

Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday 15 February 2023

PRESENT:

Councillor Laing, in the Chair.
Councillor Mrs Pengelly, Vice Chair.
Councillors Allen, Mrs Beer, Briars-Delve, Cresswell, Harrison, Loveridge, McLay, Reilly, Tippetts and Tofan.

Also in attendance: Sharon Muldoon (Director of Children's Services), Jane Anstis (Service Director for Children, Young People and Families), Annie Gammon (Service Director for Education, Participation and Skills), Alan Knott (Policy and Intelligence Advisor), Dr Lucinda Ross (Education Improvement Officer), Paul Stephens (Performance Advisor), David Northey (Section 151 Officer) & Jake Metcalfe (Democratic Advisor).

The meeting started at 1.30 pm and finished at 4.40 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.

125. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

126. **Minutes**

The minutes from 9 December 2022 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

127. **Chair's Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

128. **Tracking Decisions Log**

The Committee agreed to recommend to share best practice to all Headteachers in the city following the School Uniform Motion on Notice and this would be done via the Headteachers bulletin and would share two to three case studies.

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

Alan Knott (Policy and Intelligence Advisor) presented the item to the Committee. In response to questions raised it was reported that:

- a) In relation to the announcement from the Prime Minister that set out an

ambition to ensure all school pupils in England studied some form of maths to the age of 18, the Committee were concerned around the practicalities of this considering the recruitment for maths teachers was challenging. It was noted that the pass rate for pupils re-taking their maths examinations was low at 25% and the announcement required further thinking in principal and in terms of resourcing;

- b) A revised letter would be produced in relation to the Josh Macalister independent review of Children's Social Care which would request long term investment from national government;
- c) The Committee welcomed the news that Ofsted were introducing a new, separate judgement to the framework for inspecting local authority children's services specifically about the experiences and progress of care leavers.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

130. **OFSTED Focused Visit Update and Response**

Councillor Carlyle (Cabinet Member for Education, Participation and Skills) introduced the report to the Committee. Sharon Muldoon (Director of Children's Services) and Jane Anstis (Service Director for Children, Young People and Families) provided an update to the Committee and highlighted the following key points:

- a) Ofsted conducted a two day visit on 14th December 2022;
- b) There had already been an improvement plan in place following the appointment of Sharon Muldoon (Director of Children's Services) which focussed on the Front Door;
- c) There had been a need for a stronger Early Help offer which was launched on 23 January 2023. People were able to pre-book onto an advice line and this had been designed following feedback from schools and early help settings advising that it would take too long to get support through the Gateway;
- d) The two priority areas talked about consent and thresholds and the requirement for partners to have a solid understanding of seeking consent from families before making referrals to Children's Social Care. There would be a city wide event for partners of 26 April 2023 which would advise practitioners on consent and thresholds;
- e) There would be a fortnightly meeting with Police colleagues which would look at incidents of 'No Further Action' which would evaluate whether the correct decisions were being taken;
- f) There were positive narratives around the Senior Leadership Team and the direction of travel. Additional resource had been provided by the Council to implement the changes required;

- g) There was an additional team manager and improvement manager which would support development and understanding within the front door service in areas such as consent and understanding and applying consistent application of thresholds;
- h) The second priority action plan, timeliness of safeguarding functions for Strategy discussions and Initial Child Protection Conferences, there had been an additional team manager in place which would chair Strategy discussions to ensure timeliness. The Service Manager within the conferencing space had worked hard in understanding the changes required and has since seen the service come from a concerning low base to a good standard of service;

In response to questions raised it was reported that:

- a) It was agreed in September for additional resource for an Improvement manager as part of a transformation bid;
- b) The Early Help offer had been fragmented and the service would be looking to enhance this and to make use of the good assets within the city as well as combining the family hub programme into the offer;
- c) There was six weekly events in which the whole service would meet and was well attended to get the right culture in place. Staff awards took place weekly and was generating positive activity and Sharon Muldoon and the Senior Leadership Team were present in the staff building having open conversations with the workforce regularly;
- d) The issues around continued professional development and workforce development particularly around large caseloads and complexity were going to be rectified via the new Targeted Operating Model which would re-design some of Plymouth's services;
- e) The structures in place involved lots of handovers for families as they moved through different parts of the service. This was being re-designed and the service would move to a locality structure that would provide continued support for a family;
- f) Domestic abuse training had been revised and was providing a refreshed toolkit to support professionals. The introduction of the additional team manager was providing an improved triage response to domestic abuse;
- g) In relation to partners involvement in understanding consent and thresholds, instead of partners filling out forms, they would be calling in to have a conversation where they would be able to have advice;
- h) The Committee would be able to see if the advice line was working through how many referrals were being made into the MASH. The Committee should also begin to see the number of families within the

Early Help population increase with the number of safeguarding referrals diminishing. There was no waiting time on the advice line as people were using the booking system, this would be monitored continuously and the service would move resource if required;

The Committee agreed to note the report.

