manager explained the report would go to tender, run ideally for 3 years with an additional option to extend to 12 months.

Councillor Hague sought more details on the shortfall of providers and wondered if the service was looking for providers outside of Thurrock. The Contract and Performance Manager explained the service had 4 providers before which had now reduced to 2 which may have been due to the domiciliary care market as it was not as lucrative as it had been. Parents could also choose the personal budget now as it provided more opportunities than Short Breaks services. Councillor Hague went on to ask if more choice meant needing more providers. The Contract and Performance Manager confirmed that was the case and some services such as residential services were expensive which a personal budget could not cover but that option had to be there. By opening the contract up to tender, it would attract more providers.

Youth Cabinet Member 2 also asked how this shortfall of providers could be overcome. The Contract and Performance Manager answered that the issue had been with the previous providers where some had not met the specifications of the service. A lot of the providers had run into problems with the Care Quality Commission in terms of quality and standard. The service would be clear on the specifications required so providers would know what they were buying into. The Youth Cabinet Member 2 questioned whether the £400,000 per annum over the 4 years would be enough to which the Contract and Performance Manager answered it would be as most families could choose the personal budget. Previously, the £700,000 per annum was quite a lot whereas now, there was the community or residential services to choose from in Short Breaks.

The Chair asked if the families could use the personal budget to buy the domiciliary care services to which the Contract and Performance Manager confirmed they could. The Chair went on to query the number of families that used the personal budgets. The Contract and Performance Manager stated that 84 out of the 106 families they currently had were using the personal budget. The service ensured what was booked was used correctly.

The Youth Cabinet Member 3 questioned whether the £400,000 budget equalled out over the 106 families. The Contract and Performance Manager explained that this budget was provided over the cost of the year and that a

number of families could access Short Breaks. It covered what families needed.

RESOLVED:

That the Children's Services Overview and Security Committee agreed to the following recommendations to be made to Cabinet in November 2018:

1.1 That, subject to approval, the tender to provide Short Breaks and Support Services for Disabled Children with a term of 3 years and the option to extend for a period of 12 months.

1.2 That the authority is delegated to the accountable Corporate Director of Children's Services, in agreement with the Portfolio Holder to award contracts to meet the assessed needs and preferences of children and young people.

17. Children's Transport: Re-procurement of Service

The Contract and Performance Manager gave a brief outline of the report which stated that the provision of home to school transport was a statutory service. The current service was expensive and the service aimed to remove discretionary service. Individual schools would be looked at to see who could use public transport. The proposal was for the procurement of a framework contract for children's transport over a 4 year period. It would enable subsequent call off arrangements to be made that were flexible and responsive to changing journey needs e.g. downsizing a minibus carrying 1 child to a taxi instead.

Councillor Hague asked the Officer to expand on what the programme would do from paragraph 3.4. The Contract and Performance Manager answered that safe and unsafe home to school routes would be looked at. She gave an example of one school that had an unsafe route as it was also used by contractors. Councillor Hague went on to ask if this had a positive impact on buses as they were being used more. Stating that all bus routes had been looked at to ensure optimum use, the Contract and Performance Manager also mentioned inviting bus providers in for discussions. Talks included what services the bus providers could offer and support in home to school transport. There had been some positive comments from bus providers to run more buses during school times.

The Parent Governor Representative 1 sought clarification on what was considered an unsafe route and also on the meaning of 'call off activities' in paragraph 3.6. The Contract and Performance Manager explained that unsafe routes could include things such as the location of the school and roads with high speed vehicles. To overcome these, pelican crossings would be installed and speed limits reduced. The priority was to get children to school safely and the same went for unplaced children who could be attending a school that

was not within their immediate area. 'Call off activities' were ad-hoc funds that would give the flexibility to change routes if needed.

Following on from the previous question, the Chair asked how an unsafe route was measured. The Contract and Performance Manager explained that there were a certain set of criteria from the Department for Education that had to be met to ensure a safe route. This was different for each school which was why schools had to be looked at individually. The Chair commented that it was more of a desktop exercise and a child should be taken by the hand to walk the route. The Chair felt sending officers out was not the same given the age so he was concerned on the methodology used. He wanted these concerns to be fed back to the Cabinet Committee when the report was due there for decision.

