

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

Wednesday 28 February 2024

PRESENT:

Councillor Reilly, in the Chair.

Councillor Carlyle, Vice Chair.

Councillors Mrs Beer, Dr Cree, Dingle, Harrison, McLay, Penrose, Stephens and Tippetts.

Apologies for absence: Councillor Holloway

Also in attendance: Councillor Laing (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Culture and Communications), Councillor Cresswell (Cabinet Member for Education, Apprenticeships and Skills), Nigel Denning (Interim Service Director for Children, Young People and Families), Matt Fulton (Lead Accountancy Manager), Hannah McGuigan (Performance Advisor), Paul Stephens (Performance Advisor), David Haley (Director of Children's Services), Jim Barnicott (Head of Education and Virtual School), Lisa Linscott (Service Director for Education, Participation and Skills), Clare Hetherington (Principal Educational Psychologist), Youth Ascends, Helen Huntley (PIASS Team Manager), Nicole Gallagher (SENDIASS Case Officer) and Jake Metcalfe (Democratic Advisor).

The meeting started at 14:00 and finished at 17:11.

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.

37. **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillor Holloway.

38. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

39. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting that took place on 07 November were agreed as a true and accurate record.

40. **Chair's Urgent Business**

There were no items of Chair's urgent business.

41. **Tracking Decisions**

Action:	Response:
1)	A letter would go out to Multi-Academy Trusts for their response;
3)	Nigel Denning would distribute the data in relation to the amount of foster carers which had successfully become a Plymouth City Council approved Foster carer after showing interest.

The Committee agreed to note the tracking decisions log.

42. **Finance Monitoring Report**

Matthew Fulton (Lead Accountancy Manager) introduced the report and provided the following highlights:

- a) The report broke down the budgetary changes between previous and the current financial year;
- b) Children, Young People and Families (CYPF) saw a reduction of £464,000 from 2022/23 to 2023/24 which was made up of additional cost of volume for placements which was received at £3.053 million, pay award adjustment, pension increase adjustment and additional Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) targets;
- c) The MTFP targets saw the budget reduction decrease between financial years by £464,000;
- d) The Education, Participation and Skills (EP&S) budget saw an increase between financial years of £1.827 million which was largely down to home to school transport;
- e) In quarter three for 2023/24 there was an overspend due to increased costs due to sufficiency issues and the volume of children in the city;
- f) There had been investment in home to school transport to EPNS of just over £1 million;
- g) The 'bottom-line' for Children's Services in Quarter Three was £1.859 million for EPNS and £8.929 million for CYPF which was close to £11 million over budget.

In response to questions, it was explained:

- h) The budget had been exceeded due to placement costs, sufficiency and ensuring children were safe;
- i) Without national intervention, all councils, including Plymouth, would not be able to continue;
- j) A large pressure on the budget was home to school transport, and this

was not just a pressure faced in Plymouth, but nationally;

- k) Provisions had been maintained across the service despite the overspend;
- l) The projections were done in October 2023 including how many children were in care at the time, however this number had increased;
- m) Children's Services had become a whole Council priority;
- n) Plans were in place to contain the budget for the next financial year as much as was possible;
- o) There was no reply to the letter sent to the Children's Minister sent by the Leader of the Council which addressed profits and profiteering;
- p) A key part of the strategy would be to bring children out of the area to be closer to Plymouth;
- q) Proposed changes to foster carer council tax and payment would be shared.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

43. **Performance Scorecard and Risk**

The report was taken as read, questions and discussion points from the Committee included:

- a) Confidence had increased at the Council's front door service;
- b) Training had taken place regarding thresholds of need;
- c) Manageable workloads for social workers was a key priority;
- d) Councillors were urged to take part in Children's Social Care's Practice week sessions;
- e) Recruitment of experienced social workers remained competitive and caseloads were identified as a key area to remain low in order to retain social workers;
- f) Newly qualified social workers had protected caseloads for one year and then increased for years two and three but still capped;
- g) The service would see increased funding for 2024/25. The managed team would leave but the structure would be permanent for another team and the service would be looking to actively recruit to those posts;
- h) There was strong oversight of children and young peoples interventions and financial costs of those interventions;

- i) The levels of referrals in 2022/23 were not right and Plymouth was not dealing with its referrals correctly and was part of the remedial work that was taking place and Plymouth was now in line with its statistical neighbours;
- j) The number of child protection plans had significantly increased and was in line with statistical neighbours. Caseloads remained fairly static;
- k) The task and finish group for the recruitment and retention offer would be looking at the key areas of focus identified by foster carers.

