

Minutes of the Meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 2 February 2021 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Alex Anderson (Chair), Jennifer Smith (Vice-Chair),
Abbie Akinbohun, Sara Muldowney, Elizabeth Rigby and
Steve Liddiard (Substitute) (substitute for Bukky Okunade)

Nicola Cranch, Parent Governor Representative
Sally Khawaja, Parent Governor Representative

Apologies: Councillor Bukky Okunade

In attendance:

Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services
Sue Green, Strategic Lead of Children's Commissioning and Service Transformation
Michele Lucas, Assistant Director of Education and Skills
Joseph Tynan, Interim Assistant Director of Children's Services
Malcolm Taylor, Strategic Lead for Specialist Provision and Principal Education Psychologist
Catherine Wilson, Strategic Lead Commissioning and Procurement
Priscilla Bruce-Annan, Local Safeguarding Children's Partnership Business Manager
Roberta Fontaine, Youth Worker
Alicia Jones, Youth Cabinet Representative
Lucia Lucioni, Youth Cabinet Member
Adam Shea, Youth Cabinet Member
Wendy Le, Senior Democratic Services Officer

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

45. Minutes

Referring to page 5 on the data requested within the Pupil Place Plan report in relation to the in-year school admissions applications, Councillor Muldowney asked that the data be sent over to Committee Members as stated at that meeting.

The minutes of the Extraordinary Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 12 November 2020 and the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 1 December 2020 were approved as a true and correct record.

46. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

47. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

48. Youth Cabinet Update

The Youth Cabinet Members announced that this meeting would be their last as they would soon be over the eligible age for Youth Cabinet membership. They thanked the Committee for giving Youth Cabinet representatives the opportunity to participate at Committee to enable the voices of young people to be heard. They went on to give the following update:

- Make Your Mark had a 0.5% of voter turnout due to the lockdown and Youth Cabinet had contacted schools about this via emails. The top local issue identified was domestic violence that had never been on the ballot before and the Youth Cabinet would consider this in the future.
- In January, Youth Cabinet were invited to Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) to give the views of religious education from young people's views and how it can be improved. Youth Cabinet would be attending more of these meetings in future.
- The topics for Curriculum for Life was now confirmed as Central Life Skills; Young Thurrock Services; What is SEND?; Criminal Exploitation; Jobs and Funky Finance. Small learning content would be produced and sent to schools for them combine these into lessons to enable young people to have a better learning experience. These would be distributed via the website which was being worked on.
- A survey about the impact of Covid-19 on young people was undertaken and 73 responses came back from young people between the ages of 11 – 19 years old. 21% had felt their school provided them with effective support during the pandemic while others expressed that schools had not provided adequate support and sixth form colleges had better support. Young people wanted to also see more mental health and wellbeing related services such as mentoring, 1 to 1 support and someone to talk to so they knew that they were not alone. Another concern was uncertainty with the job market and had asked if another youth employment system could be put forward. Young people expressed their main fears to be exams; mental health; not achieving dreams; not being provided with enough opportunities; and that their voices were not heard.
- The Young Thurrock Team had been providing support to young people for wellbeing and ensuring that virtual sessions were accessible to everybody.

The Chair questioned whether Funky Finance taught personal finance to which the Youth Cabinet confirmed that it did. He went on to express his support for the Curriculum for Life.

The Committee expressed their thanks and appreciation to the Youth Cabinet Members for their commitment, hard work and attendance at Committee for the past two years. The Committee wished the Youth Cabinet Members success in their future endeavours.

Sheila Murphy questioned whether there would be a handover period for the new Youth Cabinet Members that would attend Committee to which the Youth Cabinet Members confirmed that handover sessions had already started.

The Youth Cabinet Members asked if the service had plans for a mentoring programme and how the school wellbeing programmes were run in Thurrock. Michele Lucas explained that the Thurrock School Wellbeing Service was on the Agenda for this meeting and that there was a mentoring programme that was provided via the Inspire team. The Director of Public Health had highlighted the importance of mentoring for young people in a report brought to Committee last year and the mentoring programme would be developed further.

