

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SAFEGUARDING SUB-COMMITTEE (A SUB-COMMITTEE OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE), HELD AT COUNTY HALL, CHELMSFORD, ON WEDNESDAY 15 SEPTEMBER 2010

Membership

Councillors

- * Mrs T Sargent (Chairman)
- * Mrs A Brown
- * Mrs M Hutchon
- * J Knapman
- * C Riley
- * J Aldridge (*ex officio*)

Non-Elected Voting Members

- * Mr R Carson

(* present)

The following officers were present in support throughout the meeting:

Graham Redgwell	Governance Officer
Matthew Waldie	Committee Officer

The meeting opened at 4.00 pm.

17. Apologies

The Committee Officer reported the receipt of the following apologies:

Cllr M Hutchon

It was noted that Councillor Hutchon was still recovering from an operation.

18. Declarations of Interest

No new declarations of interest were recorded.

19. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Safeguarding Sub-Committee held on 2 September 2010 were approved as a correct record.

20. In-depth Review of Safeguarding

The Chairman pointed out how important this work was, as it was inconceivable that the Council should fail on the next inspection (ie for the third time). It was noted that, owing to the short notice of meeting, neither Paul Fallon, Chairman of the Essex Safeguarding Children Board, nor Sheila

Bremner, Chief Executive of Mid Essex PCT, had been able to attend this meeting. It was agreed that Mr Fallon would be offered two dates in mid October, in the hope that he will be able to attend the next meeting.

The Governance Officer briefed the Committee, drawing attention to the checklist he had prepared for members. This set out certain questions that the Sub-Committee might wish to consider, as well as listing each of the action points proposed by the Inspectors in the Report, within a framework of months. This would enable members to see their status throughout the coming months. He reminded members that some clarification of terms such as “robust” might be required.

The Sub-Committee agreed that it would be important for SCF to be able to provide evidence of the progress they are making.

The Chairman welcomed Malcolm Newsam, Executive Director, SCF, to the meeting at this point and asked him to address members about the directorate’s work on the areas for improvement to date.

Mr Newsam informed the meeting that SCF was currently drawing up a revised action plan, which was in effect refreshing the original plan that was drawn up in December 2009, repopulating it to reflect the points raised in the Report. And at the end of September, the External Improvement Board (EIB) will receive this. The EIB is made up of the Council, Police, government and PCT representatives and it reports both to Tim Loughton MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary for Children and Families, and Cllr Peter Martin, Leader of Council. Mr Newsam pointed out that the Sub-Committee must beware it did not duplicate the work of the EIB. He advised against monitoring progress on month by month basis, as things tended to progress at different paces, but he did suggest a monthly look at the “core data”.

He tabled a copy of the SCF Scorecard for August, showing improvement notice indicators. This demonstrated trends in a range of fields: eg, initial and core assessments, stability of placements by time and number, numbers of children on the Child Protection Register, percentages of referrals going to initial assessment, and numbers of initial and core assessments in relation to general population. Of the 12 categories, 8 had reached or exceeded their target, 2 had shown marked improvement without reaching the target, and 2 had figures that were actually worse than the previous month’s.

Of the last category, one still suffered from 400 extra cases being held over from the previous year; the other, referring to re-referrals, had suffered from a combination of poor management and inappropriate classifications.

Several points were raised by members, and Mr Newsam responded to these.

- In response to a query on the place and efficacy of the Trust Boards, Mr Newsam pointed out that MAG managers make decisions on where individual cases go, based on data input to the Common Assessment Framework. They create and commission individual packages for

cases, often using external agencies. Local Trust Boards sit above these, concerned with strategic planning. Old Trust Board legislation is predicated on the idea that everyone connected should be involved – leading to boards of over 30 members. Mr Newsam's own view, and that of councillor Candy, is that a lighter approach would be better with a small, core group working with other parties as required, forming fluid partnerships.

- In members' opinion, historically, certain external parties have not recognised the importance of their part in this process; but there were some signs of change here, particularly with the PCTs.
- It was pointed out that if the quality of work is poor, it does not matter if it is done quickly. In response, Mr Newsam pointed out that quality is the ultimate aim. Since May, they have been carrying out online audits, to monitor quality; and soon they intend to use an external, independent auditor to check on the work.
- The importance of data was noted. The Sub-Committee, in carrying out its scrutiny role, needs to be certain that the figures presented are accurate. Mr Newsam informed members of several recent changes that have raised the quality of data. First is the adoption of the new ICS System last winter; the move itself requiring a substantial data clean. Second, not only do managers have access to their own data, but they have to clean it on an ongoing, weekly basis. Third, previously, data was held at a County level, which flattened out performance; now poorly performing areas can be pinpointed and dealt with.
- It was suggested that the ultimate measure of quality was the difference being made to the lives of children. Mr Newsam acknowledged this, but added that the inspectors had been very positive about our looked after children; it was the assessment stage that was letting the Council down.
- Asked about the next inspection, Mr Newsam pointed out that, although the requirement is that an unannounced inspection should take place every 12 months, he expected a visit early in 2011.

Mr Newsam suggested that the Sub-Committee might benefit from a demonstration of the full process. The Chairman asked that this should be combined with a look at the revised improvement plan. It was **Agreed** that a session should be held for the Sub-Committee after the next CYP meeting, on 30 September.

The Chairman thanked Mr Newsam for his contribution and hoped that the changes he had introduced would succeed in raising the standards for safeguarding children. Mr Newsam left the meeting at this point.

The Chairman pointed out that the Sub-Committee must be assured that the work SCF is doing is working to the requirements of the Ofsted Report and that there is no chance that they will fail the next inspection. The Sub-Committee should meet the new Director as soon as is practicable.

With regard to meeting Paul Fallon and Sheila Bremner, it was agreed that Mr Fallon should be invited to the next meeting of the Sub-Committee, either on Monday 11 or Tuesday 12 October, according to his preference. The Chairman would write to him directly. This should give him sufficient time to fit the meeting around his schedule. Sheila Bremner would then be invited to the next meeting after that.

21. Date of Next Meetings

Either Monday 11 October at 12.30 pm or Tuesday 12 October at 1.30 pm, tbc. Committee Officer to confirm this date in due course.

The meeting closed at 6.25 pm.

Chairman