

**CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL
19 November 2015**

PRESENT:

PANEL MEMBERS:

Councillor Chris Wakefield - Chair; Councillor Susan Phillips - Vice-Chair, Councillors Malcolm Davies, Bobbie Dove, Cheryl Johnson, Don McQueen, Pat Oakley, and Alan Hogg (Church of England Diocesan Board).

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillor Nicola Greene - Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services.

OFFICERS PRESENT:

Jane Portman - Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director, Adults and Children
Carole Aspden - Service Director, Children and Young People
Robin Ingleton - Service Director, Strategic Finance
Rachel Gravett - Access to Resources Manager, Community Learning and Commissioning
Stefan Kleipoedszus - Principal Social Worker, Children's Social Care

The meeting commenced at 6.05 p.m.

To see a copy of the public reports that were considered by the Panel please visit:

<http://www.bournemouth.gov.uk/CouncilDemocratic/CouncilMeetings/CommitteeMeetings/ChildrensServicesOverviewScrutinyPanel/2015/11/19/ChildrensServicesOverview&ScrutinyPanel19-Nov-2015.aspx>

SECTION I - BUSINESS RECOMMENDED TO THE COUNCIL

No items

SECTION II - BUSINESS DECIDED UNDER DELEGATED POWERS

56. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Rae Stollard, Pat Marchiori-White, and Councillor Jane Kelly, Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Public Health.

57. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Councillor Pat Oakley was a substitute member for Councillor Rae Stollard.

58. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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The Chair reported that he was a trustee of the Bournemouth Parent Carer Forum. A fellow trustee of this organisation had submitted two public questions to the Panel under agenda item 5. In the interests of transparency the Vice Chair would take the Chair for this item and provide the responses.

59. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

DECISION MADE:

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 October were confirmed.

60. PUBLIC ISSUES

The Panel received two public questions from Marion Burgess, Chair and trustee of Bournemouth Parent Carer Forum, with reference to the letter which the Minister for Children and Families had sent to all Local Authorities regarding close working with parent carer forums, as follows -

1. How are the joint working processes and further plans being implemented and how are they working within the SEND policy as a result of the new Education Act?
2. How are you engaging with your parents to monitor the SEND policy?

The Vice Chair (in the Chair) thanked Mrs Burgess for her questions and provided a comprehensive response outlining how the Council is engaging with children, young people, parents/carers and professionals in the new Education, Health and Care Plan statutory process through the POET pilot, and through proposed regular meetings with relevant services and partners, including the Parent Carer Forum.

To view a copy of the full response please visit the Council's website at the following address -

<http://www.bournemouth.gov.uk/CouncilDemocratic/CouncilMeetings/CommitteeMeetings/ChildrensServicesOverviewScrutinyPanel/2015/11/19/ChildrensServicesOverview&ScrutinyPanel19-Nov-2015.aspx>

61. LOCAL SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD - ANNUAL REPORT 2014/15 AND BUSINESS PLAN 2015/16

The Executive Director explained that she was presenting this item because the new Independent Chair was not due to take up their position until 1 September 2016. Members noted that next year's report would be published and available earlier in the summer 2016.

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The Executive Director referred to the annual report for 2014/15 and drew the Panel's attention to the core objectives of the Board, which were to co-ordinate (but not lead) the actions of each organisation represented on the Board and to fulfil its statutory requirement to hold each organisation to account. There were other non statutory requirements, for example raising awareness.

The report provided details of the significant amount of work carried out over a range of areas in the last year, for example in the area of child sexual exploitation (CSE). The Executive Director drew attention to the increased involvement of housing in safeguarding issues and it was noted that a senior housing officer was now a member of the Board. The report also included the statutory report of the pan Dorset child death overview panel.

The Business Plan for 2015/16 provided details of the five key outcomes for the Board's work, the core objectives for 2015/16 which the Board was legally required to deliver, and the developmental objectives for 2015/16 which were local objectives chosen by the Board. The focus of the developmental objectives for this year included:

- Preparing a revised and refreshed neglect strategy
- Reviewing the effectiveness of the Board to ensure it is making best use of resources and having the greatest impact
- Partnership arrangements to prevent/manage risk of harm, e.g. CSE
- Working with the health sector on adolescent health issues
- Further developing joint arrangements to respond to domestic abuse and other cases which impact on children and the family

The Business Plan provided a detailed work plan to demonstrate how all objectives were being delivered and also set out the terms of reference for each of the LSCB working groups.

