

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT COUNTY HALL, CHELMSFORD, ON THURSDAY 4 OCTOBER 2012

County Councillors present:

T Chapman (Chairman)	I Grundy
S Barker (Vice-Chairman)	E Hart
J Baugh	L Mead
A Brown	D Morris
R Callender	T Sargent
J Deakin	J Young
M Fisher	

Non-Elected Voting Member present:

Mr R Carson

The following Members were also present:

Councillor R Gooding	
Councillor R Madden	Items 1-5
Councillor C Riley	

The following officers were present in support throughout the meeting:

Graham Redgwell	Governance Officer
Matthew Waldie	Committee Officer

The meeting opened at 10.00 am.

1. Apologies and Substitutions

The Committee Officer reported the receipt of the following apologies:

Apologies	Substitutes
Cllr T Higgins	Cllr M Fisher
Cllr S Hillier	
Cllr R Pearson	
Mr S Geddes	--
Rev R Jordan	--

2. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Callender declared that he has a daughter working in Social Care in Suffolk and Councillor Baugh declared a link with a Children's Centre. Both are personal interests. There were no other declarations of interest.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People Policy and Scrutiny Committee held on 6 September 2012 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4. **Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising, requiring discussion at this meeting, but issues on Minute 7 September 2012 in relation to the JSNA and free school meals were added to an item already included in the Forward Look.

5. **MAAGs Report**

Members received report CYP/20/12, providing background information on the introduction, role and function of Multi-Agency Allocation Groups (MAAGs), along with four case studies taken from across the County. The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Helen Lincoln, Director for Children's Social Care and Youth Offending Service, Philippa Bull, Head of Locality Commissioning Mid and Strategic Lead for MAAGs, and Simon Morris, MAAGs Manager West.

Ms Bull introduced the item.

MAAGs are aimed at allocating the appropriate support for those with complex needs and who require more than one resource. They also appoint a Lead Professional, whose role it is to co-ordinate the programme of support and monitor progress. They use the Common Assessment Framework (CAF), and are primarily aimed at children, although they do support young people and families as well.

The MAAG Manager assesses each case and decides whether it goes to the Panel. The Panel will then identify what is to be done and will appoint a Lead Professional to take it forward. The Lead Professional can be from any agency. There should be an initial meeting between the Lead Professional and involved parties within a fortnight and the Panel monitors this and will provide an impetus if required. The Lead Professional's responsibility is to co-ordinate the efforts of the allocated partners, thereby avoiding duplication of effort, and to provide feedback on progress being made.

Among the **Benefits** are:

- This avoids duplication of effort/activity
- It gives practitioners a better idea of what they can do and of what others do
- The meetings themselves give all parties the opportunity to work together
- They also give all parties the opportunity to refer to the printed CAFs, as these normally have a limited circulation. For example, the Police can check on Safeguarding issues
- It encourages the right support at the right time
- The Lead Professional serves as the solitary contact point for the child and family

- Feedback is received from the families involved, providing a good, low-level picture of a developing situation
- Re-referral rates to social care of cases previously known to social care and offered a resource by MAAG have decreased substantially.

Recent Challenges have been:

- Inappropriate referrals – these are mostly due to there only being one agency needed, rather than multi-agency help. Practitioners across the partnership have been given training in this area, so they have a better understanding of the process
- Reluctance of Lead Professionals to take on cases. Sometimes it is hard to find a suitable person who is willing to undertake the work. As their role is crucial, this can present a significant challenge
- Attendance of partners at meetings. Generally this is good, and MAAG Managers try to schedule meetings at optimal times, but some agencies have withdrawn support for a variety of reasons, including lack of capacity, which in itself can present problems.

The Future:

- How these develop is likely to depend on the results of a review that was conducted over the summer. A more family-centred approach is required when accessing multi-agency services
- Multi Disciplinary family teams are being set up to deal with families with complex needs, and these may take over the role of supporting Level 3 cases, which are currently dealt with by MAAGs. The MAAGs approach may in future be used in respect of lower level multi-agency cases.

Members were invited to ask questions and make comments on MAAGs.

Pre-MAAG situation. Schools were expected to work with vulnerable families, as MAAGs targeted those with more specific higher level needs. Schools should have an officer for vulnerable families, and teachers with specific roles relating to child protection and children in care.

Family's Position. In response to a question on whether families can withdraw from these arrangements, it was pointed out that the Council's approach was to work in a consensual way with families. At this level, we cannot force a family to comply. If a family does refuse, workers will try to re-engage with them. However, it was pointed out that Child Protection Plans, which were used at a higher level of intervention, were different, being imposed on families.

Divisional Based Intervention Teams (DBITs). These are not a factor here, as DBITs operate at a higher level of intervention, specifically targeting adolescents and their families in crisis.

Costs and resourcing. It is difficult to assess the cost of preventing children going into care. On occasions, much time and resourcing will be put into

preventing this conclusion, which will be effective for a while, but will end up with the child still being taken into care, perhaps after a considerable period. It was noted that only 1359 Essex children are currently in care - a very small proportion of the 250,000 children in Essex. An added factor was that children very often want to seek out their birth parents and have access to them, and may return to them in time. This creates a very complex picture. The important element is to ensure that there is adequate resourcing for whatever levels of activity are required. As well as this, all parties are encouraged to be flexible in their approach, seeking new ways of approaching problems. It was also noted, in response to a specific query, that families do not have to pay for the officers who are sent in to assist them, but do pay for certain activities or provisions that they made use of as part of any regime that they agreed to.

