

Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday 12 September 2023

PRESENT:

Councillor Reilly, in the Chair.

Councillor Carlyle, Vice Chair.

Councillors Mrs Beer, Dingle, Harrison, Holloway, McLay, Penrose, Raynsford, Stephens, Tippetts and Tofan.

Also in attendance: Councillor Jemima Laing (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Culture, Events and Communications), Councillor Sally Cresswell (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Apprenticeships), Councillor Sally Haydon (Cabinet Member for Community Safety Libraries, Cemeteries and Crematoria), David Haley (Interim Director of Children's Services), Annie Gammon (Interim Service Director of Education, Participation and Skills), Emma Crowther (Head of Commissioning), Matt Fulton (Lead Accountancy Manager), Clare Hetherington (Principal Educational Psychologist), Rachel Crozier (Ace Schools), Paul Stephens (Performance Advisor), Tina Brinkworth (Head of Skills and Post 16), Matt Garrett (Service Director for Community Connections), Meghan Field (VAWG Strategic Lead) and Jake Metcalfe (Democratic Advisor).

The meeting started at 2.00 pm and finished at 5.10 pm.

Note: At a future meeting, the Panel will consider the accuracy of these draft minutes, so they may be subject to change. Please check the minutes of that meeting to confirm whether these minutes have been amended.

13. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

14. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 July were agreed as a true and accurate record.

15. **Chair's Urgent Business**

Councillor Cresswell provided an update and advised that the Council had been proactive in communicating with school leaders as parents and carers were concerned about the use of reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) in school buildings. Since 2018, surveys were carried out on the 14 local authority maintained schools and none had been found to contain RAAC. The Education team contacted Chief Executives of Academy's and Head Teachers to confirm that relative checks had taken place.

16. **Work Programme**

The Committee agreed to note the work programme.

17. **Tracking Decisions**

Paul Stephens (Performance Advisor) explained an answer to a question on the response regarding stepping up from Child in Need plan to Child Protection and stepping back down from Child in Need to Universal that due to lack of resourcing prioritisation had been carried out and explained why the work had not been developed. It had been placed on a list for future development.

David Haley (Interim Service Director for Children's Services and DCS) responded to a question regarding timeframe for that piece of work that an agreement had been put in place to share resource with adult social care to draw the data out for the agreed work.

The Committee agreed to note the work programme.

18. **Local Area SEND inspection: report and briefing**

Councillor Cresswell (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Apprenticeships) and Annie Gammon (Service Director for Education, Participation and Skills) presented the report to the Committee and highlighted the following key points:

- a) The Council regretted the report and accepted Ofsted's findings and would work with the Local Area Partnership to improve services for the city's most vulnerable and would look to build in a bright future for all its SEN users;
- b) The Council would be making arrangements to hold an improvement Board meeting in September which would continue 6 weekly thereafter in order to make sustained change at pace with the help of Ofsted and partners;
- c) Ofsted recognised that there were some areas of strength within the partnership which included commitment, some strong working schools, some strong work with Plymouth's youngest children, some work with post 16 children and some work with social and emotional needs;
- d) Areas of improvement included making children with SEND the centre of improvement plans, with clear oversight and tracking to measure impact. Plymouth should be better at understanding increased risk to children with SEND;
- e) Plymouth should reduce the risk of a child/young person being excluded where they had an EHCP;
- f) Plymouth required to be consistent with all children around the healthy child programme;
- g) The Parent Carer Forum had been actively involved and helped the Local

Area Partnership with the plan and help determine what the outcomes would be for children with SEND;

In response to questions raised it was reported that:

