

**Children, Young People and Family Support Scrutiny and Policy Development
Committee**

Meeting held 6 February 2014

PRESENT: Councillors Gill Furniss (Chair), Talib Hussain, Karen McGowan, Mohammad Maroof, Helen Mirfin-Boukouris, Lynn Rooney, Colin Ross, Andrew Sangar (Deputy Chair), Ian Saunders, Diana Stimely, Stuart Wattam and Cliff Woodcraft

Non-Council Members in attendance:-

Jules Jones, Education Non-Council Voting Member
Gillian Foster, Education Non Council Voting Member
Joan Stratford, Education Non-Council Voting Member
Alison Warner, Education Non-Council Member

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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1 An apology for absence was received from Councillor Nikki Sharpe.

2. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

2.1 No items were identified where resolutions may be moved to exclude the public and press.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3.1 Councillor Ian Saunders declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 8 – Adoption and Fostering Services – Updates – as he and his partner were foster parents for the Local Authority, and he left the room during the consideration of that item.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

4.1 The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 5th December 2013, were approved as a correct record, and the Committee noted the Actions Update attached to the minutes and, arising from the Actions Update, specifically relating to the meeting on 10th October 2013, the Policy and Improvement Officer provided updates in terms of the information requested by the Committee at that meeting, relating to (a) the number of teenage pregnancies that resulted in adoption, (b) a report back on the wider factors surrounding teenage pregnancy, resulting from the work carried out with the University of Sheffield and (c) a review into the quality of sex education currently provided for young people with special educational needs, with further details to be included on the Actions Update to be submitted to the Committee's meeting to be held on 3rd April 2014.

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

5.1 There were no questions raised or petitions submitted by members of the public.

6. SHEFFIELD SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD - ANNUAL REPORT 2012/13

6.1 The Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Children, Young People and Families, containing the Sheffield Safeguarding Children Board Annual Report 2012/13, which provided an overview of safeguarding children activity and information on the contribution individual partners had made towards safeguarding children in the City.

6.2 In attendance for this item were Susan Fiennes, Independent Chair, Sheffield Safeguarding Children Board, Victoria Horsefield, Sheffield Safeguarding Children Board Manager, and Trevor Owen, Head of Service, Safeguarding Children, Children, Young People and Families.

6.3 Members of the Committee raised questions and the following responses were provided:-

- For the second year running, emotional abuse was the most common reason for Child Protection Plans (CPPs) being made in the City. Nationally, neglect was the most common reason for a CPP, but Sheffield's rate in that category was very similar.
- Safeguarding Children Boards were required to have Independent Chairs and the Local Authority had responsibility for arranging this contract. The Chair worked approximately 40 to 50 days a year. The Local Authority and partners' view was that the Chair was very committed to the agenda and therefore represented very good value. Following formal review the previous week, the Local Authority and partners had agreed that Susan Fiennes would continue as the Independent Chair of this Board, as well as the Sheffield Adult Safeguarding Partnership, for the 2014/15 and 2015/16 financial years.
- Whilst it appeared that the level of funding (£82,000) allocated to deal with cases of sexual exploitation appeared low, this figure only represented the amount contributed by the Sheffield Safeguarding Children Board (SSCB) towards this work. This amount represented a small, but significant part of a much wider and larger contribution made by the various partner agencies into this important area of work.
- Unusually, Comic Relief funding had been renewed once already. April 2014 would be the start of the second year of the current three-year funding agreement. It had, therefore, some time to run, and it was too early for Comic Relief to indicate whether they would be willing to accept a further application for Sheffield.
- There was a willingness to understand how aspects of Sheffield's model

might be usefully applied Country-wide. There was a general recognition, as affirmed recently by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) and Ofsted, that Sheffield had an excellent model in terms of its arrangements for handling and responding to sex exploitation. Sexual exploitation was a key priority for the Police and Crime Commissioner for South Yorkshire. There had been a dedicated Child Sexual Exploitation Service in the City for a number of years, providing a sound platform from which it had been possible to develop the current multi-agency service.

