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OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 8.4.2015

## MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 8 APRIL 2015

### COUNCILLORS

**PRESENT** Nneka Keazor, Daniel Anderson, Alev Cazimoglu, Krystle Fonyonga, Joanne Laban and Edward Smith

### ABSENT

**STATUTORY CO-OPTES:** *1 vacancy (Church of England diocese representative), Mr Simon Goulden (other faiths/denominations representative), Mr Tony Murphy (Catholic diocese representative), Alicia Meniru & 1 vacancy (Parent Governor representative) - Italics Denotes absence*

**OFFICERS:** Tony Theodoulou (Assistant Director, Children's Services), Linda Hughes (Head of Looked After Children), Bindi Nagra (Assistant Director, Strategy & Resources, HHASC), Christine Williams (Public Health Commissioning Manager), Claire Johnson (Scrutiny Manager), Jane Juby (Scrutiny Officer)

### Also Attending:

499

### WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

Attendees were welcomed to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Andrew Fraser, Tony Murphy, Alicia Meniru and Simon Goulden.

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### DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

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### CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S STANDING ITEM: ADOPTION AND FOSTERING SERVICES

Tony Theodoulou, Assistant Director Children's Services, introduced the Annual Reports, which would be taken to Cabinet on 29 April. Any feedback and comments received from Overview & Scrutiny Committee were welcomed and would be incorporated.

The reports were then discussed as follows:

Adoption Services in Enfield 2014/15

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The Adoption Service fulfils three main functions:

- Matching adoptive families to children;
- Recruiting adopters;
- Supporting adopters and adopted children.

The Adoption Service had had a very successful year with 19 adoptive families approved and 18 children adopted.

Enfield is a member of the North London Adoption Consortium (made up of 6 boroughs) and had achieved comparatively high levels of performance in all three areas cited above.

13 children were currently in adoptive placements awaiting legal adoption.

10 adoptive families had been approved but had not yet been linked to a child.

Due to the national requirement to increase the number of approved adopters and speed up the process of adoption, there were now a greater number of adoptive families available than children waiting for adoption.

Some children awaiting adoption had associated 'uncertainties' such as parental substance misuse which may impact upon their development and it remains a challenge to match these to adoptive families.

Support was offered to adoptive families locally and via the Consortium. Ofsted had recently inspected the service and had judged the level of support to be good; no family was on a waiting list to receive support.

The following questions were then taken:

Q: How much Adoption Allowance did each family receive?

A: Not every adoptive family will receive an Allowance. The criteria for receiving an Allowance relates to the needs of the child. An Allowance may be paid, for example, to cover increased clothing costs for a child with a disability, or to cover sibling groups. The Allowance is means tested.

Q: Please can you explain the apparent higher than average time taken in Enfield for children to be adopted?

A: The Service is primarily measured against an Adoption Scorecard which has two indicators, one of which is the time taken for children to be adopted (from date in care to placement). The Service received a letter in February from Edward Timpson (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State in the Department for Education) regarding our performance against this indicator and a response to this has been finalised this morning. Enfield's performance has essentially been impacted by 4 cases of BME children with complex special needs who had spent extended time in foster placements awaiting adoption. We

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are pleased to report that the foster carers concerned have now adopted these children.

Committee Members requested that a copy of the letter received from Mr Timpson, and of Enfield's response, be circulated **ACTION: Tony Theodoulou/Linda Hughes.**

Q: Is the figure of 6 out of 18 children adopted within timescale over the year a low number or what is expected? How does this figure compare to the previous year?

A: As previously mentioned, the 4 cases of extended fostering have impacted upon this year's and the previous year's indicator in this respect. The year before last did see better performance. We expect the indicator to improve again for 2016. Enfield's performance against the indicator largely depends on the children within each annual cohort. The Service produces a briefing every 3 months to track adoption progress and to ensure no child is 'drifting' in care.

Q: What efforts are being made to increase the numbers of BME adopters?

A: It has been identified across the Consortium that a number of BME children await adoption due to the lack of BME adopters. It wouldn't be correct to say that Enfield would not adopt cross culturally but we find that adopters do not often want to do this. Engagement work is ongoing with faith groups, churches and community groups to build relationships in BME communities and to help encourage a positive view of adoption. We are now also taking a targeted approach with the Service's annual marketing strategy. It is a national issue.