- h) There would be changes to professional development for staff to enact change in culture across the partnership to put children with SEND at the heart of everything the service did;
- i) There were increases in the number of young children coming up to school age, following Covid with limited language and was an area of focus through the stronger practice hub. There was a rolling program of training with a special educational needs co-coordinator and this would need to be pulled together as part of the SEND improvement planning;
- j) Part time timetables should only be used as a temporary measure and all children should be in full time education. They were too prevalent in Plymouth that was used to regularly by schools and work was on-going with schools in Plymouth to remedy;
- k) Most children with an EHCP in Plymouth were in mainstream education however it was acknowledged the Plymouth had a shortage of places requiring the correct provision and a sufficiency plan was underway to create more spaces. The Council was exploring a number of options which included opening a further provision and increasing existing provisions;
- l) To ensure all schools in the city were working to good outcomes for Plymouth SEND children, the partnership would need to create a common goal. The council offered support and had undertaken an audit of its secondary schools to make them aware of what could be done and what training was in place. There were assurances from Department for Education that if the Council did not think schools were involved as much as what they should be the DfE would be involved in those discussions;
- m) The Council would look into schools have more support provision which would not only help children with SEND but all children and staff in the school;
- n) The Council would ensure that best practice across the city was shared and would look to ensure good coaching/mentoring was established;
- o) Stability in the senior leadership team would be a key element in improvement work but the current interim team in place were right for Plymouth at the time and had already driven changes in the service;
- p) Health partners have been and wanted to be involved as part of the improvement work and had signed up strategically;
- q) Those in residential care outside of the City and those entitled to residential respite had all been assessed and were being remedied. Checks were ongoing

for children that applied for short breaks that aren't residential and a report would be ready by the end of October;

- r) Schools should have an inclusion development plan to ensure that schools were increasingly accessible to all children and although the local authority could not insist on that, it would be seen as good practice.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

19. **Unlocking Plymouth's Potential 2023 to 2025**

Councillor Cresswell (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Apprenticeships), Tina Brinkworth (Head of Skills and Post 16) and Annie Gammon (Service Director for Education, Participation and Skills) presented the report to the Committee and highlighted the following key points:

- a) The plan allowed a way in which the council could work across the system but in a preventative model to introduce early interventions and prevent people becoming not in education, employment and training;
- b) Young people in the SEND cohort would transition to education and training at a rate of 1 in 2 and very few transitioned into employment;
- c) A care experienced young person transitioned into education, training and employment at a rate of 1 in 5 and this was the same for those in the criminal justice system;
- d) Early employment pathways in the city existed in very low numbers and a SEND employment forum was established, the Council had grown its supported internship numbers from nine to 49, was working hard to grow supported apprenticeship opportunities and other innovative pathways that would lead to employment.

In response to questions raised it was reported that:

- e) There were many people and organisations operating across the city, but were operating in silo's. The council would not need to provide additional funding as it was already present but partners and the council were not working effectively across the system and the Unlocking Plymouth's Potential strategy would bring it all together and drive it across Plymouth in a coordinated approach. The strategy would triage young people more appropriately;

The Committee agreed to note the report.

20. **Educational perspectives on Emotional Health and Wellbeing (EHWB)**

Councillor Cresswell (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Apprenticeships), Clare Hetherington (Principal Educational Psychologist) and Rachel Crozier (ACE) presented the report to the Committee and highlighted the following key points:

- a) Good mental health was important for children and young people to develop and thrive. Emotional health and wellbeing influenced their cognitive development and ability to engage with learning. It also affected physical and social health;
- b) Ofsted's school inspection handbook set out what inspectors took account of to ensure schools provided high quality pastoral care to enable pupils and students to develop into resilient adults with good mental health. All schools had a statutory duty to promote the welfare of their pupils and students, including preventing impairment of health or development as set out in Keeping Children Safe in Education (updated 2023) statutory guidance;
- c) The Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice defined Social Emotional Mental Health (SEMH) difficulties whereby children may experience a wide range of needs that manifest themselves in many ways. These included becoming withdrawn or isolated, as well as displaying challenging, disruptive or disturbing behaviour. These behaviours may have reflected underlying mental health difficulties such as anxiety or depression, self-harming, substance misuse, eating disorders or physical symptoms that are medically unexplained. Other children and young people may have had needs related to attention deficit, hyperactivity, or attachment (and/or trauma). The experiences and needs of children and young people should always be understood in the context of environmental factors within the home, community and school/setting. Children experiencing primary SEMH SEND need may have been impacted by other needs such as in the areas of communication and interaction and/or cognition and learning;
- d) The Children and Families Act (2014) placed a duty on local authorities to ensure integration of education, health and social care to promote wellbeing and improve quality of provision for disabled young people and those with SEND;
- e) The following plans supported EHVB in Plymouth for all pupils, as well as those with additional needs, are highlighted for reference:
- A Bright Future 2021-2026
 - NHS Long Term Plan – focus on emotional mental health
 - SEND Strategy
 - Area SEND Inspection Priority Action Plan (in development)
 - Inclusion Strategy task and finish group facilitated by the place-based plan
 - Special Educational Needs graduated approach to Inclusion and iThrive frameworks.
- f) The Emotional Health and Wellbeing Steering Group met quarterly and was chaired by a Plymouth city council Public Health Officer. Representatives attended from Education, Health and Independent Sector providers. The group provided a forum to support optimisation of the system through local

organisations and agencies coming together. Updates and information sharing provided opportunity for partnership, collaboration and improved system effectiveness. The work supported the system to share and co-own the vision and ambition of a Bright Future;