Action: Members to be given a briefing on the Leaders for Excellence programme.

Action: Members to be provided a briefing on the NSPCC Neglect tool.

Action: Links to the councils recruitment drive to be shared to Committee Members to spread more awareness.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

44. **Children's Social Care Improvement Plan**

Councillor Laing (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Culture, Events and Communications) introduced the report and highlighted the following key points:

- a) Plymouth had come to the end of the stabilisation and firm foundations of the plan and would be moving into develop, sustain and embed;
- b) The report shared a self-assessment which was provided to Ofsted in the recent inspection;
- c) Improvements in relation to the focussed visit of the Front Door at the end of 2022 had been achieved and sustained;
- d) Stabilising the workforce leadership and additional investment improved recruitment and retention;
- e) There was a clear understanding of strengths and areas of required improvement;
- f) The workforce was able to demonstrate passion and commitment to make differences to children's lives;
- g) The Ofsted report would be published on 15 March 2024.

Questions and discussions points from the Committee included:

- h) There were seven young people in unregistered placements and numbers have fluctuated. The children in those placements were not the same and

had good move on plans to appropriate placements;

- i) The target for children being seen alone by a social worker to gather their wishes and feelings was 95%. The performance reported included all children and it was acknowledged it was not appropriate to see some children alone;
- j) Plymouth had shown its capacity to improve and sustain improvements under the improvement notice;
- k) The age cohort of 5-9 years on a child protection plan;
- l) Early help was a key offer for the city and the offer would be improved in the city;
- m) Family hubs were integrated into the three year improvement strategy;
- n) MASH had seen increased resource which had seem sustained improvement since the improvement notice was given.

Action: Additional line to be placed within the report for unregistered placements.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

45. **Key Stage 4 Outcomes Report**

Councillor Cresswell (Cabinet Member for Education xxxx) introduced the report to the committee and was supported by Jim Barnicott (Head of Education and Virtual School).

Questions and discussion points from the Committee included:

- a) The number of children receiving SEN support and the waiting times in assessment times;
- b) How the Local authority held schools to account in how they spent their pupil premium;
- c) The Education service and Councillor Cresswell's continued and consistent engagement with schools in the city.

Action: Examples of best practice in relation to the pupil premium would be circulated to Members.

Action: The committee would receive a demographical report which would evaluate the links between free school meals and pupils grades and whether there were some schools evidencing positive outcomes. The report would also advise members of the numbers of children that were entitled to free schools meals but were electively home educated or were permanently excluded.

Action: In addition to action xx Jim Barnicott would write to work placed based co-ordinators and Multi Academy Trusts CEO's to ensure the place based plan continued to reflect the city's priorities.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

46. **Attendance Strategy and COVID Legacy Issues**

Councillor Cresswell (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Apprenticeships) presented the report to the Committee.

Questions and discussion points from the Committee included:

- a) Absence and key points in which absence became an issue such as the transfer between KS2 and KS3;
- b) The Plymouth inclusion and attendance toolkit;
- c) Transitions work being undertaken by the city and the need to get it right;
- d) The differences between Primary schools and its nurturing setup into secondary schools which were different;
- e) The introduction of the transitions portal for Primary and secondary schools and the introduction of the Early Years to Primary transitions portal which would begin for 2024/25;
- f) Toileting issues and the potential affect it was having on children and young people's attendance;
- g) Senior officers within the Council were challenging schools in relation to the issues around toileting;
- h) There were 541 pupils electively home educated at the end of Q3 2023/24 which increased from the previous year from 396;
- i) Severe absences of pupils in the city were increasing and were exacerbated at transition phases;
- j) Continued communication with families to ensure they felt welcomed back at school;
- k) Plymouth City Council's attendance campaign which fed into the Department for Educations campaign and the need to revisit that campaign and embed practice;
- l) The Council's Electively Home Educated team were able to provide resources to families where the decision to electively home educate was positive;

- m) The Council would understand children's needs where being electively home educated was a decision that was taken by parents/carers where they felt they had no choice to try and get those children and young people back into school;
- n) Children who were electively home educated but had a ECHP;
- o) Lack of SEND placement sufficiency within the city and the focussed piece of work to build places immediately and setting out a longer term strategy;
- p) Satellite provision within Plymouth's existing schools;
- q) Falling roles in relation to primary schools;
- r) The need to keep children and young people in their communities;
- s) The Graduated approach and requirement to keep some children and young people in mainstream school.

