

Minutes

Education & Children's Services Policy Overview Committee

Tuesday, 22 March 2011

Meeting held at Committee Room 6 - Civic Centre,
High Street, Uxbridge UB8 1UW



HILLINGDON
LONDON

	<p>Members Present: Councillors Catherine Dann (Chairman) Brian Crowe (Vice-Chairman) Judith Cooper Peter Curling John Hensley</p> <p>Other Voting Representative Tony Little – Roman Catholic Diocesan</p> <p>Apologies: Kuldeep Lakhmana</p> <p>Officers Present: Merlin Joseph – Deputy Director – Children & Families, Heather Brown – Interim Service Manager – Adoption & Fostering, Pramjit Chahal – Service Manager Family Support, Gill Brice – Democratic Services</p>	
50.	<p>Apologies for Absence</p> <p>Apologies had been received from Councillor Kuldeep Lakhmana.</p>	
51.	<p>Declarations of Interest in matters coming before this meeting.</p> <p>Councillor Judith Cooper declared a personal interest in Item 6 - Adoption Inspection Report.</p>	<p>Action By: Gill Brice</p>
52.	<p>To confirm that all items marked Part 1 will be considered in Public and all Part 2 items will be considered in Private</p> <p>It was confirmed that all items would be heard in Part 1.</p>	
53.	<p>Matters that have been notified in advance or urgent</p> <p>There were no matters notified as urgent.</p>	
54.	<p>To receive the minutes of the previous meeting held on 26 January and 10 February 2011</p> <p>The minutes of the meeting held on 26 January and 10 February were agreed as correct records and signed by the Chairman.</p>	<p>Action By: Gill Brice</p>

<p>55.</p>	<p>ADOPTION INSPECTION REPORT</p> <p>Officers introduced the report informing the committee that the Adoption Inspection took place between 15 and 19 November 2010 with 2 OFSTED Inspectors. An Inspector also attended to observe the Adoption Panel on 9 December 2010. The Inspectors visited the premises and inspected files speaking with Doctors and Social Workers throughout the inspection. The outcome of the inspection was positive and overall the Adoption Service was judged as good.</p> <p>Officers further stated that the Inspectors had found the quality of the letterbox contact (provides a way for birth families to receive information about their child) had declined but processes had now been put in place to address this.</p> <p>A member stated that the report was encouraging but asked about the Inspectors first recommendation, which suggested that application forms from prospective adopters should be sought prior to them undertaking the preparation training. There must be a good reason for doing what was currently being done, can officers clarify this.</p> <p>Officers advised that the packs given to prospective adopters contained the application form. The comments made by the Inspectors had been noted but some prospective adopters preferred to attend the preparation group before completing their application. The Inspectors felt that some forms were not completed until after the preparation training, statistics would look better than if they were completed on initial contact. Officers were satisfied with the current process and that it was being carried out in an appropriate way.</p> <p>The Committee felt that the report was very well balanced and that there was good work being undertaken in the Adoption Service. Officers were asked whether an update could be provided in three months time on the actions taken on the Inspectors recommendation. This would enable the committee to recognise the improvements made and ensure that the Inspectors recommendations had been followed through.</p> <p>Officers advised that an update would be provided to the committee in three months time.</p> <p>The committee agreed to the update being provided.</p> <p>Officers further advised that most authorities received the comment made in relation to the submission of the completed Adoption forms following an inspection. It was felt that there needed to be a discussion with OFSTED in relation to this particular recommendation.</p>	<p>Action By:</p> <p>Gill Brice Merlin Joseph</p>
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	<p>A member asked whether many prospective adopters dropped out after attending the preparation training.</p> <p>Officers advised the committee that there were some that do drop out and others were not accepted. Generally those that attended the preparation training continued to be assessed as adopters.</p> <p>Officers advised the committee that a number of actions arising from the Inspectors recommendations were already underway. The Adoption team was currently very stable, although recruitment was not as good as it should be. Officers suggested that the best way to update the committee on the actions taken would be to provide the action plan on the Inspectors recommendations.</p> <p>In answer to an issue raised in relation to ensuring staff were fit to work officers advised that this was in relation to the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks and whether they had not been completed or had they lapsed. Processes had now been put in place to ensure that all CRB checks were completed and renewed.</p> <p>A member asked for clarification of the last recommendation as to how counselling was currently being accessed by Birth parents whose first language was not English.</p> <p>Officers advised that this was not provided by Hillingdon but advice was provided to those parents on how this could be accessed.</p> <p>In answer to clarification as to what was included in the 'Transition Box' officers advised that it was age appropriate toys, objects and life maps to help children with their feelings and emotions to help them move to where they were going next.</p> <p>Resolved – 1. That the report was noted.</p> <p>2. That an update on the actions taken to address the actions in the Inspectors recommendations be submitted to the committee in three months time.</p>	
56.	<p>Unannounced Inspection of Contact, Referral & Assessment Arrangements in Children's Services</p> <p>Officers introduced the report stating that the unannounced inspection team arrived at 8 am on the 18 & 19 January 2011 and was carried out by two Ofsted Inspectors. Thanks to the planning and preparation on every level the Inspection went well.</p>	

