

## **CARE SERVICES POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Minutes of the meeting held at 7.00 pm on 6 December 2016

### **Present:**

Councillor Judi Ellis (Chairman)  
Councillor Pauline Tunnicliffe (Vice-Chairman)  
Councillors Ruth Bennett, Kevin Brooks, Mary Cooke,  
David Jefferys, Catherine Rideout and  
Charles Rideout QPM CVO

Linda Gabriel, Rosalind Luff and Lynn Sellwood

### **Also Present:**

Councillor Robert Evans, Portfolio Holder for Care Services  
Councillor Diane Smith, Executive Support Assistant to the  
Portfolio Holder for Care Services  
Councillors Graham Arthur, Nicholas Bennett J.P.,  
Stephen Carr, David Cartwright QFSM, Kate Lymer,  
Tom Philpott and Angela Wilkins

Joan McConnell

### **53 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Kim Botting, Councillor Peter Fortune, Councillor Hannah Gray, Councillor Alexa Michael, Councillor Terry Nathan and Councillor Chris Pierce.

Apologies were also received from Justine Godbeer.

The Chairman led Members in welcoming Ade Adetosoye, Executive Director: Education, Care and Health Services and Deputy Chief Executive who had recently joined the Local Authority.

### **54 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **55 QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS AND MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ATTENDING THE MEETING**

Three written questions were received from a member of the public and these are attached at Appendix A.

## **56 HOLDING THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER AND EXECUTIVE TO ACCOUNT**

### **A CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT PLAN UPDATE**

#### **Report CS17062**

The Committee considered an update on progress in implementing the Children's Services Improvement Action Plan which had been agreed by the Council's Executive on 14<sup>th</sup> September 2016.

The Council's services for children in need of help and protection and children looked after and the Bromley Safeguarding Children Board had been inspected by Ofsted between 11<sup>th</sup> April and 5<sup>th</sup> May 2016. Although the Inspection had identified some strengths across children's services, the Local Authority had received an overall judgement of 'Inadequate' and the Bromley Safeguarding Children Board was rated with a judgement of 'Requires Improvement'. Following the publication of the Ofsted report, the Department for Education had appointed a Commissioner to assess the service and make a recommendation on how to improve children's services in Bromley. In September 2016, the Commissioner's report was provided to the Secretary of State, who accepted the positive direction of travel indicated and agreed with the recommendation that a Department for Education Commissioner be appointed to undertake a further six month period of scrutiny to ensure that progress continued to be made.

The multi-agency Children's Service Improvement Governance Board was established to oversee the improvement process and support the development of the Improvement Action Plan which had 10 priorities covering the 23 Ofsted recommendations. An Officer-led Service Improvement Team was also convened to lead on work streams identified in the Improvement Action Plan, as well as to monitor improvement actions and performance measures and to report progress to the Governance Board. The Council's Executive had evidenced its commitment to implement the Improvement Action Plan by agreeing an additional £950k funding to be released over two phases, with plans for a third phase of funding in early 2017 that would bring the total additional funding to £2.3m. A comprehensive training programme had also been developed for Members to assist them in their role as Corporate Parents.

The first Ofsted monitoring visit took place between 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> November 2016. The Inspection Team reviewed six cases from the Children's Social Care Division's monthly audit cohort, and sampled 15 cases chosen from the list of children and young people who had been involved with children's services since June 2016. The Inspection Team also interviewed a number of Officers from across the Local Authority, as well as young people and parents and carers. Following the visit, Ofsted confirmed that it recognised the progress made in management, leadership and governance, but identified a need to further improve social work practice and increase the pace of change.

It was expected that more significant improvement would be demonstrated at the next monitoring visit in February 2017.

In considering the update, the Chairman was concerned that of the six cases reviewed as part of the first Ofsted monitoring visit, four had been judged as 'Inadequate' and two as 'Requires Improvement'. The Executive Director acknowledged that there were issues with historical casework but that the focus of improvement would be on cases going forward. The six cases had been audited by the Quality Improvement Service and reviewed by senior management prior to the Inspection, and a realistic view of the cases had been formed that was in line with the subsequent Ofsted judgements and demonstrated that areas where practice required improvement were being identified. The next monitoring visit in February 2017 would consider working practices since September 2016, and was expected to show that significant progress had been made as a result of the Improvement Action Plan. A Member noted that there were 174 days until the end of the six month period of scrutiny, and queried if this would allow time for the necessary improvements to be embedded across children's services. The Executive Director advised Members that there would be further monitoring visits in February and April 2017 that would support the Local Authority in assessing the progress being made, and that this would demonstrate that the necessary measures to support ongoing improvement were in place. At the request of the Committee, the final Ofsted letter from the first monitoring visit would be circulated to Members following the meeting.

