

Overview and Select Committee

These are the conclusions and recommendations of the OSC meetings in relation to the Ofsted and the ASC Senior Management Arrangements

Conclusions

1. We are grateful to Ofsted for producing a clear report detailing where the Councils children's services are inadequate and in need of improvement. We are not convinced that the Council would have discovered this by itself.
2. We deeply regret that the Council has let vulnerable children down and put them at risk because of failures of governance, management and practice.
3. We are concerned that no elected person or officer has accepted any responsibility for the situation and have instead claimed ignorance and lack of information. We regret that no clear evidence has been presented to determine responsibility.
4. In our view the service review which led to social workers leaving and resulted in an unacceptable level of unallocated cases was driven too much by the need to make savings. (£1.8m). There was insufficient risk analysis and reporting of the review's impact to senior management and councillors. It is possible that too many things were changed too quickly creating an unstable environment.
5. We believe that the HR, Audit and Finance functions failed in their role to monitor and report on significant changes that ought to have alerted the council to problems.
6. We are concerned that it is possible for the unions to make complaints about problems in the service as a result of staff leaving and to lodge a series of related grievances, without this being brought to the attention of politicians.
7. We remain unconvinced by the Assistant Mayor Children's account of why she didn't know things were seriously deteriorating in the service between the 2011 and 2015 Ofsted reports. It appears that she did not have a sufficient understanding of the performance of the service as would be expected for the Lead Member.
8. We believe that the City Mayor should have had a better understanding of the performance of Children's Services and conclude that this needs to be the case in future and that he takes steps to ensure this.
9. That effective scrutiny was significantly hampered by the lack of performance data and unwillingness of the senior leadership of the council to provide information and reports when requested.
10. We noted the changes in monitoring across all departments and the lack of confidence the coo has in the monitoring info and how that is going to change.

11. In our view the service review which led to social workers leaving and resulted in an unacceptable level of unallocated cases was driven too much by the need to make savings. (£1.8m).
12. We are concerned that the Lead Member was being directed to give attention to areas other than Children's Services, namely Adult's Social Care, in direct contradiction of the Munro report recommendation (which was supposed to have underpinned the review).
13. We are concerned that the Council failed to appoint a principle senior social worker, as recommended in the Munro report, and that having failed to do so no mitigation steps were done to cover for this absence.

This resulted in the failure of senior management to understand the problems felt by social workers and their low morale, the exact problem the principle senior social worker is supposed to report on.

Recommendations

1. In future we expect full compliance with Ofsted's requirements for improvement. Including that the Improvement Board reports monthly to Scrutiny on progress.
2. Given that Ofsted found the LSCB to be inadequate we request details of the improvement plans for the LSCB and regular updates on progress to Scrutiny.
3. That the City Mayor appoints as soon as possible an Assistant Mayor with responsibility for children services as required by the Children's Act 2004'
4. That arrangements for regular reporting of performance of Children's services to the City Mayor and Lead Member for Children are published as soon as possible.
5. That proper risk assessments are undertaken of sensitive reviews and that the ownership of these risks rests with the COO and the City Mayor. Particular concern should be paid to changing too many things at once in any service area.
6. That HR, Audit and Finance operations are reviewed so that they can help more to 'flag up' significant changes that could present a risk.
7. That HR systems be changed to flag up to the COO and politicians any staff concerns/grievances that might indicate underlying problems in the service and it's management.
8. The Council should adopt a policy on the use of interim staff, including their length of, tenure particularly at a senior level.

9. That the City Mayor undertakes to ensure that requests from Scrutiny for information and reports are responded to in a timely way. Further that the City Mayor implements a system for escalating the failure to provide such information and sets a timescale for its operation.
10. That rules are changed to allow for the appropriate member oversight of service reviews in Scrutiny Commissions.
11. That a task group of CYPS scrutiny be formed immediately to consider all these issues in more detail.
12. That Members undertake regular and open discussions about the service with front line workers and managers, to promote understanding and openness. This is an opportunity for staff to comment on what is going well, what is not and what they think should be done. It is not an opportunity for staff to air individual grievances.
13. After the election the CYPS Scrutiny Commission receives regular monthly reports on performance, including a risk analysis of all aspects of the departments work including the performance of schools. This needs to be presented in a way that provides an understanding of pressures on service areas.
14. In the light of Ofsted's comments about the "corporate failure of leadership" and that both Safeguarding Boards share the same chair, the council commissions an independent review of Adult Social care, which will include: Reviewing whistleblowing and openness, and appropriate regular reporting of performance data to scrutiny.
15. That a permanent director of Adult Social care be appointed as soon as possible, to avoid the 18 month interim situation in Children's services.
16. That the Council work to comply with the Munro report recommendations fully and that the Council urgently seek to appoint a principal senior social worker, and put in place mitigating systems in the intervening period before such an appointment

Cllr Mohammed Dawood
Chair
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