49. Items Raised by Thurrock Local Safeguarding Children Partnership - Update on the Serious Case Review (SCR): Sam and Kyle - Action Plan

Priscilla Bruce-Annan gave the following update:

- The LSCP was working on new and creative ways of sharing learning from SCR which could be videos or podcasts to combine the learning from the three reviews to disseminate that learning. Briefings on a page was also considered to give a quick snapshot of immediate learning. These would be shared across partnerships and practitioners.
- Jane Foster-Taylor who was the Head Nurse for Thurrock CCG had recently retired and was now replaced by Steven Mayo in the interim. Safeguarding children remained at the top of their list.
- In the LSCP, one staff member had left and the peer review would look into the role and responsibilities of the business team to see how the post could be filled and to ensure that the team had the capabilities to drive forward the action plans and the work within these as well as ensuring that the team had the capability to deliver the day-to-day operational work.

Priscilla Bruce-Annan went on to present the report on pages 17 – 24.

The Chair sought clarification on whether the green actions would remain on the action plan and monitored. Priscilla Bruce-Annan confirmed that these would remain and be monitored and form a part of the service's everyday work.

Councillor Muldowney said that it was tragic when a child died and prompted a SCR. She noted that from Sam's death in January 2018, it took a long time for the SCR to be published and people were concerned about the length of time it had taken for the action plan to be formed and that it was now 6 months since the report had been published. She said that people felt no

action was being taken and that there was anxiety amongst parents in general safeguarding concerns. She thought that not a lot of action points had been accomplished and pointed out that action point 5 only required that a date be set for training which was done. She queried how an action could be completed with the setting of a date and how this would be tracked to ensure that the training took place and how that learning would be embedded. She also asked whether the training would come back in the action plan.

In response, Priscilla Bruce-Annan noted the concerns raised. On action point 5 that was in regards to Signs of Safety and Graded Care Profile training, she said that the date had been set and publicised. Agencies were booking onto that training date and following on from that, a whole suite of training sessions would take place which would be tracked and monitored. It would start with an awareness session for practitioners that wanted more information on Graded Care Profiles and there were different levels of sessions for different practitioners. The learning from the training would be embedded into the work of the LSCP and put into practice across the partnership. She said that a report on training attendance and the content delivered in training could be brought back to Committee for scrutiny. She went on to say that training courses had pre and post-delivery evaluations and follow up evaluations that tracked what practitioners felt they had gained from the training. The service also assessed whether the training had changed any practices.

Councillor Muldowney noted Priscilla Bruce-Annan's points on capacity in the team earlier and questioned whether the reduction of one staff member in the business team would cause further delays to the action plan. Priscilla Bruce-Annan explained that her earlier point referred to her post being vacant and although there had been someone covering the post during that time, it was not fully filled as the person was juggling two jobs. She highlighted that the person had done a fantastic job and that she was now the dedicated person filling the role and leading the team. She reassured the Committee that she would ensure that the action plan would progress along and be quickly embedded into practice.

Councillor Muldowney noted that this action plan and the LSCP Peer Review Action Plan was connected and was pleased to see these on the same Agenda. She felt that both action plans had similar issues identified and thought this showed that practices had not been embedded and commented that it seemed like the LSCP was at a 'beginning stage' with the two action plans. She also raised concerns on families that may have fallen into problem situations that the service did not know about and questioned whether children were falling through the net. Priscilla Bruce-Annan answered that there were some new practices and learning to be developed as a result of the SCR review. She said that the LSCP was not at the start of the action plan as some actions had already begun and just needed to be moved forward or developed further to ensure these were embedded and that awareness was raised right.

Referring to Councillor Muldowney's earlier concerns about the length of time the SCR had taken, Sheila Murphy said that the SCR needed to be agreed by

the three statutory partners and not just one. The SCR was independently undertaken and it was not within the gift of the partnership to set a time period as a thorough investigation needed to be undertaken. The partnership had looked into how the review could be undertaken more effectively and quicker yet ensure it was done thoroughly. In regards to children falling through the net, Sheila Murphy stated that the Council's Children's Social Care service was not closed and that referrals were still coming into the service. Staff were on duty and ready to act on those referrals and social workers were physically visiting families every day. She went on to say that she met with school head teachers weekly and although children were not in schools who were a source of referrals, schools were visiting families where there were vulnerabilities and making phone calls and where required referrals to children's social care. Schools also offered online learning as they were not closed. The service continued to look after the Council's looked after children as well children on protection plans and children in need.