- The SSCB had a comprehensive multi-agency training package and, in addition to this, the Board was committed to providing training opportunities that met the needs of the workforce. The Board was keen to adopt new ways of working and to this end, had recently introduced themed audit days to look at specific practice areas.
- It was difficult to analyse fully why the number of children subject to CCPs had increased, and any increase or decrease could be due to multiple causes. One possible reason for an increase in cases was that directly following a high profile national serious case review, such as Baby Peter, there was an increased awareness across all partner agencies, which could result in people being considerably more cautious and vigilant.
- It has, and always will be the case that professionals, particularly Social Workers, have to make very difficult decisions. Sheffield was fortunate in that there was a specialist paediatric facility based in the City, and professionals dealing with safeguarding cases were able to call on this for advice and support. Despite this, paediatricians often found it very difficult to provide a definitive diagnosis in child abuse cases. In the most serious cases, a Child Protection Conference would be held, comprising all relevant professionals, and where relevant information was shared, views and opinions expressed, and a decision made as to how best to safeguard that particular child.
- The role of the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), in managing allegations against staff and volunteers who worked with children and young people, is to manage the three strands of investigation into the allegations – Safeguarding of an individual child, potential criminality and employment/disciplinary issues. The LADO would also be responsible for ensuring that any enquiries took place in a thorough and fair manner, and that there was a speedy resolution.
- Information in terms of the number of children from ethnic groups with CPPs would be circulated to Members of the Committee.
- The SSCB had undertaken some specific work with regard to the over-representation of certain ethnic groups subject to CPPs, but acknowledged that further analysis in this area was required. Officers would be comparing current statistics with census data in an attempt to find out why some children were over-represented, and details of any findings would be

included in the Safeguarding Children Board's Annual Report 2013/14.

- As part of a programme of work undertaken over the last three years, officers had established safeguarding leads in mosques and madrassas across the City, and there were established safeguarding links with other faith communities. In addition, safeguarding training was provided to all faith communities.
- 84% of Looked after Children were placed within a 20 mile radius of the City boundary.
- There was good evidence of information-sharing and good multi-agency working practices between the different partner agencies.
- In terms of Council employee awareness, through the Section 11 audit, the SSCB had worked with the City Council to produce a joint children's/adult's safeguarding policy, and all Council employees, as part of their induction programme, have access to a safeguarding e-learning programme.

6.4 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes the information contained in the report now submitted, together with the responses to the questions raised, and acknowledges the excellent work being undertaken by the Sheffield Safeguarding Children Board; and
- (b) thanks Susan Fiennes, Victoria Horsefield and Trevor Owen for attending the meeting and responding to the questions raised.

7. ADOPTION AND FOSTERING SERVICES - UPDATES

7.1 Fostering Service

7.1.1 The Executive Director, Children, Young People and Families, submitted a report providing an update on the Fostering Service.

7.1.2 In attendance for this item were Jon Banwell, Assistant Director, Provider Services, and Liz Spaven, Fostering and Adoption Service Manager, Children, Young People and Families.

7.1.3 Members of the Committee raised questions and the following responses were provided:-

- On the basis that there was a very robust marketing strategy in terms of the recruitment and retention of foster carers, it was not considered that there was a need to refresh the Business Case 2010. The Fostering Recruitment Campaign, which was launched in January 2011, and continues to date, had included television and radio advertising, web activity, advertisements on public transport and JCDecaux sites, and attendance by Council officers at community events across the City. The Local Authority was currently

looking at implementing shared recruitment arrangements with Barnsley, Doncaster and Rotherham.

