

# Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee

**Wednesday 29 May 2019**

## **PRESENT:**

Councillor Mrs Johnson, in the Chair.

Councillor Murphy, Vice Chair.

Councillors Allen, Sam Davey (substitute for Councillor Buchan), Downie, Goslin, James and McDonald.

Co-opted Representatives: Mrs Nicky Williams (Parent Governor Representative).

Apologies for absence: Councillors Buchan and Loveridge.

Also in attendance: Neelam Bhardwaja (Service Director for Children, Young People and Families), Judith Harwood (Service Director for Education, Participation and Skills), Jo Siney (Head of Special Educational Needs and Disability, Education, Participation and Skills) and Helen Rickman (Democratic Advisor).

The meeting started at 2.00 pm and finished at 4.05 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.*

## 1. **To Note the Appointment of the Chair and Vice Chair**

The Committee noted the appointment of Councillor Mrs Johnson as Chair and Councillor Murphy as Vice Chair for the forthcoming municipal year 2019/ 2020.

## 2. **Declarations of Interest**

The following declarations of interest were made by Members in accordance with the code of conduct:

<b>Member</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Reason</b>	<b>Interest</b>
Mrs Nicky Williams	All items	She is a Parent Governor at High View Primary and sits on the Plymouth Teaching School Alliance.	Personal
Councillor Downie	All items	Employed by an academy school in Plymouth	Personal
Councillor Mrs Johnson	All items	She is a Governor at Compton Primary School.	Personal

3. **Minutes**

Members agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 13 March 2019 as an accurate record.

4. **Chair's Urgent Business**

Under this item the Chair thanked Councillor Mrs Beer for her work in chairing the Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Panel for the municipal year 2018/2019. Councillor Murphy as Vice Chair for the previous year was also thanked for her work and for returning to the committee as Vice Chair for 2019/2020.

5. **Terms of Reference**

Under this item the Chair highlighted to Members the creation of the new Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and drew attention to the specific terms of reference for the Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Members noted the terms of reference document.

6. **Co-opted Representative Update (verbal)**

The Chair, Councillor Mrs Johnson, advised Members that the Panel had been approached in the previous municipal year by an individual wanting to be co-opted onto the panel. The Chair advised that the following questions were posed with the expectation that responses would be discussed by Members at the meeting:

1. Reasons why you are interested in the role;
2. A brief description of your background;
3. What skills and experience you could bring to the panel;
4. What you hope to get out of the position, is successful;

The Chair advised Members that in response to the questions it was highlighted that the individual worked with the Plymouth Parent Carer Voice, had worked with supporting families over 10 years and had a variety of experience in this role, worked for PIAS for 5 years and aimed to bring a voice for parents, carers, young carers and those with SEND to the scrutiny panel.

Members discussed the following:

- how the Council's website was used/ could be used to encourage co-opted representatives and attract a broad range of people;
- how the individual contacted the Council to seek co-option;
- the process by which Mrs Nicky Williams was co-opted onto the panel, via the governors network;

- that the panel's terms of reference referred to two statutory parent governor representatives whereby the panel still had one current vacancy and two diocesan representatives whereby the panel had two current vacancies;
- the difficulties the panel may encounter in recruiting a further parent governor representative due to the requirement in statute of the representative to come from a local authority maintained school; it was questioned if this was still relevant due to the diverse education system;
- the benefits of having a report submitted to the next scheduled scrutiny meeting detailing the requirement for statutory co-opted representatives onto the Education scrutiny panel, the broad landscape of Plymouth's schools and the implications of co-opting an individual onto the panel who, via her employment, was commissioned by the Council;
- the suggestion that the individual is invited along to the next scrutiny meeting in order to allow them to get a sense of the working of the committee and how to contribute.

Agreed that a report would be submitted to a future Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Panel detailing the statutory responsibilities (where relevant) and clarifying the position regarding co-opted representatives on the panel.

## 7. **Overview of Children's Directorate - Presentation**

Neelam Bhardwaja (Service Director for Children, Young People and Families), Judith Harwood (Service Director for Education, Participation and Skills) and Jo Siney (Head of Special Educational Needs and Disability) provided an overview of the children's directorate – a copy of the presentation was attached to the main agenda pack.