Councillor Muldowney was pleased to hear that the Council's Children's Social Care service was still accessible. She asked whether all action points were delayed apart from 3.2 which was green. She queried whether the colour blue was used in the RAG rating. She also sought clarification on action point 1.1. She also raised concerns where the SCR report in July 2020 had highlighted that concerns had not been escalated. Priscilla Bruce-Annan explained that an amber rating meant that the action was in progress alongside the delivery timeline; red meant that the action had not started yet and green meant that the action had been completed and needed to be embedded. She said that blue could be used for when actions were embedded. In terms of action point 1.1, she said that the action had been completed and feedback from organisations had been received in regards to how they would ensure that their practitioners would understand the escalation policy. The next action down had also been completed which involved agencies feedback on implementation and how they would share their areas of good practice.

Sheila Murphy added that the LSCP independent review highlighted that the LSCP had always had an escalation policy and the review found that some of the agencies had concerns that they were not being heard as they had not been using the escalation policy appropriately. One of the recommendations was to ensure understanding of the policy which the agencies had agreed to and the review had questioned why agencies had not used the policy to make their concerns known. The action taken on this was to ensure that agencies would feedback on how they would use the policy instead of just sending the policy out again and to give the LSCP reassurance that agencies would raise concerns in line with the policy. All agencies should understand the policy now and the LSCP should see some of those escalations which would be monitored if the escalation came to the strategic partners. She said that the appropriate use of the escalation policy would be raised in training programmes and also thresholds as not all agencies understood where the responsibilities lay with which agencies and the escalation policy needed to be highlighted here. The LSCP had also updated their thresholds document and sent out to partners which was agreed as a partnership. She highlighted

that this was not done out of the review but was to ensure that the partnership was clear on the thresholds.

Councillor Muldowney sought clarification on when the action plan would be completed and embedded. Priscilla Bruce-Annan answered that the action plan had begun before she had been in post and that the aim was to complete and embed the actions by the end of the calendar year.

Referring to Sheila Murphy's earlier comments on the position of schools, Malcolm Taylor reassured the Committee that the service continued to monitor children who had social workers or was on an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) and Safeguarding Leads continued their monitoring too as well as sending the service a fortnightly return data. Schools continued daily contact with those children to ensure their safeguarding welfare and would report any concerns directly to children's services if they were concerned.

Adding to this, Joe Tynan said that the sharing of information about vulnerable children between social care and education was good as there were regular meetings that Officers attended and reassured the Committee that children were safeguarded every day. In regards to escalations, he said that conversations about cases between partner agencies were being held earlier and that audit processes were being looked at to make these more creative so showed that there was a good partnership working. He highlighted that the Signs of Safety training had been going on for a while before the review and that the MASH Strategic Board had been in place for about two years and would be coming into the LSCP. Learning was constantly looked at and the outcome for a child and practices were always looked at to see what could be done better to give children the best support and service.

Councillor Muldowney noted earlier comments that Covid-19 had caused some delays to the action plan and she asked for examples of this and how this would be addressed going forward. Priscilla Bruce-Annan said that the service had changed the ways that they were working and had adapted to these changes such as virtual meetings which was working well. With the current lockdown situation, different working patterns had also been well embedded in order to meet the needs of the service. Sheila Murphy added that some staff in health services had been diverted elsewhere to support other health services during the pandemic. Agencies had also had staffing levels affected due to some staff going into self-isolation. In this current lockdown, the service had been assured by health colleagues that where possible, health staff in Children's Services would not be moved to support other health services during the pandemic so the health services was ensuring that children were prioritised.

The Chair asked that the action plan be returned to Committee at the start of the new municipal year.

RESOLVED:

- 1.1 That the Committee acknowledged the progress to date against the Action Plan.**
- 1.2 That the Committee provided oversight and challenge to ensure the actions are having impact across the agencies.**

50. Update on the LSCP Peer Review Action Plan

The report on pages 25 – 32 was presented by Priscilla Bruce-Annan.

The Chair questioned how the agencies had been working together over the past few months since Priscilla Bruce-Annan had been in post. Priscilla Bruce-Annan said that the multi-agency working was working well and where there were challenges, these were monitored and discussed. Discussions were monitored to check what was agreed and to ensure that work was being followed through.

Councillor Muldowney sought clarification on the action point for meeting with the MASH steering group which was shown as a red rating. Priscilla Bruce-Annan explained that the action had been red at the time that the report was submitted a few weeks ago but since then, the action was now amber as a meeting with the MASH steering group had been set for next week.