Adding onto this, the Parent Governor Representative 1 thought every route was unsafe. She referred particularly to Treetops School and Woodside Academy due to the increase of vehicles. The Contract and Performance Manager said these were looked at regularly and knew that Treetops had been unsafe at the time of construction. Children would have been offered transport. The Parent Governor Representative 1 went on to say that she had seen minibuses carrying just 1 child which was concerning considering the extra pollution added to the environment. The Contract and Performance Manager clarified that the child may have been the last one to be dropped off but if not, the service would downsize to a taxi.

The Parent Governor Representative 1 went on to ask if there were any cases where the service would charge for school travel arrangements which were free for eligible children. The Contract and Performance Manager explained that not every case was funded and each one was monitored closely. Following on from this, the Chair queried whether extra seats were sold as concessions. Explaining that this was the case previously for parents, the Contract and Performance Manager stated this was no longer the case as it was disruptive for other children who had to wait until the concessionary seat was available again.

Regarding a Local Authority's duty to provide home to school transport to enable attendance, the Parent Governor Representative 1; asked if this would be a special case that would run for a short period to increase attendance. The Contract and Performance Manager explained it was the parents' duty to ensure the child's school attendance whether they were eligible for transport or not. Each case was monitored closely for eligibility.

The Vice-Chair queried the £4 million cost to the Council to take children to school. He asked how many children that would cover. The Contract and Performance Manager answered there were over 123 school transport routes and over 1000 children attending school. There were no specific data to hand but could be provided to the Committee from the Contract and Performance Manager.

As children had safe routes going to school, the Chair asked what happened after getting there. Routes from there would become unsafe within the school. He gave an example of one school where the road was blocked with vehicles taking children into school. The Chair asked if a drop-off point could be established to ease congestion. As the trouble was getting parents to listen, the Contract and Performance Manager explained the service needed to work with schools on drop-off points. An example was given where one school used a local pub's car park for parents to park for drop-offs. Walking buses were also an option the service was considering. The Chair went on to ask if concessionary transport vehicles could have a drop-off point established to which the Contract and Performance Manager confirmed it could.

Moving onto procurement, the Chair asked what chances was the service giving Thurrock based taxi firms to win a contract. The Contract and Performance Manager replied that the service was looking to bring in software that would enable providers to choose the routes. There was the option to break the routes down and still be able to deliver the service required.

The Chair went on to ask what weighting was given to environmental concerns and keeping extra miles down to a minimum. The Contract and Performance Manager answered the service was working with procurement to ensure specifications were met. Sustainability was one aspect and social values were another aspect. The service had been engaging with local providers who were looking for innovation within the service and were looking to deliver different services as well. For example, this could be specialist vehicles for special needs children.

Querying on out of borough contractors, the Chair asked if the service would accept those with lower licensing standards than Thurrock's. With a firm no, the Contract and Performance Manager confirmed the service would not reduce standards.

Supporting the Chair's points, Councillor Hague asked that the criteria surrounding the procurement process be provided at the Cabinet Committee when the report would go there. In particular the environmental impact and border issues and how these would be addressed to ensure Cabinet had a clear structure of this.

The Youth Cabinet Member 2 felt 123 routes was a lot for Thurrock and questioned if these routes could be combined. He expressed concern on how taxpayers' money was used for these many routes. The Contract and Performance Manager explained that the amount of routes contributed to the fact that Thurrock was close to the London network and the borough was comprised of many villages. The service had a statutory duty to provide transport to children to get to school but they did look at every possible method to reduce spend where possible.

On public transport, the Youth Cabinet Member 2 asked if this was used to which the Contract and Performance Manager confirmed they did. He went on to suggest free transport for children similar to the Transport for London

model. The Contract and Performance Manager stated the service was working with bus providers to negotiate discounted tickets for children although it would not be free. The Youth Cabinet Member 2 continued by asking if sixth form children would use a walking bus given their ages. Answering that this would be for special needs children, the Contract and Performance Manager also mentioned travel training for special needs children as well.