131. **Recruitment and Retention Update**

Councillor Carlyle (Cabinet Member for Education, Participation and Skills) introduced the report. Jane Anstis (Service Director for Children, Young People and Families) presented the report to the Committee and highlighted the following key points:

- a) The Recruitment and Retention looked to deliver a stable and able workforce and had five key priorities and included:
 - Priority 1 - Create the right climate and conditions for a thriving workforce
 - Priority 2 - Realise an inclusive culture
 - Priority 3 - Create an enhanced career pathway and development offer that remains attractive to staff as their careers and lives develop
 - Priority 4 - Establish a competitive and intentional approach to recruitment and Retention (IRCSC2)
 - Priority 5 - Ensure sustained focus, investment and accountability
- b) The Plan aimed to provide better professional development for team managers and social workers and also to provide the right conditions for social workers to work with families and children;
- c) Plymouth would look to implement a new social worker assistant role to address some of the administrative tasks preventing social workers from carrying out direct work and being unable to develop meaningful relationships with families;
- d) There would be a retention incentive which was competitive regionally and nationally and would set out the right response to secure valued staff;
- e) There would be reports and scorecards in place that would demonstrate the reduction in the use of agency social workers;

In response to questions raised it was reported that:

- a) Assistant social workers would be based within the Children's Social Work service (centre part of the service), before the looking at other area's;
- b) Plymouth City Council had a post-graduate scheme through the University which was being utilised. The service would be developing an apprenticeship

offer and there would be a meeting in March to co-collaborate the design of a degree apprenticeship;

- c) Plymouth had partnered with an experienced recruitment agency which delivered a significant amount of work for the recruitment of international social workers post and pre-arrival which would be on-going for a year. The service had also connected with the social workers still with Plymouth following a previous cohort of international social workers to find out what did and didn't work for them;
- d) Councillors would have an event to meet with international social workers being recruited to Plymouth City Council.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

132. **Performance Scorecard**

Councillor Carlyle (Cabinet Member for Education, Participation and Skills) introduced the report to the Committee and in response to questions raised it was reported that:

- a) Absence from education had increased significantly across the country with Plymouth sitting above the national average. There had been particular issues with children/young people in years 9,10 and 11 not attending which seems to have correlated with the pandemic and pupils not having to be in the classroom for lessons. Locally, Plymouth would be driving an inclusion agenda to bring down those children absent from education which would, if left unchecked would prevent students obtaining basic English and Maths skills;
- b) There was a place based plan which looked at attendance and absence. There was an information sharing agreement with Multi-academy trusts to compare what was happening in Plymouth;
- c) Children/Young people in unsuitable accommodation had reduced and was lower than the national average. This was being monitored weekly to further reduce but the figures would include children/young people in police custody;
- d) The service would be joint funding an EET Personal Advisor post as part of the wider work of the city for Care Leavers, following national learning and visits from Mark Riddell. There would also be a Seeking Education and Employment (SEET) strategy for Plymouth to fix and support the issues of NEET;
- e) The Skills Launchpad was working intensively with employers in the city in developing supportive placements for young people. The number of supported internships would increase over the coming years due to the work which was being done;

- f) For children placed outside of the area, they would have parity of offers with Plymouth's local children/young people until they were 25;

The Committee agreed to note the report.

133. **School Attainment**

Councillor Carlyle (Cabinet Member for Education, Participation and Skills) introduced the report to the Committee. Annie Gammon (Service Director for Education, Participation and Skills) presented the report to the Committee and highlighted the following key points:

- a) In the 2021/22 exam series, the performance of students in Plymouth matched the national benchmark for attainment 8 for the first time. The gap with regional and statistical neighbour benchmarks was also closed significantly;
- b) In addition, the average progress 8 score for Plymouth students closed significantly with regional and statistical neighbour benchmarks. However, whilst students were making a greater amount of progress between years 7 and 11 than in previous years, they were still falling short by approximately a fifth of a grade across measured subjects;
- c) In 2021/22, the number of students achieving the 'basics' measure significantly increased from 37.6% in 2018/19 to 45.9%, closing the gap with the national benchmark to 0.7%;
- d) There were three significant drivers for this change across the Plymouth secondary education landscape. The first was the introduction of high performing multi-academy Trusts into the city (Reach South, Greenshaw, Thinking Schools & Ted Wragg) as well as the expansion of locally based Westcountry Schools Trust. The opportunity of joining a large high performing trust had offered school leaders the opportunity to develop curriculum, share resources and provide teachers with high quality professional development;
- e) The second driver had been Plymouth's 'Place Based Approach'. Improving outcomes in English and maths was a focus of the 'place based' plan and increased the amount of students achieving the 'basics' measure to at least 47% from a baseline 37.6% in 2019 is one of the key performance indicators. That 45.9% achieved of students this measure in 2022 indicates that city schools are on target to achieve this improvement in the 2023 series of examinations;
- f) The final driver for change was the increasing the number of secondary schools graded as good or outstanding in the city. The inspection pause meant that the last comparable point for published data was 2019 when 47% of secondary school were graded good or outstanding. This figure stood at 67%;
- g) It was notable that those Plymouth schools rated good or outstanding

outperformed national benchmarks for both the 'basics' and attainment 8 measures. This indicated the importance of strong leadership in Plymouth schools. Through our 'place based' plan, city education leaders had set themselves the target of 70% of secondary school judged as good or outstanding by the end of the 2022/23 academic year. This figure stood at 67%, with an inspection judgement of an inadequate school pending publication and further secondary school inspections due by July 2023. In addition, the development of strong and sustainable school leadership in the city as a means to secure rapid improvement in schools is captured as a discreet strand of the 'place based' plan;

- h) The attainment of those pupils in receipt of free schools meals (FSM) was better than regional and statistical neighbour benchmarks for the first time; Plymouth schools also closed the gap with the national benchmark significantly. However, as is reflected nationally, the gap in attainment between children in receipt of FSM and all children remains stubbornly high. Nationally this gap is 15 points and in Plymouth it is 14.5 points;
- i) In terms of progress, although Plymouth pupils in receipt of FSM made better progress than statistical and southwest benchmarks for pupils in receipt of FSM; the cohort made significantly less progress than all Plymouth pupils (-0.69 Vs -0.20). 25.4% of children in receipt of FSM achieved the 'basics' measure in comparison to the Plymouth benchmark of 45.9%;
- j) Lower education performance was mirrored by lower rates of school attendance for this group. The absence rate gap between children eligible for FSM and all other pupils widened by 1.1% between 2018/19 (9.7%) and the last published data point in 2020/21(10.8%). The overall absence rate for Plymouth pupils at the last published data point (2021/22) was 8.8%;
- k) 58.7% of pupils who had more than 90% attendance achieved a strong pass in English and maths. 30.7% of pupils who had less than 90% attendance achieved a strong pass in English and maths. 3% of pupils who had less than 50% attendance achieved a strong pass in English and maths.

In response to questions raised it was reported that:

- a) The Committee requested an update as to what work had been done by schools in selecting texts which would better engage boys in reading. The Committee were advised that this was a key strand within the place-based plan and schools had stepped forward to deliver training and gender was a part of that;
- b) There were 7,249 children with SEN support in the city with 2,660 children with EHCP. Parents waiting for a 6 week decision for an EHCP, this had been 95% for January and 94% in February and was above the southwest average which was 49%;
- c) In terms of the 20 week decision, In November the decision rate was 38% and in January had increased to 76% which was further evidence that

Plymouth was improving outcomes for families in reducing the time they were waiting;

The Committee agreed to:

Recommendation: For the Education, Participation and Skills service to ensure students in Plymouth were aware of the accompanying entitlements when they receive free school meals to enable better outcomes for children and young people in the city. This information would also be disseminated in Family Hubs to ensure families are aware of their entitlements.

134. **Financial Monitoring Report - Month 9**

David Northey (Section 151 Officer) presented this item to Committee and highlighted the following key points:

- a) The Children's budget had a net variance of £2.757 mil;
- b) The directorate had £2.204 mil of mitigations identified and included:
 - Reduction in Court fees
 - Reduction in assessments
 - Family support reviews
 - Out of Hours working
 - A challenge for the Education, Participation and Skills department for £300,000 of management savings which was achieved
- c) Continued discussions were taking place with the ICB to receive a £500,000 contribution.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

135. **Risk Monitoring Report Scrutiny Update – January 2023**

The Committee agreed to note the report.