- g) The Trauma Informed Plymouth Network was an independent network where the ambition for Plymouth was to be a trauma informed city. It had an education branch providing a reflective learning space for mainstream, specialist and higher education staff to embed trauma informed practices throughout the education system;
- h) EHWPB was linked to mental health. The Plymouth Mental Health Select Committee held in March 2023 provided a summary of the national context regarding children and young people's mental health. The following information was presented:
- 50% of mental illness (excluding dementia) is diagnosed by 14 years, 75% is diagnosed by 24 years
 - Rates of probable mental disorder continued to be significantly higher among 7-16 year olds
- i) In Plymouth, Public Health undertook a biennial school survey. Each school had its own data and the Council aggregated data that provided intelligence at a population level. Plymouth expected to have a report covering emotional health and wellbeing from the most recent survey in 2022 completed in October. The report would reflect some of the findings linked to sub-populations e.g. SEND; Young Carers; Service Families etc. Overall trends were usually in line with national surveys;
- j) In Plymouth the Council continued to see a steep rise in the requests for Education, Health and Care Needs assessments (EHCNA). In the academic year 22/23 to 31 July 2023, 793 requests for an EHCNA were received. This compared to 583 for the same period in 21/22 representing an increase of 36.02%, which was significantly above the regional (12%) and national (6.7%) increases. As 24.5% of current EHCPs had SEMH as their primary need, the rise in EHCNAs would see a rise in the actual number of children who had an EHCP to address SEMH needs;
- k) Data from the Virtual School showed that children in care were more vulnerable than others. Children who were in care to the Local Authority were more likely to have suffered early life trauma having a significant impact on their overall EHWPB. In Plymouth nearly 60% of children in care had identified SEN needs with 22% having an EHCP. This was nearly 8% higher than the national rate for children in care with EHCPs. Looked after pupils and those known to a social worker in Plymouth were between 2 and 3 times as likely as their non-social care linked peers to have SEN support, and up to 8 times more likely to have had an EHCP, and of these Social Emotional and Mental Health Needs were identified in over 80% EHCPs;
- l) Anecdotal evidence and data suggested that children with SEMH needs

were more likely to be subject to a reduced timetable, experience poor school attendance and be more likely to find themselves suspended or permanently excluded from school. Children missing out on education (CMOOE) was defined as a child or young person of statutory school age who did not or could not attend full-time school education in the usual way. Between 1st January 2023 and 10th February 2023 (term 3), severe absence (absence above 50%) data at a city level was reported at 2.4%. Comparative data for the previous year saw a severe absence rate of 2.13%. Social Emotional and Mental Health Needs were cited by the majority of schools as the primary driver for severe absence;

- m) Plymouth city council collected data on part time timetables from schools and sought assurances regarding their implementation within an agreed framework. During 2022-23 of 335 part time timetables, 115 pupils (34.3%) had an EHCP, which represented 4.11% of the total EHCP cohort, and in addition, 126 pupils (37.6%) received SEN support. The remainder 94 pupils (28.1%) had no identified SEND need;
- n) Feedback from school leaders indicated that transition points could be particularly challenging for children, with some children struggling to cope with the greater demands of a formal classroom; or, in the case of older children, as a result of a lack of provision that offered more bespoke programmes of learning which met the interests and aspirations of some young people. Feedback also indicated that there was demand for specialist training aimed at developing the skills of school staff as well as forms of alternative provision in order to meet need at an earlier point;
- o) The main reasons for implementing a part time timetable in mainstream primary school in Plymouth across 2022-23 were SEND and behaviour, accounting for 78.3% of all part time timetables. Although the SEND area of need was not defined, local intelligence suggests that SEMH was likely to be the most prevalent need type within these cohorts. Within the secondary phase the reasons for implementing a part time timetable in 2022-23 related to reintegration 36.5%, medical needs (which could include mental health) 24.5%, behaviour 23%, and SEND 15.9%. School leaders reported increased levels of emotionally based school non-attendance and challenging behaviour post-pandemic which had been coupled with a rise in suspensions and exclusions across the city. The data suggested that part time timetables may have been implemented as a mechanism to reduce the likelihood of suspension or permanent exclusion, or to support children with anxiety based barriers to school attendance and build towards full time attendance;
- p) The attendance rate across the city for children identified with SEND and an EHCP was 83.3%, and 92.8% for pupils receiving SEN Support (2022/2023 academic year). This was in comparison to 91.1% for all pupils for the same time period;
- q) A whole setting approach was fundamental, with leadership and management that supported and championed efforts to promote EHWPB. Key principles and guidance for good practice related to:

