

Minutes of the Meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee of the 13 September 2022, held on the 5 October 2022 at 7.00pm

Present: Councillors Adam Carter (Chair), Alex Anderson and Augustine Ononaji (Substitute) (substitute for George Coxshall)

Apologies: Councillors Martin Kerin, Srikanth Panjala, Graham Snell and Kim James (Healthwatch)

In attendance:
Jenny Coles, Independent Chairperson & Scrutineer Local Safeguarding Children's Partnership
Daniel Jones, Service Manager for Looked After Children
Clare Moore, Strategic Lead - YOS and Prevention
Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services
Janet Simon, Assistant Director, Children's Social Care and Early Help
Priscilla Bruce-Annan, Local Safeguarding Children's Partnership Business Manager
Angela Surrey, Youth Worker, Children's Service Youth Cabinet
Rhiannon Whiteley, Senior 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.

The Chair explained that the meeting would be paused whilst the Committee waited for another member to arrive so that the meeting would be quorate. The meeting resumed at 19.17

10. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 June 2022 were approved as a true and correct record.

11. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

12. Declaration of Interests

No interests were declared.

13. Youth Cabinet Update Report

The Youth Cabinet Representative provided their update to the meeting. She explained about the wellbeing walk that took place on 25th July where 16 young people walked around the lake and talked about mental health. She also confirmed that the Youth Cabinet are looking to run another walk shortly towards the end of this year.

The Youth Cabinet Representative also told the meeting that a number of youth cabinet members have also had the opportunity to sit on interview panels this year and have found it a valuable experience.

The Chair thanked the Youth Cabinet Representative for the update and queried if the next walk will also be at Grangewaters.

The Youth Cabinet Representative responded that it probably would.

Councillor Anderson asked what the motion was about that the Thurrock MYP presented at the UK Youth Parliament Annual Conference.

The Youth Cabinet Representative confirmed the motion was about drink spiking.

Councillor Ononaji queried what the compilation of the Youth Cabinet was and how members were recruited.

The Youth Cabinet Representative confirmed that this is sometimes through schools. The Youth Worker confirmed that members are often recruited through schools but sometimes young people approach her directly.

14. 2021/22 Annual Complaints and Representations Report - Children's Social Care

The Statutory and Corporate Complaints Manager presented the report. She summarised that overall the report was positive.

The Chair thanked the Statutory and Corporate Complaints Manager for the report, he commented that he was interested to note that on page 25 all representations had gone up this year and asked if this was as a result of a scheme to improve communications about compliments and complaints.

The Statutory and Corporate Complaints Manager explained that during social work visits and at all stages people are advised on the procedure for making a complaint.

The Chair also highlighted that it was nice to see the compliments outweighed the complaints.

Councillor Anderson commented that he was pleased to see the benchmarking against other Local Authorities was included in the report as that was requested by another Member of the Committee previously.

Councillor Anderson queried if there is anything more that could be done with advertising in case residents aren't aware how to complain.

The Statutory and Corporate Complaints Manager confirmed that there is a good section on the website about this.

The Assistant Director of Children's Social Care and Early Help added that they had worked very closely with the Statutory and Corporate Complaints Manager and the Strategic Lead for Information Management to make sure anyone they are working with is aware of how to make a complaint. The feedback is important and helps the service to improve.

RESOLVED:

1.1 That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider and note the report.

15. Fostering Recruitment Update

The Service Manager for Looked After Children presented the report to Members. He confirmed that Thurrock Council's offer to foster carers is competitive and they are successful in recruiting foster carers however a lot of foster carer's fostering life at the same time are also coming to a natural end. The Committee were provided with an update that this month two more approvals are coming to the fostering panel.

The Chair commented that he was very supportive of the recruitment campaign and stated that he was pleased to hear that two more foster carers are close to acceptance.

The Chair queried how many of the 7 households whose approval had ended due to standards of care were recruited as part of this campaign.

The Service Manager for Looked After Children confirmed it was only one. He further explained that 'standards of care' covered a wide range of issues, it can relate to a particular incident, a change in circumstances or it might be as a result of something that has happened outside of their role as a foster carer too. He added that foster carers are not expected to be perfect, and they will always try to address any issues, provide support or help them to improve.

RESOLVED:

1.1 Members are updated on Thurrock's Fostering Recruitment Strategy and its impact on the number of foster carer approvals.

- 1.2 Members note the marketing activities being undertaken so opportunities are created to increase the recruitment of foster carers.**

16. The Inspection of the Young Offending Service 2022

The Strategic Lead for YOS and Prevention presented the report to members. She explained that on the 16th -20th May 2022 YOS was inspected by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP). The service was rated overall as 'good' and it was noted there was outstanding leadership and excellent work being done to help stop re-offending. There were 13 Judgements overall, 6 were rated Outstanding, 4 as Good and 3 as Requires Improvement. The 3 'Requires Improvement' grades were all within the domain of Out of Court Disposals. Work has already commenced to address these areas and the 8 recommendations to improve have been put into a formal action plan which was submitted to HMIP on 16.9.22.

Councillor Anderson requested sight of the action plan.

The Strategic Lead for YOS and Prevention agreed to circulate this.

The Chair noted the overrepresentation of the BAME community and queried what Thurrock is doing about this and what is being done nationally.

The Strategic Lead for YOS and Prevention confirmed they monitor their data regarding the overrepresentation of young black males in the criminal justice system and they have set up a task and finish group made up of representatives from across the whole criminal justice system to look specifically at this and the resources Thurrock have. They are also looking at a participation exercise with young black males known to Thurrock YOS to help understand about the services Thurrock provide to meet the needs of that cohort.

The Strategic Lead for YOS and Prevention confirmed that she is a member of the Essex Criminal Justice Board and they are completing a research project to look at the issue of the overrepresentation of members from the BAME community in the Criminal Justice System which is just moving into phase 2. It is a nationwide issue and there is a need to intervene earlier. A multi-agency approach is required.

RESOLVED:

- 1.1 That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider the Inspection Report of Thurrock Youth Offending Service and provide comment or challenge in respect of the outcomes**

1.2 That the areas for improvement and recommendations identified by HMIP are considered by the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee and support offered to deliver against these recommendations.

17. Items raised by Thurrock Local Safeguarding Children Partnership: Progress Update on Peer Review and Case Review - Action Plans

The LSCP Business Manager presented the report to Members.

The Chair queried what the timeline will be for the signed off action plan.

The LSCP Business Manager confirmed that the thematic review plan is due to be signed off in November.

The Independent Chairperson & Scrutineer for Thurrock LSCP confirmed that they are beginning work with the adult safeguarding board on transitional safeguarding.

RESOLVED:

1.1 That the Committee note the update on the work of the LSCP and the progress made on Action Plans to date.

1.2 Update on LSCP Work

18. Work Programme

The Assistant Director of Children's Social Care & Early Help raised that the Children's Social Care Performance report should be added to the November meeting.

The meeting finished at 8.09 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