RESOLVED:

That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed that the following recommendations be made to Cabinet in December 2018:

- 1.1 That approval was given for the re-tender of a framework contract for children's transport in accordance with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules for a term of 4 years commencing at the start of the academic year 2019/20.**
- 1.2 That agreement was given for the award of the contract to be delegated to the Corporate Director of Children's Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder.**
- 1.3 That it was noted that a further report would be presented should any policy changes be required in due course.**

18. Schools' Performance Report

The report was presented in turns by the School Improvement Manager and the Head of Virtual School. Officers would pause in between sections of the report to take questions and comments from the Committee.

Stopping at section 7, Officers took questions.

Referring to the disadvantaged gap in 6.9, Councillor Anderson questioned whether the gap would be eliminated if it continued to reduce to which the School Improvement Manager confirmed it would. The Parent Governor Representative 1 sought clarification on the 'fsm' terminology in the graph in 3.5. The School Improvement Manager answered it was abbreviated for 'free school meals'.

Stopping at section 9, Officers took questions.

Councillor Hague queried the fundamental risks of going forward in terms of maintaining a trajectory. The School Improvement Manager replied that Thurrock was doing better than some schools when compared on the Ofsted figures. She stated they were doing well with around 89% of schools that were judged to be good or better, when the national average was 88%. However, some schools' data in Thurrock had dropped due to recruitment issues. Adding on, the Church of England Representative gave praise to schools and

teachers for their hard work. She continued by stating that a straight trajectory of the figures could not be expected every year as each year was a different set of children.

The Chair welcomed the closing of the disadvantaged gap at the end of key stage 1. He asked what the strategy would be on closing the gap at the end of key stage 2. The School Improvement Manager said the learning would come from schools that had closed their disadvantaged gap to develop strategies to support schools with wider disadvantaged gaps. It was not always easy to determine the gap as not all parents would claim the free school meals which was where the figures were pulled from.

Referring to GCSEs on page 51, the Chair noted some schools had improved tremendously well but there were also a number of schools declining e.g. William Edwards. The Chair questioned when the decline would become a cause for concern. Stating that the trend would have been picked up by the school themselves, the School Improvement Manager added that the service would be visiting the schools for discussions on the trend.

As figures could not be reported from Palmer's College due to it being a part of Southend Council, the Chair stated there had to be a way to report these figures as the young people attending were living in Thurrock. The School Improvement Manager replied the figures could be included but it would not count as Thurrock's figures.

Referring to 7.2, the Youth Cabinet Member 1 mentioned the figures of the graph and expressed concern on the decrease in Maths 4+ and English 5+. He stated that as the grade bands would move up to 5 being a pass in GCSEs the following year, it would mean many students would not pass their GCSEs. He asked the service's strategy on this. The School Improvement Manager explained the grade bands had been introduced to improve standards. The current cohorts had not had much time to be taught the new curriculum whereby future cohorts would have longer to study the more challenging GCSE curriculum.

At the end of the report, Officers took questions.

Pleased to see the closure of the disadvantaged gap, Councillor Okunade asked how the service could sustain the increase and improvement in staffing levels for key stage 2. Councillor Okunade also asked for reasons for non-improvement on some disadvantaged gaps. The Head of Virtual School stated that key stage 4 was improving and in line with the national cohorts. Thurrock's looked after children were performing better than the national average but they needed to understand why some were not doing better which could be due to previous traumas. The gap may not close for looked after children until they were in later years as some may not have been in schools at an early age or had missed a few years of school. There were many variables that could affect that attainment.

In terms of sustaining staff levels, the Head of Virtual School explained that staff had been agreed for 1 academic year but they were now moving into the second academic year. The service would try to ensure the progress continued but they had to look at the progress that looked after children were making. They hoped to continue to have the staffing in the service, schools and social workers as the service had seen the impact they have had.

The Church of England Representative agreed that the progress of looked after children was important and felt that having the data and figures of their development in education would be good for the Committee to see. The Head of Virtual School explained the data could not be presented in the report as each looked after child had an individual report. However, once the data was released from the Department for Education, the data could be reported.

Continuing on, the Church of England Representative queried whether looked after children were still in care when they reached the end of a stage. Also referring to the middle of paragraph 9.3 in regards to pupils with gaps in their prior learning, she felt that could not be an assumption. The Head of Virtual School explained it was not an assumption as many of those pupils had not attended pre-school or reception prior to year 7. Some looked after children had come into care during those times and these could only be reported in their individual reports.

