

Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday 7 July 2021

PRESENT:

Councillor Laing, in the Chair.

Councillor James, Vice Chair.

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

Apologies for absence: Councillor Carlyle

Also in attendance: Alison Botham (Director for Children's Services), Jean Kelly (Service Director for Children and Young People and Families) and Jake Metcalfe (Democratic Support Advisor).

The meeting started at 13:30 and finished at 15:57.

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.

40. To Note the Appointment of the Chair and Vice-Chair

The Committee noted the appointment of Councillor Jemima Laing as Chair for the next municipal year 2021-22.

The Committee noted the appointment of Councillor David James as Vice Chair for the next municipal year 2021-22.

41. Apologies

Councillor Carlyle provided apologies for the meeting.

42. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Laing declared an interest due to being the Governor for the Green Sure Trust Board and Ford Primary School.

43. Minutes

Members agreed the minutes of 3 March 2021 as an accurate record of the meeting.

44. Chair's Urgent Business

The Chair had no Urgent Business.

45. Terms of Reference

Members discussed the Plymouth Plan and Bright Spots which will be presented at the next Full Council on 13th September, the Terms of Reference did not need to be changed to reflect this.

Discussed CAMHS and whether it needed to be referenced in the Terms of Reference as an area of responsibility. CAMHS updates and recommendations could come to Children's services and Education Scrutiny but did not need to be referenced in the Terms of Reference.

46. **Policy Announcements**

An announcement had been made for moving out of step four of the roadmap. The guidance for schools would be updated and would be disseminated to ensure that they had been made aware.

Classroom bubbles would come to an end for under 18's; social distancing rules would end as well as the staggering of start and finish times for pupils from the 19th July.

From the 16 August there would be no obligation to self-isolate for under 18's who would 've come into contact with someone who has tested positive and would only self-isolate if they had tested positive.

NHS Test and Trace would now take over from schools for advising pupils that they needed to self-isolate.

Schools had been advised to continue with measures such as good ventilation, sanitising and regular testing of teachers until the end of September; another review would take place for these measures.

Members discussed:

Press release 19 May 2021 – More support for local areas to drive up school standards. It was clarified that Plymouth will not have to bid for £10 million but the grant will be divided between four Local Authorities, Plymouth City Council and the regional schools commissioner will decide how that money is allocated but it would be allocated directly to Academy Trusts involved in relevant schools, mainly secondary schools. Plymouth City Council had been agreeing arrangements that would be in place to oversee the allocation of funds.

Councillor Cresswell sought clarification as to whether the funds, when allocated to the Trusts would be allocated to Plymouth and not to other schools that the Trusts have responsibility for out of the area. Alison Botham advised that the funds allocated to Plymouth would be for Plymouth schools in order for agreed work to be carried out.

Councillor Goslin questioned what oversight Plymouth City Council will have on how those funds would be allocated. Alison Botham advised that the decision would be for the Regional Schools Commissioner within the Department of Education. Plymouth had been finalising arrangements and would have shared governance

arrangements and would have a place on the Strategic Governance Board which the Chief Executive and Director of Children's services would be a part of. The Board would not be able to make decisions but would be able to give recommendations where decisions would be made centrally.

Press release 21 May 2021 – Multimillion-pound investment to inspire children to walk to school. Councillor requested a written response from Ming Zhang with how this will be monitored.

Press release 21 May 2021 – Department for Education announced a further £8 million as part of the AP Transition Fund for 2021/22. Councillor Allen questioned how the fund will be directed to the poorest children in alternative provision settings. The fund would be allocated to those children in most need, deprivation would be a key factor in determining children in need.

Councillor Laing requested that information relating to the £10 million grant when finalised at the Strategic Board would come back to this Scrutiny.

47. **COVID Update** (Verbal Report)

Jean Kelly provided a verbal update for the Children, Young People and Families service for this item:

There had been an increase in demand on the service for the last 15 months but this had not reduced nor stagnated. There had been an additional demand of 25% on the Childrens Social Work service over 15 months.

There had been a regular increase in the number of children in care during the pandemic, however this had stabilised since March 2021. Figures from 31st May advised the committee that there had been 488 children in Care with an increase in older adolescents coming into the Care of the Local Authority. This had presented a challenge for the service and due to the complexity of need placements in house and in the independent sector were not available which subsequently had led to an increase in residential placements. These residential placements had been monitored closely and a Service Manager had been reviewing the Care plans of those children in Residential Care. This increase had presented a challenge for the service in terms of capacity to respond, the service had been successful in recruiting Newly Qualified Social Workers however had faced difficulty in recruiting experienced social workers which is reflected regionally and nationally.

Plymouth City Councils Children's Service had recently restructured its fostering service and targets had been set to recruit in house foster carers. In the last financial year Plymouth City Council had recruited 14 households representing 18 placements for children requiring care. Currently in this financial year, Plymouth City Council had approved one household with two placements, there had been 9 applicants in the process of assessments which would represent 14 new placements if recruited. The service would be targeting 36 new placements for this financial year. There had been a challenge nationally to successfully recruit foster carers which had been reported within the independent review of Childrens services 'The Case for Change'

by Josh Macalister. Plymouth have a marketing strategy and had been working hard to identify families interested in becoming a foster carer.