Q: What is a 'good adoption service'? What other measurements besides the Adoption Scorecard are used to determine this?

A: The number of adoption breakdowns can also indicate the success of a service. For a number of years Enfield has not had any adoption breakdowns. In a small number of cases the adoption process has been ceased by mutual agreement before finalisation in the courts. Essentially, the Scorecard is the main means of measuring the service but it can be a blunt tool. It should be noted that Ofsted did undertake a recent thorough inspection of the Service against a given framework so the Committee can be reassured that Enfield has a good service.

Q: Why has it now become the case that there are more adopters available than children waiting for adoption?

A: There has been a very successful national campaign which has encouraged more people to come forward as potential adopters. The time taken to complete assessments has reduced, it has been commented to us by adopters that this might be too rapid and is not giving families enough time to adjust to the idea.

Q: At what point does the supporting/monitoring of adoptive families cease?

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A: If an adoptive family moves out of borough, we would normally provide support for up to 3 years after the family moves. If the family remains in the borough we often try to maintain links as long as possible. Some families, however, withdraw from support eventually as they wish to live as a 'normal family'.

Cllr Smith asked for the total numbers of children in care currently in the borough, which he felt would provide a useful context to the number of children being adopted. He also commented that the age and ethnicity profiles of Looked After Children would help provide additional context for adoption.

Tony Theodoulou responded that 6% of children in care in Enfield currently go out for adoption. He proposed that a further report on Looked After Children be brought to the Committee to provide this additional information **ACTION: Tony Theodoulou/Linda Hughes.**

Cllr Smith then commented that the Report should set out the context around the growth in Special Guardianship Orders, which was a primary contributor to the projected overspend of £150,000 for 2014/15 **ACTION: Tony Theodoulou/Linda Hughes.**

Q: If a family, as previously mentioned, moves out of the borough, who has continuing responsibility for providing support?

A: Enfield would have responsibility for 3 years; we would look to work with any new authority to help provide this service. If there is a risk of breakdown the Service may decide to undertake a visit or have this arranged on our behalf. Adoption is, ultimately, a permanent process with legal status.

Q: If a child did not wish to move from the borough in an adoptive family, would they have to?

A: Yes, as would be the case with any other family.

Q: Was the termination of the previous provider's contract the decision of the contractor?

A: Yes. We have now commissioned a service across the 6 borough consortium.

Q: How does Enfield's Service budgetary position compare with other authorities? Is the projected overspend a regular occurrence?

A: Demand on the service has increased as the population has increased. In Enfield for every 10,000 children living in the borough, 40 will come into the Council's care at any one time. Also, recent changes to legislation has led to an increase in children deemed to be in care – for example, children remanded in custody are now categorised as in care. It is acknowledged as a budgetary pressure, due to demographic pressures.

Fostering Service Annual Report 2014/15

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The following questions on the Report were taken:

Q: Given the projected overspend for the service in 2014/15, could unit costs be reduced to help address this? Why are these not the same as other local authorities?

A: There are a number of established staff members at the top of their pay scale which affects these costs. It should be noted that maximising the use of in-house provision is more cost effective than relying on external placements from the independent sector.

Q: What is being done to improve the uptake of training by foster carers - 86% of carers completing training seems to be quite a low figure?

A: This has been identified as an area for improvement. The Fostering Service has now taken the view that it needed to be made clear that four learning opportunities in a year must be undertaken. In order to improve access we have commissioned a range of opportunities such as e-learning, evening sessions, reading and discussion with supervising social workers etc. It is important that all foster carers keep their training up to date as children's needs are changing.

Q: How feasible is it to make training mandatory?

A: Some training is already mandatory for registration as a foster carer under the Fostering Standard. This includes elements such as health and safety and First Aid.

Cllr Fonyonga commented that comparative data with other authorities would be useful in the Report for those children experiencing '3 or more moves' between foster placements. **ACTION: Tony Theodoulou/Linda Hughes.**

Q: How many unaccompanied children are currently in care the borough? Has this increased from last year?

