

Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday 7 November 2023

PRESENT:

Councillor Reilly, in the Chair.

Councillor Carlyle, Vice Chair.

Councillors Stephens, Dingle, Holloway, Penrose, Tippetts, Dr Cree, Loveridge, Harrison, Mclay and Beer.

Also in attendance: Councillor Laing (Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Culture, Events and Communications), Councillor Cresswell (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Apprenticeships), Nigel Denning (Service Director for Children, Young People and Families), Annie Gammon (Service Director for Education Participation and Skills), David Haley (Director of Children's Services), Jake Metcalfe (Democratic Advisor) and Paul Stephens (Performance Advisor).

The meeting started at 2 pm and finished at 4.43 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.

26. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

27. **Minutes**

The minutes from the meeting that took place on 12 September 2023 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

28. **Chair's Urgent Business**

There were no items of Chair's Urgent Business.

29. **Tracking Decisions**

The Committee agreed to note the tracking decisions log.

30. **Council Tax Exemption for Plymouth City Council Foster Carers (To Follow)**

Councillor Laing (Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Culture, Events and Communications) supported by Nigel Denning (Interim Service Director for Children, Young People and Families) presented the report to the Committee.

a) Questions and discussion points from the Committee included:

- b) Council Tax exemptions for Plymouth City Council foster carers;
- c) On-going work to formulate a new recruitment and retention offer for Plymouth City Council foster carers;
- d) Aims to redress the imbalance of Independent Sector foster carers to Plymouth City Council foster carers which pressured the Council's budgets year on year;
- e) High cost specialist placements and impacts on budgets and with good recruitment, this could be addressed;
- f) Bringing more children back to the city from their Independent sector foster placements which were throughout the country;
- g) Life Centre Membership offers;
- h) The upcoming foster carer summit which would involve foster carers, councillors and cared for young people;
- i) New training packages for foster carers which would include therapeutic parenting;
- j) How the Local Authority engaged with people expressing an interest in becoming a foster carer;
- k) The Department for Education's virtual hub which would take over all marketing and advertising of recruitment of foster carers in the southwest in April 2024;
- l) Cost of living impacts on foster carers;
- m) Planning permission offers;

Action: Councillors from the Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be involved in the Foster Carer summit.

Action: Councillors to be distributed data as to how many foster carers from them having interest to then becoming a Plymouth City Council approved foster carer.

The Committee unanimously agreed to:

- I. Recommends to Cabinet that a Council Tax Exemption for foster carers was considered following the conclusion of the consultation on proposed new Support and Retention Offer to Our Foster Carers.

31. **Children's Improvement Plan and Highlight Report (To Follow)**

Councillor Laing (Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Culture, Events and Communications) supported by David Haley (Director of Children's Services) and

Nigel Denning (Interim Service Director for Children, Young People and Families) presented the report to the Committee.

Questions and discussions points from the Committee included:

- a) Strong political support and was a key priority of the Council to rectify;
- b) Partnership working at the Front Door of Children's Social Care and the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) to ensure appropriate contacts were made at the right time;
- c) Gaining consent from families;
- d) Stabilisation of the workforce and assurance the service had the right culture in place to bring about change for quality and appropriate levels of response;
- e) Staff posts had increased to ensure quality and consistency of work;
- f) Reduction in caseloads for better quality and timeliness of assessments and overall work;
- g) Recruitment of a managed team to ensure appropriate capacity in the Children's Social Work service;
- h) Permanent recruitment to key management posts continued;
- i) Threshold and consent training for practitioners across the city had been successful;
- j) Staff morale was increasing;
- k) Quality of live data capture had improved;
- l) Single assessment timeliness;
- m) Practice week within Children's Social Care;
- n) Involvement of partners across the city at the Plymouth Children's Improvement Board which included Department for Education representation and the Sector Led Improvement Partner, Dorset County Council;
- o) Agency staff within the workforce;
- p) High proportion of staff that were newly qualified social workers and social workers from overseas;
- q) Timeliness of Initial Child Protection Conferences;
- r) Improvement of management capacity within the MASH which was appropriately resourced for the level of contacts and referrals received;

- s) Increases in unplanned admissions into care;
- t) Leaders for Excellence program.

Action: Councillors to be invited to Practice week sessions with staff.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

32. **Child Exploitation Update** (To Follow)

Councillor Laing (Cabinet Member for Children’s Social Care, Culture, Events and Communications) supported by David Haley (Director of Children’s Services) and Nigel Denning (Interim Service Director for Children, Young People and Families) presented the report to the Committee.

