

Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday 3 March 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 Laing (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People), Jean Kelly (Service Director for Children, Young People and Families), Alison Botham (Director for Children's Services), Tina Brinkworth (Head of Skills and Post 16 Education), Councillor Jon Taylor (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Transformation), Ming Zhang (Service Director for Education, Participation and Skills) and Helen Rickman (Democratic Advisor).

The meeting started at 1.30 pm and finished at 4.00 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.

30. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made by Members in accordance with the code of conduct.

31. Minutes

Agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 6 January 2021.

32. Chair's Urgent Business

There were no items of Chair's Urgent Business, however the Chair wished Councillor Laing a happy 50th birthday.

33. Policy Brief

Caroline Marr (Senior Policy Advisor) presented the Policy Brief to Members and spoke to a presentation which provided further information since the publication of the report in the agenda. It was highlighted that:

- on 22 February 2021 the Government set out a roadmap for reducing Covid 19 restrictions and announced the return of face to face teaching on 8 March 2021;

- schools were able to hold outdoor sports activities;
- pupils in secondary schools were recommended to wear facemasks;
- examinations would not be taking place and scores would be based on teacher assessment grades;
- the requirement of children needing to be tested prior to returning to school was still being discussed however households with children of school age were eligible for free rapid covid tests;
- there was a £700m package to get children back to school and caught up on lost learning.

Key areas of questioning by Members included:

- how teachers were expected to enforce children wearing masks in schools;
- how the local authority could support head teachers and principals;
- were academies, university trust schools and grammar schools included?
- would parents be fined for not sending their child back to school if they were concerned for their safety due to Covid 19?
- would the council encourage schools to have a lenient approach to their uniform policies as a result of hardship caused to family finances during the pandemic?

Members noted the update.

34. **Covid Update - verbal update**

Councillor Laing (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People), Jean Kelly (Service Director for Children, Young People and Families) and Alison Botham (Director for Children's Services) presented the Covid Update.

The following key points were highlighted to Members:

- the children's department had continued to support children, young people and families through the third lockdown; the majority of frontline practitioners had had their vaccine in line with Government protocols and safe systems of work remained in place;
- there had recently been the addition of lateral flow testing; this continued to improve our protection from covid;
- vulnerable children and young people and those with a social worker were encouraged to attend education in a school setting during lockdown;
- during the course of the whole pandemic, children in care numbers has

risen month on month; there were 488 children in the care of the local authority at the end of January – this was a net rise of 57 from the beginning of lockdown;

- less children were leaving the care of the local authority during the pandemic as some problems were encountered with care and adoption proceedings due to the pressure on courts;
- in terms of fostering, officers had recruited to 22 new placements, 11 households has been approved since April with two more to be approved shortly; 10 assessments were progressing and there were 16 active enquiries. Marketing was being focused towards adolescents.

Key areas of questioning from Members related to the following:

- was enough focus aimed towards prevention and intervention of children coming into the care of the local authority?
- in terms of fostering, was Plymouth City Council comparable to the private sector to attract carers?
- could Councillors be involved in promoting fostering in Plymouth; specifically Councillors that had been fostered themselves, were fosterers, or lived with foster brothers or sisters?

It was agreed that foster care numbers and recruitment would be added to the work programme for the next municipal year.

Members noted the update.

35. **NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training)**

Tina Brinkworth (Head of Skills and Post 16 Education), Councillor Jon Taylor (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Transformation) and Ming Zhang (Service Director for Education, Participation and Skills) presented the NEET report.

Key points highlighted to Members included:

- in December 2020 there were 233 young people age 16 to 17 NEET, this represented 4.3% (higher than the SW 3% and national average 2.7%) in comparison with 4.1% in the previous year. There were a further 147 (2.7%) young people with unknown status, against 2.4% at the same point in 2019;
- SkillsLaunchpad Plymouth was developed to provide a one-stop open door facility for all young people, parents and carers with a range of offers to support young people and minimise the risk of them becoming NEET. The Launchpad pulled together city wide service providers and stakeholders engaged in supporting young people and those at risk of NEET and included; CSW Group Ltd, DWP/Job Centre Plus, National Careers

Service, the Plymouth Careers Hub, the Devon and Cornwall Training Provider Network as well as links to employers across the city; the Skills Launchpad had so far supported over 9,000 users.

Key areas of questioning from Members related to the following:

- what support was there for children in the care of the local authority who were NEET?
- were remote working opportunities further afield from Plymouth explored for placements? There were large companies outside of the immediate region which could offer placements remotely;
- it was important for remote working opportunities to be explored as well as physical placements as this would increase possibilities;
- how successful was the Kickstart programme?