The pandemic and lockdown had an effect on the amount of children coming into care which had been similar with other local authorities in the region. Children's services are a demand led service and would be legally obliged to respond when a child meets the threshold. Plymouth had been working hard with partners some of whom have had to furlough staff which had then impacted interventions for families in the community and had led to children remaining within the service for longer. Lockdown and the pandemic had exacerbated concerns and risks within families homes which had led to children coming into the care of the Local Authority.

Targeted Support are facing a challenge, there had been a significant number of children requiring interventions from this service, however due to the pandemic and reduction in service from other services they had not been outward facing as they had been previously. The management team had been working closely with the Targeted Support service to increase capacity to ensure families receive the right support at the right time.

Children's Mental Health services had been under significant pressure in terms of both preventative work and referrals submitted by the Local Authority for the children we work with. The waiting times for referrals would be provided as a written response to Councillor David James.

The Adolescent Support Team had been working with children, young people and families where they are either on the edge of Care or in Local Authority Care to reunify them back into the family home or with extended family members. Since June 2020 to March 2021 the team had reunified 12 young people and this year to date had reunified 5. The committee were advised that more than 20 young people had been prevented from coming into the Local Authority's care through the Adolescent teams work. The service had been looking to expand that service as they operate with trauma informed interventions with wrap around support in order to prevent children and young people coming into care or to reunify the family.

Ming Zhang provided a verbal update for the Education service:

The Service had been working hard during the pandemic to support schools to achieve maximum participation in education. There had been a focus on creating provision for keyworker's children to come to school and also to provide placements for vulnerable children. The Service had been successful in delivering on this and the attendance figures are 95%, nationally this figure had been 87.5%. The attendance of vulnerable children had been above the national average.

The Inclusion service had worked closely with the Children, Young People and Families service to help vulnerable learners who may need support to access school based learning. Schools were supported to provide good health and safety risk assessments in place and ensure facilities were ready for vulnerable learners to access on site provisions.

The Education service had an increased pressure on their service. The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities service (SEND) had seen a 19% increase in demand for specialist places. The team had not been designed to cater for such a high number. The service had realigned to prevent tribunal cases.

Many schools have advised that they would keep the arrangements of their bubbles at least until the end of the school term.

Work is on-going to ensure schools, staff and pupils feel supported and to ensure that their wellbeing had been supported when returning to school.

9 schools had confirmed local outbreaks of COVID-19, 10 early years settings and there had been 39 single cases reported. Councillor Laing requested data in terms of how many children and young people had been isolating. From the 28th June – 2nd July, 1500 children, young people and early years had been isolating. The current figure had been 1103 school aged and 389 early years. These figures had shown a rise in the last two weeks but the figure had not been as high during periods of 'full lockdown'.

During the pandemic Specialist Education staff realigned to ensure staff are available to schools and families. Virtual online meetings had been made available to SEND children and families. A helpline had been setup by the Plymouth Information Support and Advice for SEND (PIAS), this service had allowed direct phone calls from the parent to alleviate high demand.

48. **Children's Service and Education Overview**

Jean Kelly (Service Director for Children, Young People and Families) presented to members.

Members discussed:

- Children's homes are part of the framework and are required, some children would not be ready to live in a family arrangement. They had been single occupancy children homes, the difference between that and a foster placement is that it had been run by staff and are much smaller units to make children and young people feel more homely. Jean Kelly would provide the numbers of children placed outside of the city to Councillor James with the costs associated with that. Plymouth are challenged with providing enough foster placements in Plymouth which the service had been working on. All children and Young People in residential had been reviewed weekly.
- There are no children or young people under 16 in unregistered setting and nothing Plymouth are required to do as all children and young people under 16 are in registered placements.
- PAUSE had been funded innovatively in Plymouth and had been a social investment approach. £900,000 funding is required to support the project and the service had been building a business case. The service had also

been looking to jointly fund the project as there would be a direct cost saving in terms of Health and costs of proceedings.

Ming Zhang presented to members.

- There had been an increase in parents/carers applying for Education, Health and Care plan. Some parents/carers had found this stressful. The service had been working closely with a parents group to understand the provision and demand the service had been facing. Parents/carers are able to speak with an officer whilst going through this process.
- Early prevention to address children and young people's mental health in schools had been the direction for the service to mitigate these problems. A Caseworker would work with family to complete an assessment should the child or young person's mental health had not been addressed. Some children and Young people would be referred to CAMHS should concerns or worries still exist.
- Academy schools had been behind the national average. It had been highlighted that some of those academies had been as a result of them failing previously. Consistency and agreed drives and priorities is what the service had been working towards to improve this.
- Members discussed if academies continued to fail, would it be possible for them to come under Local Authority governance.
- Additional funding would be coming to Plymouth to increase the capacity for improvement with the main focus being secondary schools to ensure that there would be capacity to see the rate of improvement.

49. **OFSTED Inspection Local Authority Children's Services**

Jean Kelly presented this item for the Committee.

