

Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board

22 June, 2015

Summary of Matters Considered at the Board

Report of the Chair, Councillor J Underhill

The Scrutiny Board met on 22 June, 2015 and the following items were considered. I have selected the main points of the discussion which I feel members of the Council will be particularly interested to know more about. For more detail, a copy of the minutes is available on the Committee Management Information System (CMIS) via the Council's website at <http://cmis.sandwell.gov.uk/cmis5/>

1.1 Ofsted Inspection of Services for Children in Need of Help and Protection, Children Looked After and Care Leavers

The Director of Children's Services attended the meeting and reported on the outcomes of the Ofsted Inspection of Services for Children in Need of Help and Protection, Children Looked After and Care Leavers. The Board also received the inspection report published by Ofsted. For the inspection areas of Children who need help and protection, and Leadership, management and governance the Council and Local Safeguarding Children Board had been rated as 'inadequate'. For Children looked after and achieving permanence, the Council had been rated as 'requires improvement'.

The Council has challenged Ofsted's findings through that organisation's appeal process. The outcome of the most recent stage of appeal is expected in July.

Ofsted's report includes five priorities for immediate action; the Director advised the Board that these actions had been addressed. A revised Improvement Plan for Children's Services is being developed to address the other matters raised by Ofsted as well as continue the Council's improvement journey. Members agreed that this would be considered by the Scrutiny Board in due course.

It was reported that, nationally, authorities that receive Ofsted ratings of 'inadequate' experience an increase in referrals. This had been experienced in Sandwell but due to how caseloads are managed within the authority this additional work has been absorbed, although monitoring would continue to ascertain if this was a longer-term trend.

It was noted that the application of thresholds had been raised by Ofsted and it was proposed that the Scrutiny Board be provided with training on thresholds to strengthen members' knowledge and understanding of this important topic.

The Director advised members that the Council was introducing the Signs of Safety tool which would complement and reinforce the use of the Outcome Star system already being used to work with families.

1.2 Update on Youth Service Provision in Sandwell

The Board received an update on the current provision of youth services in Sandwell following the restructure of the Service in 2014. The Council has ensured that for each of the Community Operating Group areas there is an open-access youth club and there are two detached youth working teams in each town. This also supports the area-based approach to targeted work with young people and families as part of the Early Help support in the borough.

The Council also has a role in working with local third sector organisations who are well placed to provide youth services. This support included pump-priming and providing other assistance to help organisations to successfully draw down grant funding from a variety of sources that are not available to the Council.

The Youth Service also supports the Council's wider strategy for ensuring the voice of the child is heard through the SHAPE Strategy.

The Just Youth website has been reviewed and closer working with the Family Information Service was being looked at to find ways to keep the information up to date and relevant to young people, including information on youth activity opportunities provided by the third sector.

The Board noted the many good stories relating to Sandwell's young people, for example intergenerational initiatives and talent shows, and asked that social media be utilised to help convey the positive attitudes of the borough's young people.

1.3 Appointment of Members to Workstreams

The Board determined the appointment of members to the two workstreams; Quality, Improvement and Safeguarding Assurance, and Challenge to Schools and Academies.

1.4 Work Programme 2015/16

The Board discussed its work programme for 2015/16 and agreed a number of topics for scrutiny including the Children's Services Improvement Plan, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and Early Years.

The workstreams were also discussed and these would convene to further identify and prioritise issues for scrutiny.

**Councillor J Underhill
Chair of the Children's Services Scrutiny Board**