- The number of foster carers having children of their own varied greatly. This would not have any effect on their ability to become a foster carer.
- A number of foster carers do go on to adopt children placed with them.
- In terms of making efforts to ensure that children's cultural and religious needs were met, staff would target and visit specific communities in order to recruit foster carers from all sections of the community. For example, staff had attended an event in the Somali community to raise the profile of foster care. If it was not possible to match children with foster carers having the same cultural and religious beliefs, the child's Care Plan would determine fully how his/her needs would be met, and address any cultural needs. Every effort would be made to match a child and foster carer with the same cultural and religious needs, and staff would occasionally look for a suitable match, if necessary, outside the agency by using an independent fostering agency. Whilst it was not imperative that a child was culturally matched with a foster carer as the matching was in relation to the child's holistic needs, every effort would be made with this in consideration.
- There were currently approximately 75 children with an Adoption Plan, together with a number of children who had been placed for adoption, but had not yet received an Adoption Order.
- Some foster carers simply wanted to foster children, and not adopt them. The application process for prospective foster carers was different to the application process for prospective adopters. The priority of the Fostering and Adoption Service was ultimately to find permanence for the child.
- The Service has looked at offering Housing Extension Loans to those foster carers wishing to increase the capacity of their homes to accommodate additional children. Whilst there had been difficulties linked to this, a number of possible properties suitable for this purpose had now been identified. One important benefit to this was that it increased placement choice in regard to placing siblings together.
- Whilst details in terms of the number of foster carers who were from a BME background were not available, this information would be obtained and circulated to Members of the Committee.
- Whilst the Service had not noticed a reduction in the number of foster carers, or applications to become foster carers, following the introduction of the 'Bedroom Tax', officers would be monitoring this situation.

7.2 Adoption Service

7.2.1 The Executive Director, Children, Young People and Families, submitted a report

providing an update on the Adoption Service.

7.2.2 In attendance for this item were Jon Banwell, Assistant Director, Provider Services, and Liz Spaven, Fostering and Adoption Service Manager, Children, Young People and Families.

7.2.3 Members of the Committee raised questions and the following responses were provided:-

- Every effort was made to keep siblings together where possible, although this was dependant on their assessment and Care Plan. In some cases, siblings were kept together in the short-term, in foster placements, to assess how the arrangement works. In those cases where it was not suitable or possible to keep siblings together, arrangements would be made for them to have direct contact at agreed times, as defined in the individual's Adoption Support Plan. The arrangements in terms of maintaining relationships between adopted siblings were included as part of the Adoption Support Plan. There may be cases where the adopters would not want contact between siblings to continue, and it could potentially be left up to the children themselves as to whether they maintained contact, although this was very unusual. Every effort was made to encourage adopters to allow contact between siblings.
- The Adoption Regulations determined that the local authority that placed the child/children with the adopters remained responsible for the adoption support three years post the Adoption Order being granted. The responsibility would then transfer to the local authority that the family resided in.
- Whilst the age range in terms of children placed for adoption varied, children of certain age groups proved more difficult to place than others, this included boys of five years or older, and sibling groups.
- Despite all the work and publicity in terms of recruitment, there was still a shortage of people wanting to adopt. This was a national issue.

7.3 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes the information contained in the reports now submitted, together with the responses to the questions raised; and
- (b) thanks Jon Banwell and Liz Spaven for attending the meeting and responding to the questions raised.

8. WORK PROGRAMME

8.1 The Policy and Improvement Officer, Diane Owens, submitted a paper containing the Committee's Work Programme 2013/14, indicating that the report on Looked After Children and Care Leavers, which had been planned for this meeting, would

now be submitted to the meeting on 3rd April 2014.

8.2 Arising from the report on School Governance, which had been considered by the Committee at its meeting held on 3rd October 2013, Councillor Karen McGowan raised the issue of whether the Council acknowledged the excellent work and dedication of School Governors, particularly those who had held the position for a number of years.

8.3 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes the contents of the report now submitted, together with details of the amendment now reported; and
- (b) in the light of the comments raised by Councillor Karen McGowan, requests the Policy and Improvement Officer to ask the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families, to consider the possibility of re-establishing a procedure whereby School Governors receive some form of acknowledgement from the Council in terms of their work, and to report back thereon to the Committee's meeting on 3rd April 2014.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

9.1 It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Thursday, 3rd April 2014, from 2.00 pm to 4.00 pm, and this would be followed by the Committee's annual meeting with young people and young carers at 4.30pm in the Town Hall.

(NOTE: Agenda Item 9 – Looked After Children and Care Leavers was withdrawn from consideration by the Committee on the grounds that, following changes to its inspection framework, Ofsted was to undertake a further inspection of the Service in April 2014.)

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