Neelam highlighted the following key points to Members:

- (a) the Children's Directorate (formally the People Directorate) was created in April 2018 to reflect the wider scope of the Torbay Children's Services contract and the integration of services;
- (b) both Education and social care, as part of the Children's Directorate, had been changing since 2014. Progress included: creation of alternative delivery vehicles (CATERed, On Course South West); new partnership working with Torbay; roll out of mobile devices to enable more flexible working; a comprehensive accommodation review was being undertaken to establish how staff could be brought together over fewer buildings; further integration of the Early Help Offer and Targeted Support;
- (c) the Children's Safeguarding Board devised a threshold document to clearly set out what the 'need' of an individual contacting the Council was, and to help point people in the right direction as to what support, and by whom, they could access;

- (d) best practice standards focused around the importance of making sure the child was central to everything undertaken by the Directorate; Officers aimed to provide a timely service in a targeted way and to work efficiently with partners in order to provide early help at a very early stage other than escalating things to acute and multi-agency level;
- (e) what children and young people expect from the Children's Directorate: for officers to practice good communication, to work together with agencies and for the children themselves to not have to repeat their story to several individuals. In response the Council aimed to make a real difference to the lives of the young people, to not take too long in making changes, to work effectively with other agencies and to keep children safe;
- (f) quality assurance systems were built in to the work of the Children's Directorate in order to highlight to officers how they were performing, what progress was made and if there were any gaps that needed to be addressed. Following the ILACS (Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services) Inspection in 2018, the OFSTED improvement plan had been finalised;
- (g) Business Plan Priorities for 2019/20 included: increased resilience for children, young people and families through the Early Help and Targeted Support framework; timely permanence plans for children in care; increased permanent foster care placements; increased resilience for care leavers;
- (h) the Early Help support was in the process of being restructured to ensure officers in this area would be working 7 days a week from 8am to 8pm instead of 5 days a week until 5pm;
- (i) partnership and innovation highlights included: Plymouth was chosen to take part in the NSPCC Together for Childhood (to prevent child sexual exploitation); Plymouth was 1 of 3 local authorities nationally involved in a project with Barnardos (looking into care journeys and outcomes for care leavers); the PAUSE Project started in Plymouth in April 2019 (work with women that have had 2 or more children removed from their care); Academy of Social work established in 2018;
- (j) headline achievements for 2018/19 included: successful transition to the Regional Adoption Agency; Plymouth Best Practice Standards embedded; a reduction in percentage of children subject to multiple child protection plans; increase in percentage of the proportion of care leavers in education, employment or training;
- (k) challenges for children's social care included: managing demand; foster carer recruitment; cost of wrap around support packages; cost of residential placements; recruitment of experienced social workers.

Judith highlighted the following key points to Members:

- (l) the City Council's Education Purpose in relation to Education, Participation and Skills is to facilitate partnerships so that all children, young people and

their families in Plymouth have the best access and opportunities; this is achieved by being a champion for children, through commissioning and convening collaborative relationships;

- (m) the 7 key functions of the department included school improvement, health & wellbeing, transport, admissions & organisation, safeguarding & inclusion, skills and special educational needs and disability;
- (n) the role of the local authority included: provide influence as a systems leader; challenge schools and other providers to improve; use powers of intervention for maintained schools; lead SEND; manage school admissions; work in partnership to support schools that are below floor standards;
- (o) the Local Authority has a range of functions it had to perform; a vast majority of these functions were statutory;
- (p) priorities for 2019/20 included: the department lead on the Children & Young People's Plan (2017-20) – Raising Aspirations; to complete the work recognised by Ofsted – transforming the SEND offer; to deliver an integrated education, health and care offer; deliver the STEM plan; deliver the Skills Plan;
- (q) funding: £9.6m received from Plymouth City Council's revenue budget (The Government cut the Education Services Grant a few years ago); other funding received from the Dedicated Schools Grant;
- (r) Plymouth's schools had benefitted from the National Funding Formula however the cap on gains meant that the LA would have to wait until 2020 to receive the additional £10.6m funding;
- (s) Plymouth High Needs Block received an additional £0.232m in 2019/20, an additional allocation of £0.550m was received however the High Needs Block still remained under pressure;
- (t) successes for the department included: progress of pupils from ages 5–11 largely in line with the national average; productive partnerships; high performance in school admissions and SEND; positive Ofsted judgements in Early Years settings; widely acknowledged work in the virtual school;
- (u) challenges included: readiness for school; KS4 performance, falling school attendance and school governance;
- (v) the aim of the Plymouth Challenge was to bring coherence to the education system in Plymouth and develop leadership and raise standards and aspirations.

