

Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday 16 February 2022

PRESENT:

Councillor Laing, in the Chair.

Councillor James, Vice Chair.

Councillors Allen, Mrs Aspinall, Bingley, Cresswell, Goslin, Loveridge and Partridge.

Also in attendance: Councillor Vivien Pengelly (Cabinet Member for Homes and Communities), Alison Botham (Director of Children's Services), Jean Kelly (Service Director for Children, Young People and Families), Ming Zhang (Service Director for Education, Participation & Skills), Jane Anstis (Head of Service for Children, Young People and Families), Paul Stephens (Performance Advisor), Caroline Marr (Senior Policy Advisor) & Jake Metcalfe (Democratic Support Advisor).

The meeting started at 13:30 and finished at 16:18.

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.

76. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

77. **Minutes**

The minutes of 17 November 2021 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

78. **Chair's Urgent Business**

Councillor Laing presented a letter to the Committee that had been sent to Baroness Baron on the Trailblazers Education Pilot and the announcement of the Education Improvement Area's. Plymouth had been one of four, but this had increased to one in 55 Local Authority areas. Any response to the letter to Baroness Baron, would be included in any future Scrutiny.

79. **ECSC Policy Brief**

Caroline Marr, Senior Policy Advisor presented this item to the Committee and highlighted the following key points:

- a) A consultation had been launched with changes to the school admissions appeals code with a proposal to hold those appeals remotely either via telephone or video conference to make this easier for people to attend;

- b) Funding would be made available through the 'England for Everyone' fund and would support families that had been struggling financially, suffered bereavement or isolated and to give them a weekend break;

Members discussed:

- a) The need for Public Health to provide parents with information in September in relation to Measles vaccines in readiness for the new school term. This would be fed into the Health and Adult Social Care overview and Scrutiny Committee;
- b) Plymouth had been selected as one of the Education Investment Area's, the Committee would like to review this in the next municipal year;

Recommendation: For Scrutiny Management Board to investigate a mechanism for the relevant scrutiny to feed into Plymouth City Council's responses to consultations.

80. **General Update on Home to School Transport**

Councillor Mrs Pengelly, Cabinet Member for Homes and Communities introduced this item to the Committee. Ming Zhang provided the Committee with an update and highlighted the following key points:

- a) The service had been delivered by Plymouth City Council's Home to School Transport Team and provided a statutory service to the most vulnerable children in the city;
- b) The service had been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, the national driver shortage and the increase in operating costs which had equated to 10-20%. Costs had also increased due to the decrease in drivers operating for taxi companies;
- c) There had been a change in the statutory guidance in that the SEND cohort ages had increased to 25, this increase did not come with extra funding for the post-16 cohort;

Members discussed:

- a) Due to the increase in demand for the service and the decrease in supply, the school transport service had been running at capacity. The service had been looking at ways to increase efficiencies or combine routes covered in order to find savings where possible. Despite the challenges no vulnerable child in Plymouth had been left without;
- b) There had been a COVID grant of £400,000, however Ming Zhang advised the Committee that he had been confident that the service would still be able to operate within the budget set, although this would present challenges;

- c) The importance of maintaining a good home to school transport service for the benefit of the vulnerable children it had served. It was noted that Plymouth City Council had been exploring alternative ways to promote jobs in the taxi industry and had been targeting those that had been unemployed. Drivers had changed their roles to delivery roles due to an increase in wages;

Recommendation: Within future financial monitoring reports, additional reporting would be required for the Home to School Transport Service

The Committee noted the report.

81. **Child Exploitation Update and Child Evidence**

Councillor Mrs Pengelly, Cabinet Member for Homes and Communities introduced this item to the Committee. Jane Anstis, Head of Service for Children, Young People and Families service highlighted the following key points:

- a) The Adolescent Safety Framework had been used as the framework delivered by partners and agencies across the city to tackle Child Exploitation facing all children since the beginning of January 2022. The Adolescent Safety Hub has been based within the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub and had been receiving contextualised safeguarding concerns and where there had been significant risks for individual children, there would be a same day response and work with partners to make sense of the context of risk. The Adolescent Safety Hub would then feed into the Operational Multi-Agency Child Exploitation Group which had met once every two weeks to ensure there would be a co-ordinated response to particular areas of concern from key partners. The Operational Group would then feed into the Strategic Multi-Agency Child Exploitation group to ensure that there would be a co-ordinated response for the city;
- b) The Reducing Exploitation and Absence from Care and Home team (REACH) had been a team of Professional Youth Workers who worked with young people who had been reported missing and would undertake Return Home Interviews (RHI's) with the young person and direct work with those children/young people who may have been at risk;
- c) Between April 2021 and February 2022, there had been 657 missing episodes reported with those attributable to 388 young people, 276 of whom were young people open to the Children, Young People and Families service. 135 were Looked after Children, 21 on a Child Protection Plan and 120 had been on a Child in Need plan.

