

BARNSELY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

11TH MARCH 2014

20. **Present:** Councillors Worton (Chair), Rusby, Saunders and C. Wraith together with co-opted members Mr. Winter and Mr Haigh.

21. **Apologies for Absence - Parent Governor Representatives**

Apologies for absence in accordance with Regulation 7 (6) of the Parent Governor Representatives (England) Regulations 2001 were received from Ms K. Morritt.

22. **Declarations of pecuniary and non-pecuniary interest**

There were no declarations of pecuniary and non-pecuniary interest.

23. **Minutes of the meeting held on 14th January 2014**

The minutes of the meeting held on 14th January 2014 were accepted as an accurate record.

24. **Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS): Annual Self Assessment of Children's Services**

The Chair welcomed the following witnesses to the meeting:

Cllr Tim Cheetham, Cabinet Member, Children, Young People and Families Directorate.

Rachel Dickinson, Executive Director, Children, Young People and Families Directorate

Jean Imray, Interim AED Safeguarding Health and Social Care, Children, Young People and Families Directorate

Phil Lawson, AED Lifelong Learning, Achievement and Enterprise, Children Young People and Families Directorate.

Simon Snowden, Data, Information and Research Manager, Business, Strategy and Operational Development, Children, Young People and Families Directorate

Rachel Dickinson was invited by the Chair to outline the context of the ADCS Annual Self Assessment of Children's Services. The ADCS performs an important role in co-ordinating sector led improvement in children's services, aligned with the national ambition to improve outcomes for children in all areas. The report is a mechanism to help that improvement. The report outlines what we are already doing well alongside with things which we could be better at. All data is examined and areas of strength and for development are identified using a collaborative approach.

Members proceeded to ask questions as follows:

- I. Although all residential care provision for children in the Borough is either 'good' or 'outstanding', foster care more closely replicates a family environment. How will the shortfall in foster carers be addressed?

It was acknowledged that residential care for children does not represent value for money. There is a need to 'grow' local foster carers and this is a key area for development. A number of strategies will be used, including word of mouth, radio advertising, open days and through the website. Members were informed that an event was being held in the Town Hall the next day (12.3.14) to encourage people to foster for Barnsley Council rather than for the plethora of Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) which currently exist. It would also be useful to advertise in GP surgeries and perhaps a leaflet could be produced to be included with Council Tax Bills.

- II. Is the IT system now fully operational?

This improves week on week and staff now make suggestions on how to improve information retrieval. The system is now able to extract performance management information more efficiently and in a reasonable timeframe. Managers are now using performance information to better understand performance and to drive improvement.

- III. What is the situation with written records?

This is an area of continuous development and includes care plans and case conference documentation. Efforts are being made to make care plans smarter and it is now rare to find case recording which is not at an acceptable level. Monthly audits take place. It was highlighted that the Munro report stated that helping children and building relationships with them is of paramount importance and it is essential that the workforce is built and supported to do this. When talking to Social Workers it is reassuring that they know the children who are on their caseload well. Other authorities struggle to strike a balance between recording and face to face contact. There is a need to be able to put records on the system quickly and this is under constant review. Options around 'Dragon' software (digital dictation) are being explored to help with this. Social Workers are supported through PDRs and appraisals to develop skills to ensure the voice of the child is heard, particularly children with special needs.

- IV. Page 22 (5) of the report refers to 'low aspirations' for Children in Care (CiC). Why is this?

This is a national problem in that historically there have been low aspirations for Children In Care that exist across the piece and include carers, teachers and the children themselves who need to believe in themselves and have aspirations for achievement. Peer support is available to children as part of education and learning, with schools responsible for independent advice. In addition the work of the service and the Corporate Parenting Group must combine to raise aspirations for Barnsley's children in care population.

V. What is the breakdown of 'other' white background for Barnsley's population?

This refers mainly to people of Polish origin. It was pointed out that national classification of groups is used in population statistics, which separates out 'Gypsy-Roma' from 'Traveller'.

VI. One of the key areas for improvement is to increase the range of suitable accommodation for care leavers. What does this involve?

There is a need to develop a choice and range of accommodation options for care leavers, to include family settings and supported lodgings. Berneslai Homes does not have specific accommodation for care leavers but rather they are housed in regular accommodation. It is not appropriate to house care leavers in homeless units alongside other vulnerable people. The Housing Strategy needs to include accommodation for care leavers, including children who enter the care system at age 16 and will need support to maintain a tenancy. It was pointed out that children and young people can now stay to the age of 18+ in foster care. Unfortunately this is not the case for children in residential care who must leave at age 18, meaning that some of the most vulnerable young people have the worst option. It would be far better if they were able to leave when they are ready, which replicates what responsible parents do for their children.

VII. Is 'sheltered housing' for young people with independent living under one roof available for care leavers?

Some of this type of accommodation is available across the Borough but units tend to be small, accommodating two or three young people at the most as any larger than this would not be appropriate as it could potentially attract exploiters. It would not be possible for one person to manage a large group of vulnerable young people in one place as the risks they face are different to those which face older people in sheltered housing. A 'halfway home' type of accommodation would be most appropriate, with a move-on plan in place.

A member asked if care leavers are placed in either The Forge or Holden House. It was explained that The Forge was not used for care leavers as their age, vulnerability, mix of other people and the size of the unit meant that it was not appropriate. Witnesses were not familiar with Holden House and therefore involvement in accommodating care leavers there was unlikely.

VIII. Is information available about the number of children who use food banks as the number of people using them has increased dramatically in Barnsley.

Attempts are being made through the Anti-Poverty Strategy to gather this information but it is proving difficult as there are a number of places where vulnerable children and their families may go to for help. Volunteers need to know where to signpost vulnerable people for support or if there are concerns about their welfare. It was pointed out that the number of children coming to school hungry has increased and in Sheffield there is a 'food bank' scheme specifically for children. Members felt that it is also important to look at private nurseries in case children are attending and are hungry. Members were reassured that the Early Years Team has

a good working relationship with both the private and voluntary sector and concerns would be picked up.

IX. What is the situation with regard to sexual exploitation in Barnsley?

There are few case reports in Barnsley but this is no reason to be complacent. Two cases in Barnsley recently led to custodial sentences. There is a national public awareness raising campaign and posters etc., can be seen around Barnsley.

It was explained that the Multi Agency Sexual Exploitation Strategy is being developed by the Barnsley Safeguarding Children Board as very often victims of this type of crime are vulnerable and get drawn in - hence the need for a multi-agency response to tackle this. Shaun Wright, the Police and Crime Commissioner, has been involved in this.

X. Are Looked After Children and Care Leavers given 'life skills' training?

This depends on the child's placement. The Future Directions Team run skills training programmes and foster carers and residential care workers look at developing the children and young people so that they are able to be self sufficient in the future - for example teaching them how to cook a meal, how to do laundry etc., along with budgeting skills. School lessons on budget planning, team work and independent and creative thinking are also part of the 'I Know I Can' (IKIC) programme. IKIC recently ran a very successful 'Big Challenge' event sponsored by the Work and Skills Board aimed at developing new businesses. These were then incubated and supported by BBIC and several are now thriving businesses. It was pointed out that resilience is a key life skill which children and young people need to learn.

Witnesses were thanked for their attendance and contribution.