RESOLVED:

That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the provisional outcomes of the summer 2018 tests and examinations and commended schools, pupils and parents/carers on their achievements.

19. 2017/18 Annual Complaints and Representations Report

Presented by the Strategic Lead for Information Management, the report outlined the number of complaints and key issues arising from these within the Children's Services. This was for the year 2017/18.

Referring to page 55 of the report, Councillor Anderson said it was good to see the increase in the complaints response times. He asked if there was a process in place to sustain this figure. The Strategic Lead for Information Management explained there were processes in place to track and trace complaints. The service did their best to maintain performance.

Councillor Okunade queried whose decision it was for a complaint to go through to Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR). The Strategic Lead for Information Management answered that ADR took place if a complainant was unhappy with their Stage 1 response. The complaints team would then work with the service and complainant to agree a resolution to the complaint.

The Parent Governor Representative 1 questioned who decided when a complaint was complex. The Strategic Lead for Information Management said

it could be a combination of the volume of issues raised within the complaint along with any risks to the complainant.

RESOLVED:

That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered and noted the report.

20. Safeguarding and Performance Management Children's Social Care

Presented by the Corporate Director, the report outlined the current arrangements for the monitoring and oversight of children. It covered areas of:

- Child Safety;
- Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services;
- Staffing;
- Staff Survey Results;
- Performance Standards;
- Management and Reporting Progress;
- Creating a Positive Learning Culture; and
- Data Quality.

Referring to section 6, the Chair commented that some of the results from the staff survey were poor. Explaining that work was being undertaken with staff to improve in those areas, the Corporate Director stated that additional teams were also being created. He recognised that social work was stressful and the feedback from Ofsted had been that most were grateful for the support given from managers. The service was looking to support staff through adding in additional resources. Agreeing with the Chair on the poor results of the staff survey, the Church of England Representative also congratulated the service on picking up on the issues found within the survey.

The Parent Governor Representative 2 explained she came from a social work background and understood that the issue of working late was one found in all boroughs. She felt it was a national issue that had to be addressed due to the complexity of the work undertaken by social workers.

Councillor Okunade queried if there were issues and reasons for permanent staff leaving the service. The Corporate Director stated the turnover was low and the service was good at bringing in newly qualified social workers. Many who had joined Thurrock had chosen to stay.

RESOLVED:

That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the current arrangements for safeguarding children.

Standing orders were suspended at 9.22pm to an additional 15 minutes in order to allow the Committee to finish the agenda items.

21. Children's Social Care Performance

The report was presented by the Assistant Director which outlined the continuing high level of demand within Thurrock's social care. An area of focus was on the number of adopted children in 2017/18.

There were no questions or comments from the Committee.

RESOLVED:

1.1 That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the areas of improvement in Children's Social Care and work undertaken to manage demand for statutory social care services.

22. Work Programme

Members queried the agenda items to be added on for future Committee meetings as the programme showed a few items only. The Corporate Director would discuss with the Chair.

23. Chair's Resignation from Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Chair expressed his disappointment that there had been no report given into the serious whistleblowing allegations as had been requested by Members at the last Committee meeting. He stated that they had not expected to see details but only for the Committee to be taken seriously.

Upon not seeing the report on the agenda for that night's Committee meeting, the Chair had approached Officers and queried on this. He had been told by Officers that the report would be covered in item 10 of the agenda to which he felt it did not.

The Chair continued by saying the Committee had not expected to see names or fine details but only asked for reassurances that allegations were being investigated. He thought the report given was 'nothing more than a white wash' and that the members of staff that had made the allegations had been let down as well as the Committee and the children of Thurrock.

The Chair stated he did not like to criticise Officers but as the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Members had to be provided with an overview of the services provided for children and young people. Without this, the Committee could not provide a real overview and real scrutiny of the services.

As the Chair had felt he and elected Members of the Committee had been treated unfairly by Officers, along with the lack of report produced, the Chair felt his concerns increased. With that, he resigned from his role as Chair of

the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee with immediate effect.

The meeting finished at 9.35 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**