On the first day the Inspector interviewed the Corporate Director, Service Manager and met with a number of Social Workers and Managers. They then carried out inspections of electronic files, open and closed cases, supervision files and audits completed. The feedback from the first days Inspection was incredibly positive. The Inspectors were impressed with the quality of the Social Workers the Management Overview and Safeguarding. The Inspectors felt that the authority was providing a safe effective service and that morale was high. They were also impressed with the permanent staff and the quality and consistency of assessments that they had seen.

The Chairman advised that unannounced inspections were important and congratulated the staff for the way that it had been managed.

A member stated that it was noted that good quality assurance was in place but had concerns that a member of staff who was not qualified had been carrying out assessments.

Officers advised that the department was working to ensure that there was no unqualified staff undertaking assessments. Historically the staff member concerned had been the strongest social worker in the team and part way through qualifying had been unable to continue for personal reasons. Ofsted had no concerns in regard to the quality of assessments that this staff member had undertaken but it was not in line with the Working Together to Safeguard Children. A strategy had been put in place by the Manager who was working jointly with staff to move all cases to qualified staff.

A member asked whether the member of staff was being given support to attain an accreditation to retain the skills and expertise within the team.

Officers advised that this was something that the department wanted to do but it was unclear whether this was the route the member of staff wanted to pursue. The member of staff was very experienced and the department would be working to see how the skills and expertise could be retained within the team.

A member stated that an area for development was in relation to clarity between partner agencies about the thresholds for referrals to the referral and assessment team. Could officers provide further information on this?

Officers advised that the threshold document set out the criteria for referrals and this had been reviewed by a sub-group consisting of partner agencies. This would always be an issue arising from an inspection and there were processes in place to provide further support and advice to schools.

