

Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday 8 September 2021

PRESENT:

Councillor Laing, in the Chair.

Councillor James, Vice Chair.

Councillors Allen, Bingley, Cresswell, Goslin, Partridge and Vincent.

Apologies for absence: Councillors Carlyle and Loveridge

Also in attendance: Jean Kelly and Jake Metcalfe (Democratic Advisor)

The meeting started at 1.30 pm and finished at 4.02 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.

53. **Declarations of Interest**

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

54. **Minutes**

Agreed that the minutes of the 7 July 2021 were confirmed.

55. **Chair's Urgent Business**

There were no items of Chair's urgent business.

56. **Education and Children's Social Care Policy Brief**

Caroline Marr, Senior Policy Advisor presented this item to the committee and highlighted the following policy briefs:

- On the 25 August there had been an announcement from government for £50 million in additional funding for T-Level students and this would be invested into schools and colleges delivering T-Levels across England from next year. This funding would support six million students over the next three years.
- The back to school campaign set out rules and expectations relating to COVID-19.
- On the 2 September the government announced an expansion for tutoring over the next three years supporting six million students. Guidance had been issued to schools in order for schools to offer their

own teacher led tuition.

Members discussed:

- Policy brief 14, Plymouth had been working with Cornwall and other local authorities in the region and a bid for this funding would be submitted by the 12th September 2021.
- Councillor Laing requested that for the next Policy brief in the Scrutiny scheduled for November that there would be an update on Family hubs, tutoring and T-Level funding.
- Policy brief 10 - Members were advised that the £1 million in funding would be spread across the country. Although the funding is small, it had been hoped that it would unlock cross working local authority partnerships so education packages would follow Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and young people as they moved areas.
- Policy brief 3 – Members were updated that the Council had been exploring what Plymouth could access and how that would affect Plymouth through the regional network.
- Policy brief 11 – Members were updated that the Regional Adoption Agency would access this fund and an update in relation to progress would be provided to members.
- Policy brief 6 – Plymouth did not know if children would be required to spend more time in school to catch up with the education missed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The multi academy trusts in Plymouth had much more autonomy in how they had planned to deliver this for Plymouth’s students.

The Committee noted the Policy Brief update.

57. **Corporate Plan Performance Report, Quarter One 2021/22**

Hannah Daw, Performance Advisor and Paul Stephens, Performance Advisor presented this item to the committee and highlighted the following key points:

- 16 – 18 year old’s in education, employment or training had received a RAG rating of Amber as it was just below the target of 92%.. Skills Launchpad had been working closely with this cohort. There had been 25, 16 – 17 year olds claiming benefits which had reduced from 35 during COVID.
- School readiness had no longer been reported on but data was still being collected on those children in foundation. A key area of improvement required had been in relation to their communication and language.
- Repeat referrals to Children’s Social Care reported an improving picture

with a decrease to 23.4%.

- Children in care (rate per 10,000) had decreased in the last quarter, however since the first lockdown Plymouth's children in care numbers had increased by 50.
- Children with a multiple Child Protection Plans showed an improving picture. The target had been 23% and the service showed a figure of 25.6%.

Members discussed:

- Members were updated that in relation to school readiness data and the implementation of the new framework, the Department for Education would not publish data until November 2022. In the meantime the service would establish an Early Years board before the end of the year to tackle the data deficit.
- Councillor Cresswell queried as to whether there would be any additional resources for SEND support or Speech and Language outreach? Ming Zhang, Service Director for Education, Participation and Skills advised that no additional funding had been sourced, but this would be taken back to the Schools forum to see if this could be enhanced.
- Jean Kelly provided an update to members for the increase in children coming into care during the COVID-19 pandemic. During the first phase of the lockdown two core groups came to the attention of the Children's service, which were very young children living in neglectful households due to alcohol and substance misuse issues. These additional referrals had come from Police colleagues who attended households from reports filed by neighbours working at home or being furloughed. The second group were older adolescents that were managing with support from the community and family support resources, however due to lockdown some of those resources ceased which escalated their home situations leading to an increase of those adolescents coming into the care of the local authority.
- Another factor leading to the increase had been due to a delay in family court hearings and the finalisation of those court proceedings. It had meant that children and young people were staying in the care of the local authority for longer whilst those decisions were.
- The Service had been increasing its preventative approach and had been looking at a specific child in need team to focus on supporting families.