The Executive Director responded to questions on the following issues raised by members:

- The percentage of children with Child Protection Plans (CPPs) was higher than the national average. With reference to the demographic this was to be expected more in Bournemouth than in Poole. However the number of children in care in Poole was lower than the national average and lower than in Bournemouth, which was also to be expected. It was important to ensure that the thresholds were set and applied at the right levels in these cases.
- Some items on the work plan had been delayed due to capacity issues. This had been due to a period of recruiting to three posts. It was noted that the work plan should be back on track in early 2016.
- Private fostering arrangements, where a private arrangement is made with another family for 28 days or more, were treated differently to other fostering arrangements. Private fostering cases were normally rare but in Bournemouth the cases were much higher due to the number of language schools. Children's Social Care had a statutory responsibility to assess risk,

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monitor arrangements and produce an annual report. The Council was working with schools to raise awareness of notification requirements.

The Cabinet Member drew attention to the Private Fostering Service being recognised by Ofsted for its innovation and progress, and recorded her thanks to the team.

The Panel sought assurance that the Board was operating effectively and asked if there were any areas of concern. The Executive Director explained that the risk of not having an independent chair in place until September 2016 had been recognised and an interim chair had been appointed with effect from 1 December 2015. The Ofsted Inspection of Children's Social Care in 2014 had included a review of the LSCB, which was found to be functioning well in terms of commitment, policy and procedures, attendance and frequency of meetings. The review had raised some issues regarding the profile of the Board, and the use of datasets which all partners were working hard to improve. Collectively there was still more work which could and would be done.

The Executive Director reported that the new independent chair would be reviewing the Board's constitution and membership to ensure there were no gaps. For example the important role of housing had been recognised in working with private sector landlords to raise awareness of safeguarding issues. The role of lay members was also vital in ensuring that strong links with the general public and it was noted that two new lay members were being recruited. It was also noted that CAFCASS (Child and Family Court Advisory Service) had not attended any meetings in the 2014/5 year. This was likely to be due to work pressures/resource issues.

DECISION MADE:

- a. That the contents of the Local Safeguarding Children Board annual report 2014/15 and business plan 2015/16 be accepted;
- b. That the annual report for 2015/16 be included on the Panel's work programme for July 2016;
- c. That the Panel receives an update on the LSCB in six months time (April 2016).

62. BUDGETARY PROCESS 2016/17 - 2018/19

The Panel considered a report which gave an update on how the Council was preparing to set a balanced budget for 2016/17 and maintain a medium term financial plan (MTFP) for the period 2016/17 - 2018/19.

The Service Director, Strategic Finance, reported that the revised position as of October 2015 had seen the gap reduced from approximately £3.5 to £1.7million. Work to balance the budget was continuing and he expected this to be complete by 31 March 2016. The Service Director referred to the MTFP assumptions paper and

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wished to make it very clear that these were officers' assumptions and not Council decisions. The paper set out the assumptions which had been made in respect of council tax, revenue support grant and national non domestic rates, pay award and pension payments, inflation and other key factors in the budget process.

Councillor McQueen reported that the Corporate Services O&S Panel, which he chaired, had scrutinised the report and the assumptions made and been satisfied with the process. He questioned the potential impact of the £4.5 million savings identified within the Adults and Children Directorate. The Executive Director explained that the budget for children's services was always challenging because they were demand-led services which were not easy to predict, but she was confident that the target would be achieved. The Council used the best forecasting, trend and data analysis available to work out how much was needed to meet the likely demand, and then prioritised efficiencies, income generation and best value through commissioning.

The proposed savings included a review of staffing and placement costs in Children's Social Care. The Ofsted Inspection had been satisfied with the staffing levels and workloads within the service but had asked the Council to address the high turnover of staff. The Council now had a strategy to recruit to its full compliment and reduce the number of agency workers, thereby reducing the provision for agency costs in the budget. The Council was also undertaking a value for money exercise with its current providers to reduce the cost of new and changed placements.

