

**16<sup>th</sup> December 2019**

**Agenda Item: 6**

## **REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, COMMISSIONING AND RESOURCES**

### **CHILDREN'S HOMES GOVERNANCE BOARD UPDATE**

#### **Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to provide an update to Committee in relation to the Children's Homes Governance Board and seeks approval for a review of the revised governance arrangements for the Council's children's homes to be incorporated into the wider review of the Council's Looked After Children care settings.
2. The report also seeks approval for all Members of the Children and Young People's Committee to be involved in announced and unannounced visits to children's homes on at least an annual basis in accordance with the guidance.

#### **Information**

3. On 18<sup>th</sup> March 2019 Children and Young People's Committee received a report on Rota Visits by Elected Members. Committee agreed recommendations within the report for the withdrawal of the guidance on Rota Visits by Elected Members and that visits under that guidance would cease. They also agreed to the establishment of a new Children's Homes Governance Board to oversee the Council's children's homes, including Clayfields House Secure Unit, led by Elected Members and with cross-party representation alongside senior professionals from multi-disciplinary backgrounds. Terms of Reference were produced and agreed by the Committee on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2019 .
4. It was further agreed that a report from the Governance Board on its work would be presented to Committee and that a review of the revised governance arrangements would be present in March 2020. It has subsequently been agreed by Policy Committee on 18 September 2019 in respect of a report on the Initial Response to the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse that the County Council will complete a further review of governance arrangements for the Council's Looked After Children care settings. It is therefore proposed that the review of the Children Homes Governance Board arrangements should be incorporated into this wider review.
5. The Governance Board has met on three occasions in June, September and November and has received Ofsted and Regulation 44 reports in respect of the children's homes under the direct control of the Local Authority. Regulation 44 reports are produced monthly by an independent person who visits the home. There have been no significant issues raised in

respect of progress on actions recommended within these reports. Clayfields House received an 'Inadequate' Ofsted judgement in June 2019 but action taken has meant that all compliance notices have been lifted and a further inspection has resulted in a 'Requires Improvement' judgement with confidence that this will improve again at the next inspection. The home continues to work with NHS England, as commissioners of health services to Clayfields House, to strengthen the performance of this area which has been of concern due to issues with health staffing. Work is also underway to improve recruitment and retention more generally within the home and to establish a financial plan, funded by the income received directly by the unit, to ensure ongoing investment to improve resources.

6. New guidance has been agreed by the Board for Elected Member visits to children's homes and this is attached as **Appendix 1**. The two Elected Members on the Governance Board have been undertaking a programme of unannounced visits to children's homes and all homes will have been visited at least once by the end of the calendar year. To promote the corporate parenting responsibilities of Elected Members it is proposed that all members of the Children and Young People's Committee should become involved in an announced or unannounced visit, alongside Member representatives on the Board, to these homes and to selected commissioned homes in the private market on at least an annual basis in accordance with the guidance. The Principal Social Worker has agreed to provide training and advice for Elected Members to assist them in preparing for these visits.
7. Oakhurst children's home has not been operational in recent months. The home has now been refurbished and a new Registered Manager, with considerable experience, has been appointed and approved by Ofsted. The home will be operational early in December 2019.
8. The Board has identified a piece of work to be completed regarding the future arrangements for programmes on management of aggression within the homes. This is due to changes to the scheme that has been used for some years within the Local Authority. Further details of this work will be presented to the Committee in the next update report.

### **Other Options Considered**

9. Alternative options for the governance of children's homes directly run by the Local Authority will be considered should Committee approve the recommendation for this to be incorporated into the wider review of the Council's Looked After Children care settings.

### **Reason for Recommendations**

10. The recommendations support the delivery of corporate parenting and the Local Authority's initial response to the findings of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse.

### **Statutory and Policy Implications**

11. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

## **Financial Implications**

12. There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

## **RECOMMENDATION/S**

That:

- 1) a review of the revised governance arrangements for the Council's children's homes be incorporated into the wider review of the Council's Looked After Children care settings
- 2) all members of the Children and Young People's Committee be involved in announced or unannounced visits to children's homes on at least an annual basis in accordance with the guidance.

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## **Constitutional Comments (LW 21/11/19)**

13. Children & Young People's Committee is the appropriate body to consider the content of the report.

## **Financial Comments (SAS 20/11/19)**

14. There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

## **Background Papers and Published Documents**

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

[Rota visits by Elected Members – report to Children and Young People's Committee on 18th March 2019](#)

[Terms of Reference for the Children's Homes Governance Board – report to Children and Young People's Committee on 20th May 2019](#)

## **Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected**

All.

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