Every Three years there would be a full ILACS inspection and possibly in between which would be dependent on the judgement the Local Authority received. For Plymouth which had required improvement the rhythm works a full ILACS and in between that two years focussed visit every year or a joint targeted area inspection.

Plymouth had an ILACS in 2018 which required improvement, the Local Authority had been providing updates to OFSTED every year since then to advise how the Local Authority had been getting on with the progress on key developments.

There had been a Joint Targeted area inspection in November 2019 which had been focussed on children's emotional and mental health needs. Probation looked at the Local Authority's Youth Offending Service.

Plymouth have been due a focussed visit since the end of 2020, but due to the suspension of some activity from the pandemic this had not occurred. OFSTED are now continuing with their inspections and Plymouth are due at any time.

50. **Youth Justice Update (To Follow)**

Councillor Downie introduced this item to the committee, Ian Taylor (Service Manager for the Youth Offending Team) and Jean Kelly (Service Director for Children, Young People and Families) presented the item to members.

The Youth Offending Team worked with children and young people aged 10 -18 who had either committed or had been suspected of committing offences in the city.

The last Joint Targeted Area Inspection advised that the governance arrangements for the Youth Offending team had not been robust enough. Plymouth had then moved to a joined up approach with two other Local Authorities, Torbay and Devon. This joined up approach did not work for Plymouth and in turn re-instated the Youth Justice Board in Plymouth.

The team are funded from the Government, Local Authority, Probation, Police and Health with the aims to; prevent offending, reduce the risk of further offending, support victims, support young people on bail, prepare reports for the court, supervise young people on Court Orders, help with young people remanded to local authority care, help young people during and after custodial sentences, help parents.

Since the formation of Plymouth's Justice Board, progress had been made which had allowed the team to focus on the city of Plymouth rather than the whole of Devon.

The JTAI had highlighted some weakness, particularly in relation to children's mental health, training had been provided to staff and a psychologist is now part of the team. All young people go through a screening.

Improvements had been made in the way in which Plymouth worked with the Police. There was now a full time police officer based within the team. Plymouth had a child centred policing team which is unique to Plymouth in region who had a team of officers working with children and young people across the city.

There had been a delay in receiving the statistical data for the five Key Performance Indicators of two years which had made it difficult to adjust.

The 5 Key Performance Indicators are:

- Young People in Custody – Plymouth had two young people in custody, this figure two years ago had been 9 which showed a marked improvement.
- First Time Entrants into the Youth Justice System – Figures released on 5 March 2021 stated that 74 young people had been first time entrants during the period January 2019 – December 2019. This had represented an increase from the previous year's data of 65 young people.
- Re-offending rate – Figures from 5 March 2021 evidenced a rate of 41.2% of Young People who had been open to the Youth Offending team in December 2018, this represented an increase from the previous year figure

of 32.3%. This data had been two years old and since then the team had created a local live tracking tool to monitor 90 young people open to the Youth teams between 01 April 2020 to 20 May 2021 for any further offences. To date Plymouth's Youth Offending rates for those 90 young people had a rate of 12%, this had been due a change of approach, young people would re-offend within 3 months, and the team now have diversion programmes to target this which had worked.

- Young people in suitable Education and Employment
- Suitable accommodation, 96% of the teams young people are in suitable accommodation.

Between 1st January 2020 and 31st December 2020, 1042 young people had come to the attention of Police, however only had come through to the Youth Offending team, this had been a key factor is Plymouth's reoffending rate being high due to 90% of young people not being engaged by the team. The Youth Offending team had work closely with Devon and Cornwall Police to address this.

Plymouth's Youth Offending teams Impact project had gone live on 1st June which worked with partners to deliver a programme to the young people in the service around harmful sexual behaviour, child sexual exploitation, child exploitation and substance misuse. Work had been done to divert young people through various projects and get them into better peer networks. The team had continued to work closely with education colleagues and had started delivering parenting interventions.

Members discussed:

- 56 interventions had been offered in the first month, much have been diverted to other agencies. The Youth Offending team had regular meetings with partners to discuss best interventions for each young person.
- The Plymouth Youth Justice Board have funded two new posts for the team.
- The team recognised that they would not have the capacity to work with 1042 young people but target those that have patterns of repeated offending. Plymouth University evaluate the project, if more resources had been required the team would apply for this.
- There had been four social workers and probation workers in the team that assess risks for every young person within the team. There had been six young people in Plymouth that were assessed as high risk to members of the public. These young people would have risk managements in place, would be seen more regularly by the team and the Police would target these individuals. These together had been reducing reoffending in the city and protected the public.

51. **Everyone's Invited School and Safeguarding (To Follow)**

Ming Zhang presented this item to members.

Update to members at scrutiny on what schools had been doing in relation to the recommendations by the end of the year.

52. **Work Programme**

Members discussed the work programme and have added:

- Out of Hours service reshaping
- Home Education
- High Street Funding
- REACH academy
- Regional Schools Commissioner
- Kickstart programme
- NEETS
- Young Carers
- Care Leavers
- Barnardo's Care Journeys
- Missing and Child exploitation action plan
- COVID Legacy