The Service Director, Children and Young People, and the Principal Social Worker spoke about the importance of early help and preventative services. Although these were not statutory services there were risks involved in not investing in these areas. Lack of investment could result in poorer outcomes for children at a later stage which may require the involvement of statutory services at increased cost. The Service Director referred to the review of the Youth Service which had managed to strike a balance between making efficiencies and providing the right level of service for longer term benefit of young people. Better quality performance datasets were also helping to identify where services were making the most impact to improve outcomes. Members felt that the long term benefits of early intervention and measuring success should be demonstrated at every opportunity and highlighted in reports.

The Cabinet Member talked about the comprehensive nature of the work which went into preparing the budget before final approval by Full Council in February each year. This included contributions from staff, practitioners, overview and scrutiny, and strategic discussions, with all suggestions given due consideration. The Executive Director explained the role of her management team and staff in putting forward creative and innovative ideas to provide the 'same for less'. Discussions with the Cabinet Member were also regular throughout the year.

Additional issues raised by members included -

- Company profits - The Service Director, Strategic Finance reported that the Bournemouth Group had made a reasonable surplus. The overall savings of

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£400,000 was considered a good outcome. The Bournemouth Development Company had made a capital receipt of £2.5 million with a profit share of £1.5million.

- The reduction in agency costs was significant and should result in an anticipated saving of around £300,000. The Cabinet Member referred again to the strategy Bournemouth had implemented, and explained that recruitment and retention within the sector was an issue nationally. The Principal Social Worker reported that the number of agency staff in Children's Social Care was low compared to other local authorities, some of which were at levels of 30 to 40 percent. It was also important to recognise that there would always be a need for good agency staff, to cover for sickness absence, interim vacancy, etc.
- The changes in Youth Service provision would be monitored to establish any impacts and if necessary could be reviewed at a later date. It was noted that this item was on the Panel's work programme for a future meeting.
- Whether there were any plans to roll out the Personal Outcomes Evaluation Tool (POET). This was being piloted at the moment specifically to users of Education, Health and Care Plans. The Principal Social Worker reported that service users were now being asked about their experiences on a more consistent and regular basis, for the Council to act on and address.

The Cabinet Member referred to the Council's approach to early budget planning since 2008. The Service Director, Strategic Finance, confirmed that the Council had a history of achieving a balanced budget and likely always would, which was a significant achievement in recent years given the challenges faced and the difficulties ahead. He was asked if the Council would reach a tipping point in the next few years as Central Government funding continued to decrease. He explained that the situation would become increasingly difficult, particularly in trying to strike the right balance between providing statutory services and recognising that non statutory services often reduced the cost of statutory services in the longer term.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member, and the Executive Director and her staff for their commitment to prioritising and delivering children's services. He also thanked the Service Director, Strategic Finance, for the significant contribution he had made to the Council and wished him a happy retirement.

DECISION MADE:

That the Panel notes the actions the Council is taking to prepare a balanced budget for 2016/17 and a medium term financial plan for the 2016/17 to 2018/19.

63. DECISION MAKING PROCESS FOR HIGH COST LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN PLACEMENTS

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The Panel considered a report which provided a summary of the decision making process within Children's Social Care for approving high cost placements for Looked After Children (LAC).

In addition to the decision making arrangements detailed in the report the Access to Resources Manager asked the Panel to note that high cost placements were monitored very regularly, and formally reviewed on a fortnightly basis by herself, the Service Manager, and a Finance Officer and reported to the Service Director. She explained that for the purpose of the report high cost placements were defined as those in categories above a standard placement, i.e. either 'enhanced' or 'very high cost' placements. A very high cost placement could amount to £1,200 per week, with the child requiring considerable education, health and social care provision and support.

