

Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Monday 19 October 2020

PRESENT:

Councillor Mrs Beer, in the Chair.

Councillor Murphy, Vice Chair.

Councillors Allen, Goslin, James, McDonald and Morris.

Apologies for absence: Councillors Downie and Loveridge.

Also in attendance: Alison Botham (Director of Children's Services), Niki Clark (Finance Business Partner), Judith Harwood (Service Director for Education, Participation and Skills), Jean Kelly (Service Director for Children, Young People and Families), Councillor Laing (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People) Caroline Marr (Senior Policy Advisor), Councillor Jon Taylor (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Transformation) and Helen Rickman (Democratic Advisor).

The meeting started at 1.30 pm and finished at 3.20 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 Beer as Chair and Councillor Murphy as Vice Chair for the municipal year 2020 – 2021.

2. Declarations of Interest

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

3. Minutes

Members agreed the minutes of 4 March 2020 as an accurate record of the meeting.

Under this item clarification was sought as to the status of minute 58b (Policy Update) and if a response to the 'Music Education: Call for Evidence' open consultation was submitted - it was confirmed that a response to this question would be provided.

4. Chair's Urgent Business

There were no items of Chair's urgent business.

5. **Policy Update**

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 the extra time allocation for students to prepare for exams in 2021, that relevant guidance for schools/ nurseries and childcare settings had been updated to reflect the tier level of 'alert' and that the DFE had published a report on the evaluation of Regional Adoption Agencies.

It was recommended that the Evaluation of Regional Adoption Agencies – 2nd report is provided to Panel Members for their information.

Members noted the update.

6. **Children in Care Update - verbal**

Jean Kelly (Service Director for Children, Young People and Families) and Councillor Laing (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People) provided a verbal update on Children in Care. It was highlighted to Members that –

- there had been a rise of 40 children in care since the beginning of lockdown from 431 to 471; this increase closely followed the trend analysis previously undertaken. Children whose adoption hearings hadn't taken place because of delays in the court system due to Covid 19 continued to be counted as part of the 471 figure;
- regular placement review panel hearings were undertaken to assess every child's review plan;
- since August 2020 there had been 6000 visits to the newly designed Fostering website.

Members questions related to the following key areas:

- clarification as to the reasons for the increase of children brought into care of the local authority since lockdown and the effect on the council's budget;
- praise for the Fostering for Plymouth advertising campaign;
- a request for comparison figures regionally and nationally regarding new foster carers figures and enquiries to the service;
- if enough emphasis was focused upon supporting parents other than bringing children into care; and what emphasis was placed upon the child's extended family;
- the effect of the increase of the number of children in care on the workforce and what challenges were being faced;

- if there was a higher proportion of children brought into care on a long or short term basis.

It was recommended that –

1. the Children in Care Update (verbal) would be a standing item on the panel's agendas going forward;
2. the update for the next meeting to include information upon the Children in Care Awards Ceremony, Care Leavers Week, personal advisors and Foster Carer Awards;
3. an update on children and young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) to be added to the panel's work programme for future discussion.

7. **Children's Services - finance breakdown (month 4 monitoring report)**

Alison Botham (Director of Children's Services), Councillor Laing (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People) and Niki Clark (Finance Business Partner) presented the Children's Services Finance Breakdown (month 4 monitoring report). It was highlighted that the figures on page 27 of the agenda set out the pressure for the children's directorate which was currently £4.290m.

Members questions related to the following key areas:

- if the average cost of placements had increased or decreased;
- extra costs associated with the budget and what they were for;
- school transport and the impact of Covid 19 on this;
- financial support received from the Government and what plans were in plans to mitigate spend.

It was recommended that –

1. a written response would be provided to Members regarding the overall support received from Government for the children's directorate;
2. a finance breakdown would be added as a standing item for future scrutiny agendas going forward.

8. **Return to School Recovery Plan**

Judith Harwood (Service Director for Education, Participation and Skills) and Councillor Jon Taylor (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Transformation) presented the Return to School Recovery Plan update. The impact of Covid 19 on the curriculum was highlighted to Members, specifically with regards to the results of the Ofqual consultations upon the proposed changes to GCSE, AS and A level

examinations for 2021, and the assessment and awarding of Vocational Technical and other General Qualifications in 2020-21.

Members questions related to the following key areas:

- children's access to laptops to aid with home learning;
- if sufficient school transport was available to allow children to get to school;
- the variation in offer of remote learning from school to school across the city;
- if officers had been in contact with other local authorities to share best practice;
- the impact on families that could not afford to pay for the internet at home, therefore were restricted with home learning activities;
- at what age children learned to use IT in schools;
- a request for further information on the launch of the Kickstart programme and The Zone's wellbeing and mental health training.

It was recommended that –

1. an update on the Kickstart programme is added to the panel's work programme for future scrutiny;
2. an update on training project provided by The Zone with regards to wellbeing and mental health training is added to the panel's work programme for future scrutiny;
3. the Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Transformation continues to keep Members updated on the impact of Covid 19 on the curriculum, specifically with regards to effect of the Ofqual consultation.

9. **Work Programme**

Members discussed the work programme; it was recommended that the following items were added for inclusion:

- the Kickstart programme – to be added to the January meeting;
- the Zone update – to be added to the January meeting;
- the Return to School Recovery Plan – 6 months on;
- Child Exploitation and Sexual Exploitation;

- Children Giving Evidence in Court and the support provided;
- Finance and Monitoring;
- Children's Mental Health.

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