The Committee noted the update on the Corporate Plan Performance Report, Quarter One 2021/22.

58. **Finance Monitoring**

David Northey, Head of Integrated Finance presented this item to the committee and highlighted the following key points:

- The Directorate had been keeping within the budget set and included an achievement in delivering £4 m saving for the year;
- The COVID impact on the budget was £7.914 m and this had been budgeted for.
- The full year cost of the new 2021/22 placements, already in the system for the quarter to date adds a further cost of £2.126m. Projecting this level of activity into residential placements based on the current trend added a further cost of £1.542m;
- To ease the pressure across the whole service of social worker caseloads, the directorate had recruited permanent social workers at an additional cost of £0.385m. This was identified and included in the budget. There was also £0.685m charged to the COVID Outbreak Management Fund to cover the cost of funding additional temporary Social Workers and Family Support Workers;
- Education, Participation and Skills were showing £0.022m lost income due to the Government's decision to cancel statutory assessments as a result of COVID-19.

Members discussed:

- £1.5 mil had been forecasted until the end of year for children coming into the care of the local authority, the current trend line was holding and was not under further pressure.
- Trend analysis had been taking place within the children's service for children that could require residential care as well as a general trend for children needing the care of the local authority. This had been holding steady and would be reviewed again in month six to ensure the trend is correct for the rest of the financial year.
- The number of children and young people coming in care had been stabilising and the service would look at whether it would reduce over time. The trend for children and young people requiring residential care continues to increase. The service had increased its preventative work to reduce the need for any statutory care.
- Members requested that a more thorough financial report with a detailed breakdown of how the budget is spent to be presented at the

next Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

- The vacancy rate for Social workers had been 1.7%, the issues facing Plymouth City Council had been retaining experienced social workers which is a national issue. Plymouth City Council had been reviewing its recruitment package to ensure it was competitive across the region. The Innovate team had been established and funded over a six month period of time to allow the service to respond to the 25% increase in demand for the service. An exit plan for the Innovate team had been scheduled for February 2022.
- Plymouth City Council had been looking into its recruitment package for experienced social workers.

The Committee noted the Finance Monitoring Report.

59. **Skills4Plymouth and Kickstart Scheme**

Tina Brinkworth Head of skills and Post 16, presented three initiatives, Skills4Plymouth, Skills Launchpad and the Kickstart scheme to members.

Members discussed the following:

- The target would be to have 1000 Kickstart placements for young people, There had been 2700 young people who would qualify for a placement. There had been delays in starting the programme due to the DWP not having sufficient timescales to initiate and the COVID-19 pandemic impacted companies being able to offer a Kickstart placement. It is hoped that that central government would extend the programme for a further six months. Since May 2021 the programme had been able to offer over 300 placements to young people. The committee would like to have some data within a report for the next meeting which would provide data on how many young people had moved onto full time employment following the scheme and how many businesses in Plymouth were involved.
- Skills Launchpad began last year during COVID-19 and much of the funding for the programme had been secured externally from the Department for Work and Pensions. This had been able to fund a youth hub co-ordinator post, an adult hub co-ordinator post for two years, a Kickstarter post for a receptionist and two community leads to work with young people in the community who were long term unemployed. There were 8-10 people within the Skills Launchpad team opening four times a week.
- The Department for Work and Pensions had not been given enough time to mobilise the programme and this had resulted in there being more places for young people than young people ready. Work had been on-going with the DWP to ensure young people were accessing pre-employment workshops to enable them to be ready for a placement. The

Leader of Plymouth City Council had written to the Prime Minister to request the programme be extended.

- The DWP would be the organisation that deems young people ready for employment through the programme and this had been sighted as the reason for the bottleneck in young people not advancing through to an apprenticeship.
- The Committee unanimously agreed to the recommendation to write a letter to government requesting the continuation of the Kickstart programme.

The Committee note the Skills4Plymouth and Kickstart Scheme Report.

60. **School's Catch Up**

Ming Zhang Service Director for Education, Participation and Skills presented this item to members.