The Access to Resources Manager was asked whether the Council had considered building its own residential facility. She explained that this option had been looked at twice in the last year and on both occasions it had been deemed financially unviable to increase the Council's existing stock. Based on actual occupancy over a 12 month period the Council's existing residential facility at Milton House cost £2,800 per week per child. There were also several private residential homes within a 20 mile radius at a similar cost. Instead the Council had been working with two residential providers high rated by Ofsted who were offering placements to the Council on a first refusal basis at preferential rates and at less risk, mostly within the 20 mile radius of home. It was anticipated that this would result in a £400,000 target budget reduction by the end of 2016/17. The Cabinet Member reminded members that it may not be appropriate to move some children from high cost out of borough placements if they were settled, as this would not be in the best interests of the child.

The Access to Resources Manager was asked how the Council had reviewed its arrangements and explained that a joint purchasing panel had been set up but unfortunately had encountered a number of issues which had caused delay the decision making. As a result the Council had run a 'virtual' pilot scheme where all parties were able to engage in the process on a daily basis and had a clear understanding of their roles. Both Ofsted and the subsequent Peer Review have made positive comments about the decision making process. Following a review by the Pan Dorset Joint Commissioning Group the Borough of Poole and Dorset County Council are now looking at implementing Bournemouth's methods.

The Access to Resources Manager responded to a question about the involvement of health services early in the decision making process. She also explained that in terms of revenue this was done through the provider who charged the health services direct.

DECISION MADE:

That having scrutinised the decision making process for high cost LAC placements the Panel is satisfied with the arrangements, and commends the Access to Resources team and all those involved in the decision making process for their proactive attitude to developing and improving the service.

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64. OFSTED ACTION PLAN

The Panel considered a report which gave an update on the implementation of the Action Plan in response to the Ofsted inspection of services to children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers. As requested by the Panel the report included more detailed information on actions flagged as 'challenging and requiring mitigating action'.

The Executive Director reported that the Local Government Association (LGA) had been invited to undertake a Peer Review of services in early November 2015, to consider how much progress the Council was making and whether it was realising the benefits since the inspection in 2014. The LGA would provide a formal written report of its findings by the end of November. This would be shared with the Panel, and the action plan would be adjusted to take into account the results. Informal feedback indicated that some areas were now 'business as usual', while other areas required further work. The Chair reported that the Peer Review had been a vigorous process. The initial report back at the end of the review period had been very informative.

Officers were asked about ICT issues, in particular whether the upgrade of RAISE was being delivered satisfactorily, prior to its eventual replacement with a new system. The Panel was told that although the upgrade had been implemented, there had been some delay and some issues with the changes to improve usability. The Council had a dedicated resource within the Research and Information team but was also reliant on support from the RAISE programme supplier and the Council's ICT service. The Executive Director reported that the procurement process for the new system was going well and was expected to be implemented by 2017. This project was being undertaken jointly with Dorset County Council and should result in savings in procurement and delivery costs.

In respect of ICT support for remote working Children's Social Care had been identified as a priority area. This had now been rolled out and feedback from staff had been positive.

DECISION MADE:

- a. That the Panel is satisfied with the progress being made in the implementation of the action plan to date;
- b. That the Panel requests a further update in Spring 2016 to include the formal report of the LGA Peer Review.

65. WORK PROGRAMME / TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME 2015/16

The Panel considered its work programme and training and development programme for 2015/16.

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Councillor McQueen asked if an item could be included on the work programme to look at how the Council is supporting apprenticeships. It was noted that this was primarily dealt with by the 14 - 19 team in Children and Young People's Services.

DECISION MADE:

That the Panel's work programme and training and development programme for 2015/16 be agreed with the additional item on apprenticeships to be scheduled at the Chair's discretion.

66. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Chair had received notice from Councillor Dove that she wished to ask why the Council had opted out of the Dorset Exchange and Maxx Card scheme.

The Service Director, Children and Young People's Services, explained that as part of work to develop the local offer the Council had noted that the Dorset Exchange website was out of date and some of the information was inaccurate. The Council had decided to use its own website to host the local offer. By doing this the Council was saving around £7,000.

Take up for the Maxx card had been relatively low even when it had been widely promoted and the use of the discount was lower still. It would remain available for some parents for the next four years. However it was felt that a better scheme could be developed in Bournemouth and the Council welcomed ideas from parents to take forward. It was noted that BH Live had never participated in the Maxx Card scheme.

The meeting was adjourned between 8.10pm and 8.16pm.

The meeting closed at 8.34pm

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