

Voice of the Child Overview Panel

14 February 2018

Commenced: 6.00pm

Terminated: 7.10pm

Present: Councillors T Smith (Chair), J Lane, Pearce, Sidebottom, M Smith, R Welsh

Apologies for absence: Councillor Peet

The Chair opened the minutes and received apologies.

21. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Voice of the Child Overview Panel held on 13 December 2017 were approved as a correct record.

22. UPDATE ON OFSTED MONITORING VISIT

The Panel welcomed James Thomas, Director of Children's Services, to provide an update on the Ofsted monitoring visit undertaken on 10 and 11 January 2018. It was reported that the visit examined children in need of help and protection, with a focus on arrangements within the safeguarding and duty teams.

Mr Thomas informed members that all Ofsted judgements have been accurate and fair in their assessment. Previous monitoring visits have commented that while services are improving in parts, that progress and pace needed to advance. Prior to the monitoring visit on 10 and 11 January 2018 a self-assessment document was submitted to Ofsted. This was considered by Ofsted to be an accurate account and reflection of the current improvement position in Tameside.

Progress was identified in a number of areas, which included the work undertaken to strengthen leadership and management arrangements across Children's Services. It was also identified that the support now going to newly qualified social workers had improved and that the regularity of supervisions had also got better. Ofsted did however identify that while the frequency of management oversight and supervision was better the quality often varied and needed to improve further and become more consistent.

The monitoring visit identified that casework remains below the standard of where it needs to be, with common weaknesses in recording. While effective social work interaction with children and families is taking place, this isn't always reflected in recordings. Casework reviewed during the visit did show some improvement in that children are being spoken to and what they say is recorded.

It was reported that the new improvement plan sets clearer expectations with regards to practice standards, what is expected and the voice and experiences of children has become an integral part of all contact, assessment and recording. Managers and social workers demonstrate commitment to, and enthusiasm for, their work and feel more optimistic about progress because of recent developments.

With a more focused plan to improve outcomes for children it is now important to build stronger partnership arrangements and remove any current weaknesses within multi-agency working. While most cases seen had information from schools, there was often an absence of

information from key agencies, such as health services and police. This can result in parental needs often not being fully understood.

The Panel asked about workforce pressures within Children's Services and if there is any work that needs to be undertaken quickly to build stability, confidence and a more sustainable approach to the recruitment and retention of social workers.

Mr Thomas informed members that workforce planning remains a significant priority for the service and something which requires a significant amount of attention to address. The improvement plan is now based on a more accurate understanding of the work required and there is a need to reduce the recruitment and turnover of locum staff. Plans are now underway to develop a new recruitment campaign for social workers.

The Panel heard that demand on services is extremely high and around 20% above our statistical neighbours. This is something that can be typical of services judged as inadequate and will require on-going attention with regards to decision making, partnerships, application of thresholds and assessment of risk.

It is positive that weaknesses are known and acknowledged by the service and that a progressive plan is now in place to address a range of issues going forward. Members were also advised that during the monitoring visit Ofsted did not find any examples of children being at immediate risk or harm.

Resolved: That Mr Thomas be thanked for attending the meeting.

23. ACTIONS IDENTIFIED

The Chair reported that informal meetings which have been held with social workers and the Children in Care Council (2BeUs) have proved useful and allowed discussion to focus on the way services are delivered and to actively seek the experiences and views of children.

By concentrating on 'voice of the child' elements within the original Ofsted inspection and subsequent monitoring visits, the Panel has identified four areas where action is required. They include:

- The creation and development of a website for 2BeUs;
- Further work and commitment required to promote 2BeUs;
- The Council's commitment to providing apprenticeship and work experience opportunities for children looked after;
- A useful and required resource (contacts card) for children looked after. To include phone numbers and available support when a child's social worker is unavailable, or during evening and weekend periods.

It was reported that the actions have been shared with Children's Services and have been fully accepted. It will now be the role and responsibility of services to ensure that plans are put in place to address and deliver each individual action. It was also confirmed that the panel will now undertake a role to effectively monitor the progress of all actions.

Resolved: That the Panel receives routine and timely updates on the delivery plans and direct progress for all of the identified actions.

24. PROGRESS UPDATE

The Panel welcomed Sara Scholey, Head of Looked After Children Services, to provide an update on the work undertaken to address the agreed actions.

Ms Scholey informed members that all actions have been accepted and work will now be planned and delivered by Children's Services. An update was provided on the creation of the new contacts card for looked after children, which is now being used. The contacts card is included within a pack given to children when entering services and provides detail of contact and support telephone numbers. Members were presented with a copy of the contacts card and informed that children have had a significant role in both its content and design.

Resolved:

(1) That Ms Scholey be thanked for attending the meeting.

(2) That an electronic copy of the contacts card be emailed to panel members outside of the meeting.

(3) That the Panel receive a further progress update at the next meeting on 11 April 2018, to include all remaining actions.

25. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To note that the next meeting of the Voice of the Child Overview Panel will take place on Wednesday 11 April 2018.

26. URGENT ITEMS

The Chair reported that there were no urgent items for consideration at this meeting.

CHAIR