Members discussed:

- a) The Chair of the Strategic MACE had been the Regional Director for

Barnardo's Nick Cook and there had been a review of those Strategic arrangements;

- b) The Plymouth Safeguarding Partnership had been providing training and awareness sessions across the City. Plymouth City Council had also provided bespoke training sessions to partners across the city. The Adolescent Safety Hub had been actively engaged with partners and agencies to model and support confidence in using the framework as part of their role;
- c) Online exploitation had been covered within the Adolescent Safety Framework and this would be made more explicit in the Framework;
- d) The Children's Safeguarding Partnership had the responsibility to ensure that all partners had been effective with the right training available to all agencies in the city. The service had been in the process of recruiting.

Recommendation: Further sessions to be extended to all councillors to ensure knowledge and confidence in understanding the Framework which would be used across the city. All Councillors would be provided with sufficient information on the Adolescent Safety Framework.

82. **Children's Performance Report**

Councillor Mrs Pengelly, Cabinet Member for Homes and Communities introduced this item to the Committee. Jean Kelly, Service Director for Children's Social Care and Ming Zhang, Service Director for Education, Participation and Skills presented the data within the report.

Members discussed:

- a) The figure for children attending schools had been affected by COVID, however the Government would look to bring this back to normality in a phased approach with attendance figures of 90% and then look to be fully back to normal after this;
- b) The number of children and young people on a Child Protection plan from the end of 2021 had been 332, this had risen to 338 in February 2022. Changes to the category of which a Child or young person goes onto, or remains on a Child Protection plan, would be decided within Child Protection conferences and could change to a different category based on what the concerns at the time had been;
- c) Plymouth City Council Children and Young People's Families service had been feeding into the Violence against Women and Girls Commission and had been sharing data, range of interventions provided and the training on offer to staff. The Targeted Support Service had met with the Commission to discuss the range of interventions that had been offered;

- d) For the Performance report to include further data over a longer period of time so members of the Committee could evaluate trends. For the Performance report to also include data on Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) and their OFSTED ratings;
- e) The School Improvement Service had been putting in support to schools across Plymouth, no matter whether there came under the umbrella of a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) or not. The Government would cut the School Improvement Grant by 50% and then by 100% next year. The Government would be implementing this as they would like schools to have more autonomy with regards to school improvement;

The Committee noted the report.

83. **Early Years Strategy Board**

Councillor Mrs Pengelly, Cabinet Member for Homes and Communities introduced this item to the Committee. Ming Zhang, Service Director for Education, Participation and Skills presented the report to the committee and members discussed:

- a) Uptake of free pupil premium for early years for Plymouth continued to be above the national average and work would continue to encourage an increased uptake in Pupil Premium;
- b) Plymouth City Council's Early Years setting staff continued to support and work hard to provide training and link up with the Department for Education's resources to ensure high quality staff would be recruited and maintained;
- c) Although Plymouth City Council had been above the national average for uptake in Early years settings, it had been encouraged that the Council needed to continue to strive to increase this uptake further;

The Committee agreed to:

1. Endorse the three strands of work for Early Years as agreed by the Early Years Strategy Board as set out in this report
2. Endorse the 2022/23 priorities for the Board as set out in this report

It had been agreed for this item to return to Scrutiny once outcome data had become available.

84. **Fostering Sufficiency and Marketing**

Councillor Mrs Pengelly, Cabinet Member for Homes and Communities introduced this item to the Committee. Jean Kelly, Service Director and Jane Anstis, Head of Service for the Children, Young People and Families service presented the report to the Committee and Members discussed:

- a) Children in care had access to leisure facilities within the city at no extra cost to themselves and the service had been trying to expand the offer. The foster care offer had been worked on to compete with independent sector foster care agencies and out of this work it had been recognised that foster carers valued the level of support on offer to them;
- b) There had been a reduction in enquiries being made to the service to become a foster carer. The Council's website had been updated regularly and efforts had been made to ensure the Plymouth offer had been visible and transparent to the city of Plymouth;
- c) Foster for Plymouth to make enquiries to include information in the Council Tax billing for the City, this would ensure every household in Plymouth have information;

The Committee noted the report.

85. **Draft Work Programme 2022-2023**

The Committee agreed to include the following for the next Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- Update on Kickstart programme
- Plymouth Safeguarding Partnership
- Update on the Youth Service
- Update on Elective Home Education