A: There are 36 unaccompanied children in the Council's care at the moment, primarily young Albanian boys/men who are unaccompanied asylum seekers. The number of unaccompanied children has increased since last year.

Unaccompanied asylum seekers, if over the age of 16, are placed in London boroughs by Croydon Council who oversee a pan London rota. If such children are under the age of 16 and present to Enfield, they are the Council's responsibility. The increase generally in Looked After Children is largely due to an increase in unaccompanied asylum seekers and remands to custody.

Unaccompanied asylum seekers are usually very keen and motivated to access education, training and language courses. They are very motivated to succeed.

Q: Is the number of 122 fostering households a low number?

A: We do need many more foster placements.

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Q: Are unaccompanied asylum seekers arriving completely on their own in the borough?

A: Yes.

Q: Under what circumstances are they arriving?

A: Some of them have had very distressing experiences and have travelled across a number of countries. We are establishing groups that help introduce them to other members in their community, to other children in care and to ESOL classes.

Q: How many such children are arriving in the borough per week?

A: There is no set pattern. Last week 3 unaccompanied asylum seekers presented in the borough.

Q: Is anything being done to work with authorities in Albania to address the problem?

A: Enfield has discussed the issue with local MPs and this may be something that is taken forward by them.

We know that often such children seek asylum because they are fleeing family feuds in rural areas of Albania. There is also an associated risk of people trafficking with such children.

Q: In the Report it mentions 4 foster carers were 'deregistered'. Under what circumstances does this happen?

A: Every child in a foster placement has a social worker attached to them, and in addition, every foster carer has a supervising social worker. Either can raise concerns over the quality of foster care being provided and we expect a certain standard. Training can help but sometimes the decision is taken to deregister. The number of deregistrations for this year is about average. It remains a challenge to maintain the number of foster carers available as some are lost due to deregistration, retirement etc as new carers are recruited. Deregistration can also occur if we have not been able to contact the carer for a period of time, if a significant incident occurs or if a carer is registered to care for a specific child, and that child eventually moves out of care.

Q: Are all foster carers DBS checked?

A: Yes.

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#### DRAFT SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2014/15 - TO FOLLOW

The draft Report was tabled. It was **AGREED** that support officers would liaise individually with workstream chairs to update their sections as appropriate; it was also **AGREED** that the Chair and Scrutiny Manager would agree the final draft of the Report by the middle of May. The Report would then be taken to the next Council meeting thereafter.

**503**

**WORK PROGRAMME 2014/15**

The Work Programme was **NOTED** as completed.

**504**

**UPDATE ON THE WORKSTREAMS AND CO-ORDINATION AND SELECTION OF THE NEW WORKSTREAMS**

Final workstream meetings were now taking place. Committee members were invited to consider new workstreams for the next Municipal Year and these would be agreed at the planning meeting scheduled for June. The Committee's Work Programme for 15/16 would also be agreed at this meeting.

**505**

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING 26 FEBRUARY 2015**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 26 February 2015 were **AGREED**.

Councillor Anderson commented that the comparative data requested in respect of the Care Act had not yet been provided and asked that this be followed up **ACTION: Scrutiny Secretary**.

**506**

**MATTERS REFERRED FROM THE EXECUTIVE/COUNCIL TO SCRUTINY**

It was **NOTED** no matters had been referred.

**507**

**REFERENCES TO CABINET**

It was **NOTED** that decision KD 3990 'Property Acquisition' considered at the Call In meeting held on 1 April 2015 had been referred back to Cabinet for reconsideration.

**508**

**DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

It was **NOTED** that meeting dates for the next Municipal Year would be agreed at the Annual Council meeting on 13 May.

The Chair, Members and officers were thanked for their work on the Committee over the year.

It was **AGREED** that provisional dates for the new workstreams be arranged **ACTION: Scrutiny Manager**.

**509**

**EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

**510**

**PART 2 AGENDA: SEXUAL HEALTH CONTRACTING ARRANGEMENTS -  
TO FOLLOW**

Cllr Anderson introduced the item; he had previously, with Cllr Pite, met with officers to discuss the matter.

Contracting arrangements were discussed and the Committee thanked officers for their comprehensive update.