Councillor Muldowney questioned if there had been further discussions in regards to the duplication of meetings that had led to a review and new structure. She also noted that shared priorities action points were still red which she felt needed to be resolved before moving onto other areas and she questioned whether this was holding back some areas of work. Priscilla Bruce-Annan explained that the recommendation suggested was to produce a joint document that shared priorities across the boards to reduce any duplications such as a plan on page that could be seen at a glance. This enabled the boards a more collaborative way of working that shared all priorities across the boards. Work continued on and was not held back.

Councillor Muldowney noted that the reviewer had not been able to look at the revised threshold document on the original report but now the document was available and circulated. The reviewer had said that she had been unable to review the effectiveness of information sharing or how the partnership was working as she had not seen the document before. She questioned how this was now being monitored. Priscilla Bruce-Annan explained that the reviewer had not seen the threshold document at the time as it was still in progress but was not published on the LSCP website and circulated to partners and agencies. Feedback had been sought from sub groups in how the document was being used; if there were any issues; and how well practitioners and agencies understood the document. In sub-group meetings, partners and representatives fed back on what thresholds had been met and whether there had been any discussions or disagreements in terms of thresholds and what had happened in some cases where the threshold was not met such as what other support was in place for families.

Referring to Councillor Muldowney's earlier query on the MASH steering group, Sheila Murphy pointed out that Steering Group had been in operation for a while and was effective. The independent reviewer had recommended that the MASH Steering Group be linked into the LSCP as it worked well and would be better as part of the LSCP's governance arrangement. She said that the LSCP knew its priorities and the reviewer has recommended that the LSCP link into other boards that also had an input in safeguarding. She went on to say that it helped to have an independent reviewer assess the LSCP to see what could be improved upon and she looked forward to recruiting an independent scrutineer chair.

Councillor Muldowney noted that there were a number of points on the action plan that had no reported formal mechanisms and sought clarity on how policies and strategies were disseminated to frontline workers and ensure that they understood these. She also highlighted the importance of the child's voice which should be at the top of the agenda. Priscilla Bruce-Annan said that frontline workers were canvassed and asked crucial questions to ensure that they knew policies; to check for learning gaps; to ensure that they knew where to go for information and awareness training. Through this, it enabled the service to check whether those channels were working and if anything needed to be done differently.

Referring to action number 14, the Chair questioned the outcome of the LSCPs' meeting on a bid to schools forum. Priscilla Bruce-Annan answered that the LSCP had considered that given the current pandemic, it was not the right time to get a bid from schools forum as schools were under immense pressure. Sheila Murphy added that the service was also looking at financial contributions to the LSCP across the strategic partners. When considering financial contributions, schools were included in this and the LSCP was looking into how the partnership could be more equitably funded.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee provided comment and challenge to the Action Plan and recognise progress to date.

51. SEND Inspection Outcome - Written Statement of Action Update

Michele Lucas thanked the Committee for providing scrutiny and challenge to the action plan in this municipal year. She went on to present the report on pages 33 – 72.

Councillor Muldowney highlighted her concerns on A2 where the NEET figures had increased in comparison to the last report and questioned how the service would be addressing this. She sought clarification on how A2 and A5 had progressed to green. She was pleased to hear that the service was working on the local offer and said that she had attended some of the parent carer groups and had found it difficult to find the relevant information as a parent/carer. She also sought more detail on the Quality Assurance (QA) visits that took place on 11 and 18 December.

In regards to the NEET figures, Michele Lucas answered that the service had been successful in its Kickstart programme and DWP had some delays partly because the programme had been oversubscribed. The Local Authority had 30 opportunities in the Kickstart programme and the service was looking at how they could support their SEND learners in that. With young people who were NEET, the service had produced videos of young people talking about their experiences on some of the service's programmes which included Supported Internship programmes and post 16 programmes. Michele Lucas said that she would send an update to the Committee on how the actions of A2 and A5 had progressed from amber to green. In regards to the local offer, Michele Lucas said that Ofsted had not picked this up but the service had. She highlighted the importance of refreshing the local offer to involve parents/carers, children and young people in the delivery of the service to ensure it functioned better.