136. **Refugee and Asylum Seekers accessing Education in Plymouth**

Dr Lucinda Ross (Education Improvement Officer) presented a verbal report to the Committee and highlighted the following key points:

- a) There were 350 asylum seekers in the city with most receiving support from the national border agency. Nationally and locally there was no accurate data on the number of refugee and asylum seeking children accessing education in the city;
- b) Through the school induction process the EMAT team were able to understand whether children/young people coming from asylum seeking backgrounds;

- c) EMAT had provided 29 training sessions to schools across the city;
- d) In 2014 Plymouth participated in the afghan relocation scheme, relocating afghan civilians that had served with British forces in Helmand province. At that time across the Council established systems, deploying Home Office grant funding for one year to support families in respect of welfare, health, accommodation and education. Since then small numbers of Afghan families settled in the City and included 10 families with 25 children. EMAT had provided support to those children and training for teachers to support the families wellbeing. The children had made good progress with one young person going onto university. Case studies in this area contributed to the City gaining city of sanctuary status;
- e) Between 2015 and 2021 the City welcomed people from the Syrian refugee population, with the overall number including 73 children under 18. These children presented with a greater need but were making good progress;
- f) Several families within the Syrian community required additional funding even though funding from central government had ceased;
- g) There were 15 children in the city under the vulnerable children resettlement scheme from Sudan, Iraq, Somalia and Afghanistan. There had been no grant funding for those children but the EMA team were including them when working with schools as much as possible;
- h) The homes for Ukraine people brought 57 children to the City plus ten 18 year old unaccompanied asylum seeking children into the city. The unaccompanied asylum seeking children were all attending City College and Suzanne Sparrow Language school and all were reported as making good progress. Reports from schools in the City state that all families were making good progress, although 3 families had returned to Ukraine;

In response to questions raised it was reported that:

There was a good wrap around package supporting families in their first year. For many families that good wrap around Care within the first year was adequate. Within each of the resettlement programmes, the majority of children presented with low levels of social and emotional behavioural needs. The group that presented with the most mental health needs were children from the Syrian resettlement programme. The government funding for wrap around care lasts for one year and after families were expected to gain work and to move into private accommodation. For several of the Syrian families, they had struggled with this which led to homelessness, living in temporary accommodation and children moving schools;

The Committee agreed to:

- I. Write a letter to the relevant minister highlighting that the one-year support package for refugee and asylum-seeking families had not been enough and encouraged the government to review the support packages in place and extend those packages;

2. Note the verbal report

137. **Early Years and Childcare Sufficiency**

Councillor Carlyle (Cabinet Member for Education, Participation and Skills) introduced the report. Annie Gammon (Service Director for Education, Participation and Skills) highlighted the following key points:

- a) There were 245 Ofsted registered childcare providers in Plymouth with sufficient childcare places in Plymouth for two, three and four year olds;
- b) Nationally the sector was under pressure including workers being low paid; a change in the way parents use childcare, with parents working at home choosing to lower the amount of days they send children to childcare providers and the subsidised 30 free hours of childcare was not enough for providers and didn't cover the costs;
- c) The number of providers closing was faster than those new providers but provision in Plymouth was still sufficient;
- d) The financial viability of running nurseries was of concern in areas of high social-economic deprivation. Whilst the Council were unable to provide funds to those nurseries, the Council was able to provide advice;
- e) There had been a reduction in the number of childminders due to a change of career or retirement and there had been less people joining the profession;
- f) There had been a steady decline in birth numbers which would affect the number of children in the population going into a childcare provision.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

138. **Early Years and Childcare Quality and Child Outcomes**

Annie Gammon (Service Director for Education, Participation and Skills) presented the report to the Committee and highlighted the following key points:

In Plymouth 97.5% of settings were judged good and above by Ofsted. The Council provided support through networking and input through childminders and colleagues that run nurseries;

In response to questions raised it was reported that:

The data stated that there was sufficient places in Plymouth for families but it did not advise whether those places were in the right area of the right sort of placement families were looking for;

The Committee agreed to:

1. Send a letter to the relevant minister highlighting the recruitment and retention pressures on the Early Help sector and requesting the implementation of a national strategy to address this. The letter would also ask that government recognise and value the importance of the early years sector and the staff working within it;
2. To note the report.

139. **Work Programme**

The Committee agreed to:

- Deep dive into absence
- Child Exploitation update
- NEET

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