	<p>It was important to build stronger links with schools and provide reassurance in the safeguarding children. This process had already been started by providing a dedicated Manager to each school with regular cluster meetings taking place. The first meeting had already taken place and over the next few months this would be rolled out as a priority. These meetings would enable partner agencies to discuss any concerns and issues that they had about the threshold criteria for referrals.</p> <p>A member stated that part of the problem was that if in doubt it was better to make a referral. It was felt that the filtering of these cases was the way forward as over reporting was better than under reporting but it was not clear how this could be best managed.</p> <p>A member asked whether the manager allocated to schools would be the first point of contact in regards to safeguarding.</p> <p>Officers advised that the Manager would not be the first point of contact but would be able to discuss issues the school had in relation to referrals. Schools would only contact the Manager if they were unable to get in contact with the Social Worker concerned. Officers further advised that Head Teachers were provided with contact details for Senior Officers that they could contact in a crisis. Safeguarding training was provided for schools and they would have appropriate Child Protection measures in place. Work was currently being undertaken with schools to help them have a better understanding of the threshold criteria.</p> <p>In answer to an issue raised in regard to chronologies, officers advised that a number of discussions had been held on this issue as it was really important in safeguarding. It was unfortunate that the Inspector picked a file where there was no chronology on the file but they were assured that this was in hand. There were statutory procedures that chronologies should be put in place at an early stage of an assessment and this would now be addressed with staff.</p> <p>Resolved – That the report was noted.</p>	
<p>57.</p>	<p>Quarterly Audit of Children's Social Care Records</p> <p>Officers introduced the reports and advised the committee that audits were undertaken by Managers. Work was underway to introduce a more robust audit process. The audit report on the Children's Support Services had been structured differently to the other reports and this was the format for future audits within Child and Adult Services. The audit framework needed to be qualitative and identify key issues, access and monitoring system.</p>	<p>Action By:</p> <p>Gill Brice Merlin Joseph</p>

There also needed to be clearer information provided on whether standards were or were not met and how the issues identified were being addressed. A draft audit framework was currently being produced and would be sent to Senior Managers and Audit Services for their comments. Once comments had been received a final audit framework would be agreed and would become part of the audit process.

The committee appreciated the work that had been undertaken to provide the information requested. Safeguarding was the provision of good quality information and auditing to ensure that all files were up to date with all correspondence.

Officers advised that a large amount of working files were up to date with Staff working late and at weekends to achieve this. Officers also needed to show how the service was meeting the system business objectives in regards to performance indicators. Officers also needed to ensure that correspondence was placed in the correct place within the protocols.

A member asked whether the department was still operating two filing systems, electronic and paper.

Officers advised that they were still operating electronic and paper files there was an ongoing project to ensure that protocols were being met.

In answer to an issue raised in relation to the main streaming of the Asylum Service, officers advised the committee that the number of service users had reduced over the last 18 months with the same number of staff. Through the Business Improvement Delivery (BID) the plan was to main stream the asylum service into Children & Families Team. A detailed project plan had been prepared to reduce the service to represent the number of cases within the Team. Safeguarding was a priority and was always at the top of the agenda and would not be compromised as part of this process.

A member asked for clarification of the chart set out on page 46.

Officers advised that it showed the number of child protection cases being dealt with by qualified and newly qualified staff. The more experienced and skilled staff had more of the Child Protection Cases and the newly qualified staff had more of the Children in Need Cases. There had been some improvements already made to the protocol as currently it was very prescriptive and not client focused. Further work was underway to rectify this situation.

A member asked where Social Care records for children with

	<p>Disabilities that were placed out of borough were reported and who audited these records.</p> <p>Officers advised that the Disability Service was part of the review audit framework that sat within Education. Officers were unsure whether audits were carried out.</p> <p>Members asked that officers provide information on the programme of Social Care Audits for children with special needs that were placed out of borough.</p> <p>Resolved –</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That the report was noted. 2. That members of the committee be provided with information on the audit programme of Social Care Records for Children with Disabilities. 	
58.	<p>Forward Plan 2010/2011</p> <p>Resolved – The information contained in the report was noted.</p>	
59.	<p>Work Programme 2010/2011</p> <p>A member asked for an update report on the current position in relation to the transition of the connexions service to the new careers advice service.</p> <p>The committee agreed that an update be provided.</p> <p>Resolved –</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That the report was noted. 2. An update report be provided to the next meeting on the current position in relation to the transition of the connexions service to the new careers advice service. 	<p>Action By:</p> <p>Gill Brice</p>
	<p>The meeting, which commenced at 7. 00 p.m., closed at 8.15 pm.</p>	

These are the minutes of the above meeting. For more information on any of the resolutions please contact Gill Brice on 01895 250693. Circulation of these minutes is to Councillors, Officers, the Press and Members of the Public.