In regards to the QA visits, Malcolm Taylor said that these were carried out virtually on two of the service's independent special schools to get an update on the key issues that had been picked up by the previous Ofsted inspection. The service was satisfied with the answers and progress given by the two independent special schools. The discussion focussed on the key issues of the two independent special schools ensuring that the quality of their service was delivering the appropriate needs for the service's children and also discussed other issues in regards of paperwork; safeguarding links; how many children were in the schools; how children's needs had been supported during the pandemic; and how these had been discussed with their parents. The QA visits were in addition to the annual reviews that took place around the EHCPs which focused on the individual needs and progress of those pupils and also in addition to the social care visits that took place

The Chair highlighted some discrepancies within the RAG colouring of the actions where some were yellow to which Michele Lucas said she would look at and update.

RESOLVED:

O&S to scrutinise the work that has been undertaken during the period outlined in the report and offer support and challenge.

52. Thurrock School Wellbeing Service

The report on pages 73 – 86 was presented by Malcolm Taylor.

The Chair said that the support line for parents, carers and staff was important and to ensure that they were made aware of this support service. He thought it was a positive feature of the service.

Councillor Rigby asked how this service was being communicated to teachers and students. Malcolm Taylor said that the schools' Wellbeing Leads regularly met along with the Psychology Service and School Wellbeing Service (SWS)

to ensure that the information was communicated. Information packs were also sent out via email to schools directly and also mentioned the SWS in regular meetings with Safeguarding Leads; in head teachers' briefings; and at SEND forums. Schools were reminded through their SWS Leads and were encouraged to add information about the SWS support line within their school publications. He went on to say that the Wellbeing Education Resilience Programme would be rolled out soon which practitioners would be fully informed of before the webinars went online.

Nicola Cranch said that her children's schools were aware of the SWS and that her son was one of the Mental Health Champions in his school which he had undertaken the training session for from the school. She said that both her children's schools were holding a Mental Health Week. She went on to say that the SWS was outstanding and that from a parent's perspective, it had been well received and informed via Facebook, emails and via school learning platforms. She thanked the SWS and felt it had been helpful. Jackie Hourihan thanked Nicola Cranch for her support and comments. She said that the team was allocated a certain number of schools each and each school had a Mental Health Lead which the team communicated through. She went on to say that network meetings were also held where the SWS information and support line was mentioned.

Councillor Akinbohun commented that schools were under immense pressure because of the pandemic and may not be able to see to every case particularly where there were those with more severe mental health issues. She questioned whether there were other mental health services available to them. Malcolm Taylor said that there were children who were more vulnerable and sensitive to the current situation and that there had been an increase in referrals for these children. This was being managed by the service's colleagues in the mental wellbeing services through their existing processes that was the triage. The service was in regular contact with these colleagues to ensure that children had good access to all services and to identify where the pressure points were. The service was also linking in to Mind and Open Door that had counselling services in schools and academies also employed their own counselling staff. The service also ensured they communicated with the Educational Psychology Service which the service used for significantly severe cases to support. He went on to say that the service ensured that schools were aware of the quick and appropriate access of higher level services where appropriate.

RESOLVED:

Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny to note the work that has taken place.

The Committee agreed to suspend standing orders at 9.14pm to enable the Agenda to be completed.

53. Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Service Re-Procurement

The report on pages 87 – 94 was presented by Catherine Wilson.

The Chair questioned how the experience and learning from the last 7 years of the service had helped to inform the specifications of the new contract. Catherine Wilson answered that the service had looked at how services had been delivered locally and how the Collaborative Commissioning Forum monitored the contract and interacted with providers. At the start of the contract, integration had not been as good. The contract had now been developed fully within the monitoring and key performance indicators to ensure that young people's experiences were far more positive and to ensure that the referral pathways worked alongside local services such as the SWS.

Alicia Jones said that her experience with the service had been negative a few years ago but was now improved. From a young person's perspective, she now commended the service due to its improvements and was pleased that it was locally based. She thanked the service and the SWS for the improvements.

RESOLVED:

- 1.1 That Members considered the continuation of the collaborative commissioning arrangements in place and support the financial contribution from Thurrock Council as set out in the paper**
- 1.2 That Members agreed to the recommendation to Cabinet for the re-procurement of the tier two and tier three Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Service through the collaborative commissioning arrangements.**

54. Work Programme

The following items were added to the work programme for the next municipal year:

- LSCP Action Plan Update
- Written Statement of Action Review
- High Risk Notifications

The Committee thanked the service for their hard work this municipal year.

The meeting finished at Time Not Specified

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

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