- The distribution of CO2 monitors from the government would be rolled out to Special schools and alternative provisions in September 2021 and in October 2021 this would further be rolled out to mainstream schools;
- 80% of schools in Plymouth took up a funding offer from the Department for Education for summer schools which was targeted at Year 7 pupils;
- Plymouth had been selected as one of four local trailblazers for local improvement. £10 m from the Department for Education. The funding to be split between the four authorities but how amount Plymouth would receive not yet decided. The Department for Education would be taking the lead together with Plymouth City Council to steer this piece of work. An Education Strategy Board for Plymouth had been established and the Chair and Vice Chair of this Board to be decided. The Board would report to the Minister and Plymouth City Council.
- The Plymouth Education Board would be revising its Terms of Reference and had proposed a new work programme for the next academic year. The Board meets four times a year. It had been proposed that other Boards covering Post 16, Early Years, Special Educational Needs, Primary and Secondary schools would feed into the Plymouth Education Board. It had been requested that members receive a diagrammatic structure of the different boards and how they all feed into one another, with details of their remit;
- More resources would be put into English and Maths qualification attainments so that Plymouth students would be fully prepared when looking for university or college placements or alternatively within the workplace;

The Committee noted the School's Catch Up

61. **Covid 19 Legacy - Children, Young People and Families Service**

Jean Kelly introduced this item to members and referred to the submitted report.

Members discussed:

- There had been a small increase in the level of sickness for staff members across the Education and Children's Social Care Directorate and this had been closely monitored. Some staff had been on long term sickness due to issues relating to long COVID. Other members of staff had been on sick leave which had been stress related, this had always been an issue for the service due to the high pressure work environment. For those members of staff off from work due to stress this had been related to COVID and the increased pressures on the service during that time. Staff had been encouraged to take breaks, to access wellbeing services and to ensure that their workloads had been balanced to prevent an increase in stress related sickness.
- The Children's Social Care Service would not initially use agency staff to cover sickness and would only seek to do so if this became a chronic and longer term issue. Staff on sick leave would be monitored closely and would have regular catch up calls with their manager, be referred to Occupational Health with their permission and be supported to access internal wellbeing services.
- As part of the National Transfer scheme, Plymouth City Council agreed to take a percentage of its looked after population, to accept unaccompanied asylum seeking children into its Local Authority. Plymouth had spontaneous arrivals of unaccompanied asylum seekers through its port which impacted the number of children the Local Authority would accept as part of the National Transfer Scheme. The service would only offer to look after an Unaccompanied asylum seeking child if there had been a placement available.

The Committee noted the COVID Legacy Update.

62. **Fostering Sufficiency and Marketing**

Jane Anstis, Head of Service for Children, Young People and Families presented this item to members and highlighted the following key points:

- The target for new fostering placements for 2021 – 2022 was 36 placements;
- Plymouth City Council's fostering service was restructured last year with a focus on recruitment and assessment. Recognition was given to drive that part of the service as well as support and retention of current foster

carers;

- Plymouth's Children's Social Care had commissioned an external experienced, marketing provider for fostering to support and redevelop Plymouth's offer. This had been vital for Plymouth's looked after children to keep them local in their established communities and schools and to remain in their social networks. It was also vital to reduce the need for high cost placements;
- Plymouth City Council's fostering service exceeded its target of establishing 21 new placements last year but had suffered with higher than normal retirements of foster carers with an overall effect of nil increase on placements within the service.

Members discussed:

- The Chair, Councillor Laing on behalf of the committee thanked Plymouth's foster carers, special guardians and connected carers especially with the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic and the difficulties this had brought. It was highlighted to members to follow 'Foster for Plymouth' on social media and to share the content provided to get the information to Plymouth residents.
- For support of Plymouth foster carers a review had been undertaken to understand the support that had been offered to Connected Carers and to Special Guardians.

The Committee noted Fostering Sufficiency and Marketing Report.

63. **Work Programme**

The Committee discussed items for inclusion on the work programme. It was agreed to add the following items:

- Early Years Board
- Sufficiency strategy regarding placements
- Education improvements
- Plymouth Education Board and their work programme
- Children in care
- Fostering Sufficiency
- Changes to the Pupil Premium

Councillor Laing requested an appropriate mechanism or framework to be sought for inviting Multi Academy Trust CEO's to come to the Education and Children's Social Care Overview Scrutiny Committee.