With regard to the caseloads of social worker practitioners, the Executive Director reported that whilst caseloads at Bromley had been higher than at other local authorities, the size of caseloads had now reduced following the recruitment of additional staff and work was being undertaken around how caseloads could best be managed going forward. The need to build flexibility into the system to allow additional support to be provided to social worker practitioners who were dealing with very complex or demanding cases had been identified and would include managerial support and practical assistance with tasks including the supervision of contact sessions. The Local Authority was part of a pan-London group that shared a range of data including caseload levels, and Councillor Nicholas Bennett JP suggested that this data be used to compare levels of locum social workers and their average length of service. In response to a question from a Member around the possibility of a departmental restructure, the Executive Director emphasised that the current priority was on embedding improvement across the existing service structure, but that flexibility would be built in to ensure that the support needs of individual children and young people were met. Councillor Nicholas Bennett JP underlined the potential to identify best practice from local authorities judged as being 'Good' or 'Outstanding'.

In considering risk management, a Member noted the issues identified around the capacity of the Legal Service and Bromley Safeguarding Children Board team. The Director of Corporate Services advised that there had been a significant increase in care proceedings relating to children during 2016/17, and that work was in progress to develop a business case for the most

effective model for the future delivery of the Legal Service, which was likely to involve the integration of the Legal Service with the Court Team to support more efficient, high-quality outcomes. In response to a question from the Vice-Chairman, the Director of Corporate Services confirmed that the Local Authority's aim in all care proceedings relating to children was for the best outcome for the child to be secured, which could be to remain with their families with a package of support. Out of hundreds of cases brought by the Local Authority, very few had been criticised by the Court for failing to meet the threshold for consideration, although there had been a range of outcomes from Court proceedings dependent on the needs of the child. The Executive Director noted that cost implications around work to increase the capacity of the Legal Service and Bromley Safeguarding Children Board team were being identified and that measures might be included as part of proposals for the third phase of funding to deliver the Improvement Action Plan, the details of which would be presented to the next meeting of Care Services PDS Committee on 10<sup>th</sup> January 2017, prior to consideration by the Council's Executive. Councillor Nicholas Bennett JP emphasised that the additional funding agreed was significantly less than that required to fund a Children's Trust over which Members' would have no control, and requested that information on the cost of Children's Trusts in other local authorities be provided to Members following the meeting. A Member underlined the need to ensure that the quality of other key services such as Adult Social Care were maintained as measures to improve children's services were introduced.

In response to a question from a Member, the Executive Director confirmed that work was underway to ensure foster carers received the support they needed to deliver their role to the highest standards. An enhanced training programme had been developed, and measures such as those to develop a stable workforce of permanent social worker practitioners would provide continuity for children looked after. The Chairman noted that the Living in Care Council had raised concerns around a lack of continuity with social workers as part of their presentation to Care Services PDS Committee on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2016, and requested that issues impacting children looked after be included as a separate section in the annual complaints report, which already included issues raised by foster carers.

A Member was concerned at the high workload of the Care Services Portfolio, particularly in relation to contracts management, and requested that more emphasis be placed on scrutiny, including analysis of policies and procedures. Another Member suggested that the Portfolio structure be reviewed to ensure an equal balance of workloads and responsibilities across Portfolios. All committee reports now included a section on the impact on vulnerable adults and children, and Members requested that this be rolled out to Planning reports to enable decisions relating to housing and development to be made with due regard to the impact on vulnerable adults and children.

In response to a query from a Member around the monthly audit process of casework, the Chairman confirmed that the Care Services PDS Committee would continue to receive regular updates on progress in implementing the Children's Services Improvement Action Plan and the outcome of any

monitoring visits as appropriate, and that this would include information on audit outcomes.

**RESOLVED that the report be noted.**

## **B CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE - RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION UPDATE**

The Committee received an update on the current staffing position of qualified children's social workers in the Children's Social Care Division as well as work being undertaken on recruitment and retention, with a view to having a more permanent and stable workforce in this area.

