

**BARNSELY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**9<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2014**

6. **Present:** Councillors Worton (Chair), Duerden, Rusby, G. Carr, and C. Wraith together with co-opted member Mr J. Winter.

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

Apologies for absence were received from Mr W. A. Haigh and Ms K. Morrith in accordance with Regulation 7 (6) of the Parent Governor Representatives (England) Regulations 2001.

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

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

9. **Minutes of the meeting held on 8<sup>th</sup> July 2014**

The minutes of the meeting held on 8<sup>th</sup> July 2014 were accepted as an accurate record.

10. **OFSTED inspection**

Members considered a report of the Director of HR, Performance and communications in respect of the recent Ofsted inspection of Children's Services in Barnsley.

The Chair welcomed the following witnesses to the meeting:

Cllr Margaret Bruff, Cabinet Member, People (Safeguarding)  
 Cllr Tim Cheetham, Cabinet Member, People (Achieving Potential)  
 Jean Imray Interim Assistant Executive Director Social Care and Safeguarding  
 Melanie John-Ross Service Director Social Care and Safeguarding  
 Dave Benbow School Improvement Officer  
 Brigid Reid Chief Nurse NHS Barnsley CCG

It was pointed out that Barnsley has progressed from 'inadequate' to 'requiring improvement'. There are no widespread failings and children are being protected from harm. Barnsley is 'self-aware', as evidenced by the fact that Barnsley was already aware of 18 of the 24 recommendations made by Ofsted.

A member highlighted that changes in leadership have been positive and that all Elected Members have corporate parenting responsibility and a desire to see improvements being made. It was highlighted that there are no areas for immediate action and Ofsted identified 17 strengths, which is commendable.

Members proceeded to ask questions as follows:

- (i) The report identified concerns regarding the quality of a number of key documents. Similar issues were raised during the 2012 inspection. What additional action is proposed to ensure consistency?

It was explained that a new computer system was introduced in July 2013, with templates for reports and care plans included in the package. Some of these templates needed adjustment to make them user friendly as they were not easy to use. These have now been redesigned and were about to be tested when Ofsted arrived. Significant improvements have been made in social work practice but some inconsistencies remain.

- (ii) What is the situation regarding children at risk of sexual exploitation?

It was explained that although there are no widespread failings, there are some areas for improvement. A multi-agency strategic group and an operational CSE forum are in place, which requires minor adjustments. It is important that children who are at risk of sexual exploitation are identified and receive the right support at the right time. The pathway needs to be clearer. For this reason, a dedicated child sexual exploitation worker has been identified to work alongside police and voluntary sector to strengthen the response. An All Member information briefing session around CSE is being planned in the near future. The session will not be compulsory, but all members are advised to attend.

- (iii) Is the IT system now working satisfactorily?

Barnsley was commended by Ofsted on the quality of the performance information which can now be extracted from the system. The system was installed in July 2013 and the first performance report was in December 2013. Information has been migrated from the old system but the quality of the data produced is accurate, of good quality and is used to drive improvement.

- (iv) How does the educational achievement of looked after children compare with others?

The performance of looked after children is comparable regionally, nationally and with all children in the Borough. Children in care are not at a disadvantage. Performance at Key Stages 1 and 2 exceeds national performance for looked after children. Progress in reading and writing at Key Stage 2 for looked after children is the same as for all children. However, at Key Stages 3 and 4 performance of looked after children is lower than the national average for both looked after children and all children.

It was explained that there is a tracking system in place for the educational performance of all looked after children and the data is analysed regularly. Ofsted recognised that actions taken to challenge performance or provide additional resources are always robust. Deployment of staff is being looked at over the next 12 months. An Education Steering Group has recently been established and a representative will attend the Corporate Parenting Panel meetings to ensure monitoring and challenge of progress. It is hoped that the success at Key Stage 2

level will be replicated at Key Stage 4 due to the deployment of the Virtual Head. The Virtual Head will meet with all children upon transfer to High School and will also monitor the use of the pupil premium. A report is prepared for each child which details the expected outcomes. It was pointed out that the number of fixed term exclusions is below the national average. Personalised pathways are in place which ensure that children are sufficiently engaged and minimises any disruption. However, it should not be assumed that looked after children are disruptive.

(v) Are there plans in place to improve the length of time taken for adoption?

Sometimes processes can get in the way. Children are now reviewed on a weekly basis whereas previously this was quarterly. The number of adoption panels has been doubled and adopters are looked for before the order is granted. The number of available adopters has increased. Barnsley has a good track record of placing sibling groups and children with disabilities, which is harder to do than placing babies and children under two years of age. New procedures and processes are now in place to manage children's care proceedings, with a target of 26 weeks implemented.

More prospective adopters and foster carers are now coming forward due to a refreshed and more effective recruitment and marketing campaign. A dedicated officer is now in post. There is now a waiting list of prospective foster carers and adopters waiting to be approved.

(vi) How will greater involvement and engagement of partners such as the police and health services be secured?

The independent chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) has now been in post for 18 months and has garnered the support of partners. Communication has vastly improved. The LSCB has a firm focus on the needs of children and any problems which arise are escalated and dealt with consistently. All partners make effective contributions to the work of the LSCB and attend meetings consistently. Representatives are from the highest level.

(vii) What plans are in place to improve the quality of services provided for teenagers with complex needs?

This requires an additional resource, with children on the edge of care and at risk of being homeless. A new team will work discretely with this group to avoid this happening. Job descriptions are currently being compiled and the posts will be recruited to shortly.

(viii) How is the review into Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) progressing?

The Children in Care Health Care Group has recently been doing some work around attachment which is not just for looked after children. The Children's Trust has been working on emotional wellbeing, prevention and resilience.

(ix) Are robust procedures in place for children missing from care? At what point are reports made?

Reports of children missing from care are carefully tracked by the Police. Safe at Last work confidentially with individual children to prevent recurrence. Sometimes children are reported missing when they are simply late. Nevertheless, reports of any children missing are always taken seriously and action taken to address risks to children, should the problem recur. The CSE forum also needs to be strengthened to ensure that children who are not in care are also adequately protected. The timescale for reporting missing children depends on the age and vulnerability of the child, as does the response to that report. A good relationship exists with care homes and foster carers. Fortunately it is rare for a child to be genuinely missing from care, there is usually another explanation.

- (x) The Chair expressed disappointment that the inspectors felt that the scrutiny panel was not routinely scrutinising performance with regard to looked after children, as this is one of the functions of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

It was reiterated that all Elected Members have a corporate parenting responsibility and need to understand their roles. An All Member Information Briefing is to take place shortly around scrutinising performance management.

- (xi) Has progress been made with the topic of foster care remuneration?

The Head of Service has now completed the review of the foster care payments scheme. A business plan has been developed and the scheme is to be rationalised.

- (xii) The inspectors reported that the Corporate Parenting Panel needs to be more child-focussed. Why do no young people sit on the panel?

It is important that the voice of the child is heard, but unfortunately meetings are not always child friendly. Time needs to be set aside for young people's agenda items and questions. There is a need to talk to the Children in Care Council to get ideas from them about how they want to be involved whilst taking into account the views of younger children too, not just young people and those leaving care. A regular event would be beneficial to ensure that the voice of children and young people is heard.

**IT WAS AGREED** that:

- 1) Information regarding the Care Leavers Grant will be provided once the review has been completed.