- Curriculum teaching and learning to promote resilience and support social and emotional learning
 - The voice of the pupils/student to influence decisions
 - Staff development to support their own wellbeing and that of pupils/students
 - Identifying and monitoring impact of interventions
 - Working with parents and carers
 - Targeted support and appropriate referral
 - An ethos and environment that promotes respect and values diversity.
- r) A range of training and provision across the city was in place to support whole setting approaches;
- s) Central themes and activities would be developed across Education, Health and Social Care partnership. Specific outcomes would be shaped and reported through the SEND Improvement and Inspection Priority Action Plan.

In response to questions raised it was reported that:

- t) It was recognised that the waiting lists for the CAMHS provision was long, but children/young people would have some input whilst on the waiting lists, where they were in crisis. Waiting lists were set out in the Local Area Inspection Plan and was being monitored by the Health service regularly;
- u) There was limited capacity at the ACE provisions which was being increasingly pressured by the number of exclusions in the city. Short term placements at ACE which would seek to provide intervention and therapy before the child returning back to mainstream education were limited;

The Committee agreed to:

Write to MAT's to see how they were working towards the Plymouth Plan in driving towards a consistency across all schools and other area's in regards to SEMH;

21. **Domestic Abuse and Children as Survivors**

Councillor Haydon (Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Libraries, Cemeteries and Crematoria) introduced the item to the Committee and made the following points:

a) Plymouth OFSTED report in December 2022 highlighted areas of improvement required around Plymouth's Domestic Abuse Practice, including improved triaging of domestic abuse cases, improved use of domestic abuse risk assessment tools and improved partnership working with Plymouth's local specialists;

b) Plymouth made significant efforts to improve the city wide response including coordinating a community response accreditation in July 23 and began working with Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse to be the first area in the UK to pilot the whole system approach, this would include reinstating the multi-agency assessment conference steering approach to address high risk domestic abuse in the city;

c) Launch of Plymouth's Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategy in 2023-2035 action plan and city wide training programme for the VAWG;

d) Domestic Abuse policy was refreshed and the Council had white ribbon accreditation;

e) Held first M.A.N Culture conference in September 23.

Matt Garrett (Service Director for Community Connections) added:

f) Re-procurement of the Domestic Abuse service was set to include an expanded offer for children with the understanding that children were victims of DA in their own right;

g) Training provided for internal social workers around PSCP Safeguarding and DA as well as Risk Assessment training and additional training from technical lead around DA and what it meant;

h) Specialist Services for children from Barnardos had been changed to help victims and survivors make more sense of the relationships they were in;

i) Planned work included: workforce development to increase social worker confidence, strengthen the Whole Family Approach, shadowing opportunities with Plymouth Domestic Abuse service, continuing to improve information sharing, implemented the Whole School's Approach in Autumn 2023 and co-ordinated Community Response Accreditation and MARAC review;

j) Safer Together Model would support Plymouth in responding to Ofsted concerns by working in a holistic way to protect children and keep them in the home and working around increasing the amount of support to people who harm to prevent them harming in the future.

In response to the questions raised it was reported that:

k) The work in the city wasn't doing what it should and the procurement of the new contract and the conversations happening at Plymouth's Domestic Abuse Sexual Violence sub group from Safer Plymouth is all about increasing the amount of support to children, how children were viewed as part of being victims of DA and

looking at specialist therapeutic support to try and improve the offer to young people across the city;

l) Held an event with providers in the city for the contract for Domestic Abuse Service;

m) The join up with Community Safety impacted positively in relation to Children's Services working within Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), the two things that helped were staff undertaking training with the tools and embedded this within the service and worked with other staff to model the approach to triage; and the second is we have a professional IDVA in the MASH for part of the week and that helped with capacity;