In response to questions raised it was reported that –

- the two safeguarding boards, in Plymouth and Torbay, shared one Director of Children's Services. Dialogue between the boards was managed by the Service

Director at both respective local authorities;

- safeguarding assurances were undertaken by Ofsted in 2016; the assurances were still fit for purpose however were currently under review;
- it was considered that there was sufficiency in numbers of staff but not necessarily experience in the social care section of the directorate. There was far more demand on the social work system than in previous years which was adding to the pressure and higher caseloads – this was continually reviewed. The newly qualified social workers, whilst very good, were unable to undertake complex work or court work until greater experience was gained;
- it was estimated that an experienced social worker would be allocated 18 cases, depending on the nature of the work, however newly qualified social workers would normally have a limit of 14 cases;
- there was a wealth across the city in universal and targeted support of people who provide support for vulnerable children and their families; partnership working and a coordinated approach was integral to realising good outcomes;
- data regarding sickness was presented to the previous meeting – it was much lower than the Council's target for the directorate, and lower than the Council's average figures which was a credit to the workforce. Sickness levels would be slightly higher this year however there were specific reasons relating to a small number of individuals (non-stress related);
- the number of agency workers was estimated to be approximately 2 social workers and 3-4 team managers however specific details would be provided to Members. Neelam confirmed that she was an agency worker however there were efforts to permanently recruit to her Service Director post;
- the council had a very good commissioning service; a block contract was already starting to show greater suitability of placement in Plymouth; work was ongoing on a peninsula basis;
- the Ofsted improvement plan was presented at quarterly safeguarding meetings however would be presented to the Education and Children's Social Care OSP;
- the virtual school was a statutory requirement of local authorities and consisted in Plymouth of a small, high performing, qualified team whose role was to support the educational needs of children in care – the ambition was to ensure those children were placed in high quality provision within their locality; the virtual school was subject to Ofsted inspections;
- there was a lag between the work of the virtual school and the rise in care leavers becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training) – it was considered that one of the main challenges was care leavers not wanting to be associated with the council once they were no longer responsible for their care. Work was ongoing with earlier intervention to ensure that young people

were engaged, mentored and provided with relevant guidance at a younger age;

- a small number of children and their families were placed in bed and breakfast as a last resort; officers did everything possible to maintain the school placement;
- young carers was a hidden area of need – a lot of work was undertaken to raise awareness including: having a named young carers champion from the council; the young carers conference which was held last year and well attended by schools; the creation of a young carers lead network; the Time For You Alliance which was a specialist offer;
- the council was working with the police to identify if there was a correlation between children missing education and rates of antisocial behaviour and crime; officers highlighted the impact of reduced school timetables on children missing education and the safeguarding issues involved.

Agreed that –

1. the Overview of the Children’s Directorate was noted;
2. the number and role of agency workers was requested to be provided to Members of the Committee.

## 8. **Draft Work Programme**

Members discussed the draft work programme as set out in the agenda and agreed the allocation of dates to items as follows:

10 July 2019 meeting:

- Elective Home Education (to include rise and reasons. What are the drivers?)
- Bullying and Attendance/code of conduct (to include consideration of cyber bullying)
- Early Help Offer and plans for development (to include Commissioning and CAMHS developments)
- Care Leavers and NEET – plan
- Post 18 Education (to present the government review findings and provide a perspective on HEI in the City)

11 September 2019

- Child Exploitation (to include a progress report on Together for Childhood)
- Plymouth Challenge update (a progress report)

13 November 2019

- Budget Monitoring (to include areas of pressure)
- Young Carers
- STEM refresh of plan (to provide a retrospective and looking forwards approach with the STEM plan.

8 January 2020

- Report on PAUSE project

Transition to Adulthood – not yet allocated a date.

Under this item it was also agreed that the data book for children's' and pupils' education performance for 2018 would be provided to Members.

9. **Tracking Resolutions**

Members noted the tracking resolutions document.