It was agreed that –

1. an update report on NEETS would be included on the panel's work programme for the next municipal year;
2. a report on the Barnardos Care Journeys project would be included on the panel's work programme for the next municipal year.

36. **Child Exploitation (To Follow)**

Siobhan Wallace (Head of Service for Children Young People & Families) and Nick Cook (Assistant Director for Childrens Services – Barnardos) presented the Child Exploitation update.

Key points highlighted to Members included:

- the oversight of work with child exploitation in Plymouth currently sat with the Plymouth Local Safeguarding Children. Safer Plymouth also maintained oversight of a number of strands of this work, in particular reporting online abuse, as part of their role to address cyber-crime and fraud. This was progressed by the Strategic Missing and Child Exploitation subgroup of the Plymouth Safeguarding Children partnership, chaired by Barnardo's. Under this was an Operational Missing and Child Exploitation Group, which met fortnightly and considered emerging patterns and concerns regarding individual or groups of children, offenders and locations, and plans disruption activity;
- Barnardos ran a BASE project, offering support and recovery work to young people affected by child exploitation. This included young people engaged with statutory safeguarding services as well as children in need. Other services such as CAMHS, NSPCC and Firstlight also offered therapeutic support and intervention as part of their sexual abuse services;

- the Child Exploitation Tool was reviewed by Plymouth Safeguarding Partnership and relaunched. For young people referred to Children Young People and Families Service following the Joint Targeted Area Inspection the initiative was taken that all children over 11 years should be screened for child exploitation using the screening tool. Since 1st December, 183 child exploitation screening tools had been completed. Of these 183, 96 young people remained actively open to Children Young People and Families Services. 11 had been identified as high risk, 25 as medium risk, 42 as low risk and 18 as no risk. A piece of work was underway to review the children at high risk to ensure their plans and assessments reflected the level of risk and included appropriate interventions to safeguard and support them from child exploitation;
- throughout COVID the Strategic Missing and Child Exploitation Group sought assurance across the system that children and young people at risk of or experiencing child exploitation were supported. This included the Operational Missing and Child Exploitation Group increasing from bi-weekly to weekly sessions for a period of time during the initial lockdown.

Key areas of questioning from Members related to the following:

- what wraparound services were available for children and young people affected by exploitation?
- of the children and young people currently considered exploitation, how many were in the care of the local authority – were any of these children considered missing?
- how were children and young people kept safe online?
- had the action plan from the Strategic Missing and Child Exploitation Group been progressed?

It was agreed that The Strategic Missing and Child Exploitation Group action plan on child exploitation would be provided to Members.

Members noted the update.

37. **Corporate Plan Performance Report**

Hannah Daw (Performance Advisor) presented the Corporate Plan Performance Report. The following key points were highlighted to Members:

- improvements were seen across the areas relating to education and children's social care in the first half of 2020/21; all five of the key performance indicators that could be trend rated had shown improvements when compared to the previous comparable reporting period;

- the percentage of young people in education, employment or training increased to 90.0% in quarter one 2020/21, compared with 89.0% in quarter one 2019/20;
- there was a decrease in the percentage of children subject to multiple child protection plans; at 21.1% at the end of quarter two, this was better than target (23%) for the first time in more than a year and lower than the average percentage of our statistical neighbours (21.3%);
- repeat referrals to Children's Social Care (CSC) saw a decrease for the eighth quarter in a row, down to 23.3%, which was a significant improvement on both the end of 2018/19 and 2019/20 positions.

Key areas of questioning from Members related to the following:

- childrens mental and health and obesity was labelled red – this was a concern;
- confusion regarding the trend of children with multiple protection plans and repeat referrals;
- how did Plymouth rate in comparison to other local authorities of a similar cohort?

Members noted the update.

38. **Work Programme**

Members noted the work programme and discussed the inclusion of the following items for the next municipal year:

- CSE update;
- Foster Care numbers;
- Kickstart Programme – update;
- Schools Catch-up (due to Covid);
- School Transport;
- School Attainment;
- Youth Hub Update/ Skills for Plymouth Update;
- Covid specific update

Under this item it was requested that the agenda and reports would be easily accessible within the Microsoft Teams meeting to aid Members in accessing information.

39. **Tracking Decisions**

Members noted the tracking decisions document.

Under this item the Committee congratulated Councillor Mrs Beer on her chairing of the Panel this year and wished her luck for her office as Lord Mayor for 2021/22.