Nursery Places for 2-year-olds. The Government's proposals to extend provision of nursery places to 2-year-olds was not seen as a significant factor, as the most important element was parents' ability to parent.

In-house Provision. In response to the suggestion that it might be better to have an in-house team dealing with these situations, it was pointed out that the Review had looked at this, and it was proposed that new multi-disciplinary teams should be set up, to perform this role.

Children's Centres. The role of children's centres was considered. Work has been done on the appropriateness of referrals, which has produced an improvement over the last six months. It was noted that, although work with children's centres is now more targeted, the loss of its broader scope has also meant a reduced ability to keep a watching brief over a wider range of families.

Training. There is some training and support available for Lead Professionals; and this should continue after the introduction of the teams, as they will still be required for lower level assistance. School Governors were suggested as being able to provide greater support. They did not receive training as such, but were provided with relevant information.

Representatives at meetings. It was confirmed that all relevant parties were represented at MAAG meetings, including representatives of children's centres and of schools. Representation of those who produced the initial CAFs runs at 80% attendance levels.

Evidence for success. The progress of each case is monitored for progress in different ways, according to the individual circumstances. The success rate for 2012 is about 50% at the moment. Some cases are very challenging, and will receive further resourcing if necessary. They do rely on the Lead Professional to provide appropriate feedback. Evidence showed that resources were now being used in a much "smarter" way. A pilot scheme was also taking place in Mid Essex, covering the needs of the whole family and involving staff from both children's and adult care sources, piloting a 'Family MAAG' approach.

In conclusion, the Chairman thanked the team for the very helpful paper and responses to Members' questions and suggestions. She confirmed that Members would like to see the following:

1. The final report on the findings of the consultation on Assessment, referral and access routes to resources for children young people and families, which are informing the future development of new models to support children and families
2. Effective Support for Children and Families in Essex. This is the new conceptual model for ensuring that the needs of children and families are responded to as soon as they arise. This is being developed and will be consulted on in the coming months with staff and partners. It includes the "windscreen", which sets out clearly the 4 main levels of intervention, upon which MAAGs and other schemes are based.
3. The Community Budgets Families with Complex Needs Executive Summary. This outlines the proposed future development of service delivery to support children and families with complex needs.

It was confirmed that these would be circulated to Members after the meeting.

It was also agreed that the Early Years Sufficiency Strategy should be included on the Committee's Forward Look.

6. YEA Updates

Members received Report CYP/21/12, which contained written updates on work being carried out on behalf of the Young Essex Assembly, in relation to:

- a) Bullying, Crime and Feeling Safe Subgroup
- b) Eating Disorders

The Governance Officer pointed out that both these projects were still ongoing and so the reports were primarily for Members' information only. Members raised the following issues:

- It would be helpful to know the scale of the problems relating to eating disorders. There were also issues behind these conditions that needed to be addressed, such as poor self-esteem and lack of confidence
- The feeling of some schools councils is that they have little impact on the YEA. The YEA needs greater involvement with local groups
- An alternative approach might have been to turn the questions around: "What would make life better for you?" This would have been more positive
- (In response to a question on where the impetus came from to look into these particular issues) it was pointed out that the decision to prioritise the work on Bullying and Crime came directly from the Towerlands Event in 2010, which was attended by 600 young people. The concern over eating disorders stemmed from a survey of young people in Essex
- The County Council needed to listen to what was being produced and to act upon it. Youth Strategy Groups were also likely to create feedback in future

- The Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee should be made aware of this work, if it was not already aware.

These observations will be passed to the officers supporting the young people's work.

7. Forward Look

The agenda items already agreed by the Committee for the remaining meetings in 2012 were noted.

It was noted that discussion of Procurement of Services, which could be taken in either November or December, may have to be taken as an exempt item.

It was noted that, as the number of free school meals taken at a school served as the trigger for the amount of Pupil Premium received by that school, there should be a direct correlation between uptake of school meals and deprivation in that area. However, the stigma of taking free school meals, which some people feel, may affect this and so skew the figures. Councillor Barker felt this was a legitimate item of concern for the Committee. It was agreed that there would be discussion on this the December meeting as part of a wider discussion on Public Health/JSNA from an education point of view.

8. Dates of future meetings

The dates up to April 2013 were noted. The date of the next meeting was confirmed as:

Thursday 1 November. Committee Room 1. Members' pre-meeting at 9.15 am and Committee meeting at 10.00 am.

9. Exclusion of the Public

Resolved:

That the public (including the press) be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as specified in Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972:

PART II (business taken in private)

10. Safeguarding Update (Paragraph 2 – information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information))

Items discussed at the most recent meeting of the Families Safeguarding Sub-Committee were noted. A Member asked that, as part of the discussion on safeguarding at the December Committee meeting, clarification should be

sought on Members' roles in relation to Data Protection and the Protection of Families' Privacy.

The meeting closed at 11.45 am.

Chairman