Questions and discussions points from the Committee included:

- a) County Lines and its disruption to prevent Child Exploitation;
- b) Adolescent Safety Framework and required improvements;
- c) Child Sexual Exploitation in the city;
- d) Children and Young People’s use of vapes within schools and subsequent work with schools and Health partners;
- e) A spike in the number of missing episodes for children and young people;
- f) Airbnb and an issue around children/young people using those provisions for underage parties;
- g) Training packages available to practitioners across the city;
- h) SHARP and the services it provides to young people in the city;

Actions:

1. The Committee to hear what outcomes were implemented following the completion of the Children’s Society Missing Children response assessment tool.
2. David Haley to discuss with John Clements the cost of training and to ascertain whether there was an issue in organisations not undertaking training due to associated costs.
3. The Plymouth Safeguarding Partnership would have an agenda item on online exploitation and how the partnership was providing the right materials and messaging to parents in the city.
4. All Councillors would be provided with advice and guidance if they were

being asked where to turn to for support in relation to substance misuse.

5. Further investigations would take place as to whether exploitation within Airbnb accommodations was a significant issue for the city which would inform Plymouth's response if necessary.

Recommendation: Faith Groups and Voluntary Sector organisations to be part of the Plymouth Safeguarding Partnership Board.

Recommendation: Child Exploitation would become a yearly report at the Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Committee agreed to note the report.

33. **Q2 2023/24 Performance Report (To Follow)**

Paul Stephens (Performance Advisor) presented the report to the Committee.

Questions and discussions points from the Committee included:

- a) Data on categories of children and young people on Child Protections (CP) plans;
- b) Enhanced training for practitioners around sexual abuse which may have driven up numbers of children on CP plans under that category;
- c) Absence monitoring data and work to remedy absences across the City;
- d) The reduction in pupils in Key Stage 4 achieving five plus in English and Maths which was due to a return to exams following COVID;
- e) Children and young people in disadvantaged had struggled more with the reintroduction of exams;
- f) Increase in the number of young people seeking education, employment and training (SEET);
- g) Costs of transport to education provisions;
- h) The SEET strategy and the requirement to drive it out to the city to partners and organisations;
- i) Plymouth City Council had been seeking to increase its offer of work experience placements within the organisation, particularly for young people that were care experienced;
- j) Concerns around whether education provisions in the City would be able to resource the teaching of mathematics for young people up to the age of 18.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

34. **Children's Services Finance Report (To Follow)**

Councillor Laing (Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Culture, Events and Communications) supported by Councillor Cresswell (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Apprenticeships), David Haley (Director of Children's services), Nigel Denning (Interim Service Director for Children, Young People and Families) and Annie Gammon (Interim Service Director for Education, Participation and Skills) presented the report to the Committee.

Questions and discussions points from the Committee included:

- a) Adverse variances to the budgets of Children's Social Care and Education, Participation and Skills departments, particularly in relation to placements costs and home to school transport;
- b) A further post had been created within Commissioning who would drive down placements costs;
- c) The requirement for national government to provide a solution to the year on year concerns of increasing placement costs with the reduction or stagnant budgets;
- d) Home to school transport costs had seen increases in costs linked to fuel and employments costs which was partly due to increasing numbers of children being placed outside of the Plymouth boundary;
- e) Travel training for young people was starting to take place which would provide a vital independence skill, but would also drive down costs.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

35. **Local Area Partnership SEND Improvement Plan (To Follow)**

Councillor Cresswell (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Apprenticeships) supported by Annie Gammon (Interim Service Director for Education, Participation and Skills) presented the report to the Committee.

Questions and discussions points from the Committee included:

- a) Work had been underway to ensure children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities received better care and support in Plymouth;
- b) Concerns identified experiences and outcomes for children and young people requiring rapid improvements;

- c) The Council and partners including Health worked closely to develop and improvement plan;
- d) Improvement work would be overseen by a Board with various partners and had included the Department for Education;
- e) Placement sufficiency and Health waiting lists;
- f) Engagement of schools and colleges within the city;
- g) A SEND placement sufficiency strategy was being developed to address sufficiency issues within the city;
- h) The Parent Carer Forum and its importance in driving improvement;
- i) School budgets and their struggles;
- j) Professional development of practitioners across the city;
- k) The importance of monitoring exclusions and suspension figures.

Action: Members of the Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be invited to the planned virtual session with head teachers in the city.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

36. **Work Programme**

Members of the Committee added the following to the work programme:

- a) Plymouth Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report ;
- b) Child Exploitation Annual Report;
- c) Child death and suicide.