n) Process where schools had been informed through the work that came through the MASH, they would be informed and made aware and they would support the young person with regards to the awareness they had got and if the threshold had been met for an assessment or work within Early Help or our Statutory social care teams then that would progress and schools would be involved;

p) Had improved transition arrangements of vulnerable children's information which included using a portal to upload information securely;

q) Work around children utilising the resources available would be delivered through the social education lessons (PSHE);

r) Whole system approach would be provided to children outside of the school environment linking into emerging family hubs, ensuring everybody who worked around the child would have the skills and confidence to support them, promised for end of September with a timeline of possibly end of April;

s) Sixteen Days of Activism had been agreed to be championed by everyone;

t) Sixteen Days programme would start on 25 November 2023 with a peaceful walk through the city;

u) VAWG communication campaign would be put on billboards and invisible places around the city within 6-8 weeks.

22. **Children's Services Finance Report**

The report was taken as read and the Committee moved to questions where it was reported that:

The service had some capacity to deliver independent travel training for children/young people that were using school transport delivered by the Council. This was part of the plans to reduce spend in the budget but would also create a great opportunity for children/young people in the city to gain some independence;

The Committee agreed to note the report.

23. **QI 2023/24 Performance Report**

The report was taken as read and the Committee agreed to note the report.

24. **Plymouth Children's Services Improvement Plan**

Councillor Laing (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Culture, Events and Communications) and David Haley (Director for Children's Services) presented the report to the Committee and highlighted the following key points:

- a) The Council had initiated a recruitment and retention plan and would see staff in area's of the children social work service receive retention payments to ensure a stable workforce that would help drive improvement work. The Council would also cover the cost of social work registrations;
- b) Dorset County Council, Plymouth's sector led improvement partner had undertaken a deep dive of the Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) which highlighted urgent work required to ensure no drift or delay for children was occurring at the service's front door. The service had worked hard to remedy the actions required and all children were having an outcome within the 24 hour timescale;
- c) There was additional management capacity in place and work was underway to improve the partner threshold guidance;
- d) Some areas of the service were experiencing high workloads which was a knock on effect from what was discovered in the MASH;
- e) There would be increased capacity within the Initial Response Teams and Children's Social Work service as the bulge in work moved through the department;
- f) The consultation for the Targeted Operating Model (TOM) had ended and a phased plan for introduction of locality model would be implemented;
- g) The Improvement Plan was being refreshed and would have a clearer focus for the service over the next 3-6 months and progress would be available at the next scrutiny meeting.

In response to questions raised it was reported that:

- a) The service was committed and determined to bring about changes that were required. Engagement and ownership had been key in the first few weeks to bring about change for the service. The Social Work Academy was exploring models to help social workers with their emotional health and wellbeing into the future;
- b) The service would be increasing capacity in areas of the service to reduce pressures on workloads for the staff and the international recruitment of

social workers had been going well;

- c) Health checks for cared for children were improving and it was noted that the health team nurses were well embedded in the service. Dentistry was an issue not just for Plymouth but nationally, but work was on-going in the city to address the issues.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

25. **Unregistered Arrangements Update**

Councillor Laing (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Culture, Events and Communications) and David Haley (Interim Director of Children's Services) presented the report to the Committee and highlighted the following key points:

There was a shortage of placements for children/young people across the country and the market was competitive and expensive;

- a) Members of the committee were urged to read the report from the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) which stated that 83% of residential placements in the country were delivered by the private market. It was noted that Plymouth City Council did not have any of its own residential provision in the city;
- b) There more children in independent fostering provision rather than in house fostering provision and it was a priority to grow the provision;
- c) There needed to be a national conversation around what was required to effect change within the market;
- d) There were five children in unregulated placements for the Council which was a reduction from seven in August 2023. This area was a priority action for the Council and the target was to have no children in unregulated provision;
- e) Two children/young people were awaiting met the requirements for a secure placement but there were 40 children nationally awaiting this type of placement;
- f) From the end of the financial year, all post 16 provision would be required to be regulated and work was on-going from the Commissioning team to understand how Plymouth's providers were going to manage the transition;
- g) Plymouth was producing a quality list of providers that could deliver unregulated arrangements should they be required;
- h) Plymouth worked well with its providers in the city and one of them would be opening a two bed crisis home which would alleviate issues of unregulated provisions.

In response to questions raised it was reported that:

- i) Foster carers were in the older cohort and nationally work was required to remedy a more broad fostering culture.