There continued to be a national shortage of children's social workers, and the Local Authority struggled to recruit experienced social workers with one year or more post-qualifying experience and found it difficult to compete with the buoyant locum market. Despite establishing a recruitment and retention package that offered a range of incentives including salary enhancements and a relocation package, the Local Authority had found it difficult to recruit experienced qualified social workers for a number of years and had a high level of locum social worker practitioners in most teams within the Children's Social Care Division. Following the publication of the Ofsted Report, the Local Authority had focused on ensuring that the majority of posts were filled by recruiting experienced qualified social workers via agencies on a short term basis to bring stability to teams and to lower caseloads, and through longer term measures such as the 'Step Up to Social Work' programme and Senior Practitioner Progression Pathway. The Local Authority had also increased the total number of social worker posts across the Division.

In considering the update, a Co-opted Member was concerned that work to reduce locum staff would result in a higher number of vacancies or new starters in the short term which might affect the delivery of the Improvement Action Plan over the six month period of scrutiny. The Director of Human Resources confirmed that work to recruit permanent staff had included meetings with existing locum social workers to promote joining the Local Authority as permanent staff members which would provide continuity of service provision. The Executive Director stated that he wanted to attract social worker practitioners who were passionate about their work and excited about getting things right for Bromley children. The need to support Bromley social workers to identify and deliver consistently good practice had been recognised, and a number of measures had been trialled as part of the recent introduction of the Courts Team, including training and capacity measures, which would be rolled out to the wider service. Consideration was being given to an holistic package of measures to attract permanent staff including caseloads and management culture. The number of 'true' vacancies was very low and was primarily due to staff turnover, and the Chairman requested that unfilled posts be monitored closely as any vacancies would counteract other work streams in place to support the management of caseloads.

A Member highlighted the high cost of housing in the region as a barrier to recruitment. The Director of Human Resources confirmed that the Local Authority offered a £6k relocation allowance for experienced social worker practitioners, and was part of the Key Worker Scheme which helped key workers in London, the South East and East of England to buy or rent a home at an affordable cost, and which included social workers. Additional work was also being undertaken with the Director: Commissioning and the Assistant Director: Housing Needs around how these existing incentives might be used more flexibly.

In considering support to the existing workforce, a member noted that a range of training sessions had been introduced for practitioners, including those relating to good practice and queried whether the impact of this training was reviewed to confirm if it improved practice. The Director of Human Resources confirmed that reviews were undertaken following training sessions, and that it had been identified that social worker practitioners required space to reflect to translate their learning into practice, which would be supported by the reduction in caseloads. A Co-opted Member of the Education Select Committee emphasised the importance of ensuring that social care staff were able to identify and manage risk, and the Director of Human Resources was pleased to inform Members that the Local Authority was considered to be a centre of excellence for the quality of its social care training programme, which included risk identification and management training. Action was also being taken to improve working conditions, including a 'breakout' space which was expected to be available from early 2017 and improvements to work place facilities.

**RESOLVED that the update be noted.**

The Meeting ended at 9.14 pm

Chairman

CARE SERVICES PDS COMMITTEE  
6<sup>th</sup> December 2016

WRITTEN QUESTIONS TO THE CARE SERVICES PORTFOLIO HOLDER

Written Questions to the Care Services Portfolio Holder received from Mrs Susan Sulis, Secretary, Community Care Protection Group

1. From 2010/11 onwards, Bromley dismantled key structures which previously supported Children's Services to perform well.

When and why was a decision taken to remove the Children's and Young People's Trust, and the CYP Portfolio Plan and Strategy?

**Reply:**

*The actions within the CYP Portfolio Plan and Strategy were incorporated into the Portfolio Plans for Care Services and Education following the establishment of the Care Services and Education Portfolios.*

2. Regarding the Assurance Of The Arrangements For Director Of Children's Services and Lead Member For Children's Services In Bromley (Reports CSED13002, and JPDS15001):

What did the 'Operational Assurance of Robust Supervision' by the Chief Executive from 2012 to 2016 consist of, and why did it fail?

**Reply:**

*Reports on the Assurance Assessment relating to the Joint Position of Director of Children's Services and Director of Adult Services were considered at the joint meetings of Care Services and Education Policy Development and Scrutiny Committees on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2013 and 25<sup>th</sup> February 2015.*

3. Regarding Bromley Children's Champion

Cllr Tunnicliffe was appointed Children's Champion, under the auspices of the Education Select Committee.

- a) Does her remit cover, and has she produced any reports identifying the problems of Children's Services?
- b) How difficult is the Members' scrutiny role made by the splitting of scrutiny between Education and Care Services?

**Reply:**

*Councillor Pauline Tunnicliffe was Children's Champion between 19<sup>th</sup> September 2012 – 15<sup>th</sup> May 2013 and was fully engaged in the role including representing the interests of children in the Borough at the Council's Children's Board during this period.*

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