

Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday 6 January 2021

PRESENT:

Councillor Mrs Beer, in the Chair.

Councillor Murphy, Vice Chair.

Councillors Allen, Corvid, Goslin, James, Loveridge, McDonald and Morris.

Also in attendance: Caroline Marr (Senior Policy Advisor), Councillor Jon Taylor (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Transformation), Ming Zhang (Service Director for Education, Participation and Skills), Tina Brinkworth (STEM Consultant), Councillor Laing (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People), Dave Ryland (Community Connections Strategic Manager), Siobhan Wallace (Head of Service for Children, Young People and Families) and Helen Rickman (Democratic Advisor).

The meeting started at 1.30 pm and finished at 3.40 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.

19. **Declarations of Interest**

The following declaration of interest was made in accordance with the code of conduct.

Name	Item	Reason	Interest
Councillor Allen	All items	A family member is a resident at Greenfields Recovery Centre.	Personal

20. **Minutes**

Members agreed the minutes of 2 December 2020 as an accurate record of the meeting.

21. **Chair's Urgent Business**

There were no items of Chair's Urgent Business.

22. **Policy Brief**

Caroline Marr (Senior Policy Advisor) presented the Policy Update to Members and highlighted that since the publication of the agenda further announcements had been

made by Government regarding guidance on the status of vulnerable and critical children, specifically with regards to education during the pandemic.

It was queried by a Member if IT equipment was being distributed in a timely manner to children and young people that needed it. It was responded that Officers were working closely with schools to review the position with technology access, however the Government had updated the Covid 19 guidance so that a child without access to IT equipment would be classed as vulnerable and therefore would be eligible to attend school during lockdown.

Members noted the update.

23. **Skills for Plymouth**

Councillor Jon Taylor (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Transformation), Ming Zhang (Service Director for Education, Participation and Skills) and Tina Brinkworth (STEM Consultant) presented the Skills for Plymouth update.

Key points highlighted to Members included:

- post Covid-19, Plymouth was potentially facing high numbers of unemployment along with over 4,000 potential school leavers and 10,000 further and higher education leavers trying to enter the jobs market; the vision for Skills 4 Plymouth was to close the skills gap by creating a skilled supply of people to match demand;
- officers were working direct with employers in growth sectors and growth businesses to identify their skills demands required today and in the future and refocus the skills delivery that was required; this was transformational programme which focused upon sector demand led intelligence with the help of training providers to match provision and encourage young people to get through education and into real jobs in the city.

Key areas of questioning from Members included the following:

- how many young people were currently engaged in the Kickstart Programme and would lockdown and the focus upon remote home working hinder work placements and cause delays?
- how sector based work academies operated and the length of the Kickstart Programme.

It was agreed that Skills 4 Plymouth would remain on the panel's work programme and a report detailing the progress of the Kickstart Programme and work academies would be provided to Members at a meeting in 6 months' time.

24. Youth Provision Across the City

Councillor Laing (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People), Dave Ryland (Community Connections Strategic Manager) and Siobhan Wallace (Head of Service for Children, Young People and Families) presented the Youth Provision across the City update to Members. It was highlighted that the aim of youth work was to support young people to achieve positive outcomes and to improve life chances with a particular focus on participation and advocacy; there was a wide and diverse youth work offer across Plymouth, including the work of community groups and partnership arrangements.

Members were shown a presentation, narrated by a young carer, regarding the how the Community Youth Work Team adapted to the restriction of Covid 19 and the impact that this had on young people.

Key areas of questioning from Members related to the following:

- if there were considered to be enough youth workers throughout the city and if they had the appropriate skills and training to allow them to support young people, specifically with regards to emotional and mental health issues?
- if the youth support team provided support for young people and families to travel across the city to, specifically due to families being on reduced income due to the pandemic and furlough?
- the impact that lockdown was having on young peoples' mental health;
- if funding of youth workers was provided by PCC?
- were there any skills or work-streams that couldn't be provided currently by the youth support team, and what need was most increased by lockdown?
- what support mechanisms were in place to support staff that had to deal with the many forms of exploitation of young people?
- were youth workers going to be prioritised for the covid 19 vaccine given their work was so vital in stopping mental health issues escalating?
- What support was provided to young people who didn't have access to the internet? It was considered that young people not considered vulnerable may not receive the support required.

The Chair thanked officers for their update and wished to pass on congratulations from herself and the Panel to the young carer who narrated the presentation.

It was agreed that –

- I. Child exploitation would be scrutinised at the March 2021 scrutiny

meeting;

2. an evaluation update on the young women's project would be included on the panel's work programme;
3. the Youth Justice Plan would be added to the panel's work programme for late spring;
4. an update on laptop provision and connectivity issues faced by young people in the city would be included in the Covid Update (standing item) at the next meeting.

25. **Youth Service Presentation**

This item was presented and discussed in minute 24 above.

26. **Finance Update**

David Northey (Head of Integrated Finance), Alison Botham (Director of Children's Services) and Jean Kelly (Service Director for Children, Young People and Families) presented the Finance Update to Members. It was highlighted that the financial position included in the report was up to the end of September 2020 and that the children's department was showing an overspend of £4.9m however this was before grants were applied as £3.8m was linked to the impact of Covid 19. Members were advised that additional children were coming into the care of the local authority, specifically adolescents who were more costly as they were less likely to go into foster care and instead go to more costly placements. Officers were working hard to increase in house provision whilst also supporting children to go back home to their families when safe to do so; placement costs were monitored on a regular basis however the needs of the child were a priority.

Members questioned if it was likely that the children's department would have a balanced budget, what grants had been received by the Council and how much they totalled, and if further information could be provided in order for Members to adequately scrutinise financial pressures in this department.

Officers were cautiously confident that a balanced budget would be achieved and agreed that greater detail would be provided at future financial updates.

Members noted the update.

27. **Covid Update - Verbal Update**

Councillor Laing (Cabinet for Children and Young People) and Jean Kelly (Service Director for Children, Young People and Families) presented the Covid update to Members.

The following key points were highlighted to Members:

- that there were currently 490 children in care, which was 58 more children

and young people in the care of the local authority than at the beginning of lockdown however this was following the trend plotted by Officers;

- individual risk assessments of every child were being undertaken in order to RAG rate priorities; virtual methods were being used for children who could not be seen face to face;
- in total 6 members of staff in the children's department had tested positive for Covid 19; Midland House was kept open throughout the pandemic as a children and young people hub and was a base for members of staff to work from;
- the only service that slightly shifted direct contact was those subject to care proceedings and their parents; the contact centre was fully risk assessed however virtual contact was also adopted;
- officers were waiting for information regarding vaccinations and clinically vulnerable members of staff had been identified; staff wellbeing and morale was of great importance.

It was requested by a Member that performance monitoring reports detailing priorities and trends was provided as part of the Covid update in the future to allow greater scrutiny.

It was agreed that Members would be provided with a briefing indicating key areas of performance in the children's department, specifically areas doing well and those which were a challenge

The Chair echoed Councillor Laing's thanks to foster carers, guardians and connected carers who were continuing to look after the city's children, as well as thanking teachers and acknowledging the work of officers within the entire department who continued to provide a high quality service throughout the pandemic.

28. **Work Programme**

The panel noted the work programme.

29. **Tracking Decisions**

Members noted the tracking decisions document.

Under this item it was agreed that an update on the PAUSE project would be added to the panel's work programme for March 2021.