Action: Members would be provided the action plan that delivered the Attendance Strategy.

Action: The Inclusion and Attendance toolkit would be circulated to Committee Members.

Action: Education officers would arrange through the Participation team analysis into issue of attendance and bullying of children and young people within the LGBTQ+ community.

Action: Jim Barnicott to share materials that were taken to the Attendance Conference.

The Board agreed to note the report.

47. **Local Area SEND Improvement Plan and Accessible Plan**

Youth Ascends delivered a video and presentation to the Committee. Youth Ascends asked the following questions and were answered by Councillor Cresswell.

Q1) I haven't heard or seen anything about the Commitments in school. What are you doing to tell everyone about them?

The Accessibility Improvement Plan was approved by the SEND Improvement Board in December 2023. PIAS would be responsible for the maintenance and updating of the plan, however it was recognised work was required in relation to sharing and communication and this would be picked up by the Strategic Development Group on the 14 March 2024 to develop a plan for a full rollout. This would be taken back to the SEND Improvement Board to address issues of communication.

Q2) How will you ensure that leaders in the city are watching over the plans properly?

The Plan was overseen by the SEND Local Area Improvement Partnership Board and the independent chair, Karen Bradshaw. There was political representation on the Board with senior council leaders people from Schools, Health, PIAS and Plymouth Parent Carer Voice and met every 6 weeks to review progress and take actions where required.

The Board reported to the highest levels of local bodies which included Plymouth City Council, ICB and DFE. The council knew how important this was and the importance that plans moved forward and had an impact and you were the key people to understand whether the plans were making a difference in your lives.

Q3) What are you doing to make sure that every classroom is a place where children belong and learn with the right support?

There was work being done by the Council on the Graduated Approach to make sure in schools there was an approach to special education needs and supporting them all the way through their school lives which was in draft form and a new website was being developed and launched in May 2024. The website and Graduated Approach would help teachers and assistants to work and support SEND people.

The things you (Youth Ascends) were putting forward helps to improve teachers and teaching assistants and how they work. The wider support service would develop the workforce.

Q4) I don't think other children know about Autism and ADHD. How will teachers stop children bullying children with special education needs?

In the improvement programme the specialist support service, Educational Psychologists, specialist teaching service, special schools and outreach services alongside health professionals would work closely with schools to provide support and advice in relation to specific special education needs.

The team would be building on the consultation led model of delivery where the educational psychology service would meet individually with schools to discuss whole schools and individual children's needs.

This would now be further developed to include the wider specialist services to ensure class teachers were coming back to classes and they had the right approach, right tools and right support at the right time. The team would be interested in more instances of bullying to ensure that they were addressed.

Children that were moving from primary into secondary school tended not to have understanding relationships with their peers when in secondary school settings.

We need to take that back in terms of pupils voice within schools. Schools Council's could be talking about this themselves to improve. A wider discussion could take

place around how we supported schools to deal with bullying and ensure it was sorted.

Q5) How will you make sure that teachers know about Special Education Need in schools and college?

This fell under the work around the Graduated Approach and Lisa McDonald with SENCO networks to provide schools with a framework to help with professional development. Lisa was helping to put together professional development to help teach teachers better so they could do their job better and have better things in classes which could help children learn.

Q6) What are you doing to increase transparency on waiting lists?

There was a work stream looking at waiting times as part of the SEND Improvement plan and Health were committed to:

- Setting standards for how we communicate and deal with people that were waiting and would like to collaborate with children, young people and carers.
- Improving the data we share with the local authority and local area through routine inputs on dashboards and through process and meetings such as scrutiny meetings;
- Working to understand those with the most needs are prioritised within the waiting lists;
- Co-producing with children, young people, parents and carers
- Working to reduce waiting times and to bring assessments and carers closer to schools and communities;
- Some waiting lists were published nationally, such as the children's mental health services waiting time.

Q7) How will you make the transition from children to adult services easier?

We are working with the Educational Health Care Plan team, and our specialist teams in education and social care to develop an improved programme which would ensure the right professionals worked closely with schools and families and young people, starting that work in year 9 and we know we have a lot of work to do in getting this right going forward.

Q8) Could children and young peoples voice be included within staff training?

This was a good suggestion and perhaps that could be put in and you could trial and provide feedback as to what they were like. Youth Ascends had already showcased its good graphics and that input could be useful to provide really good quality provision.

DH – This was a helpful offer to have your voice developing the learning and development training for Plymouth’s schools and the Council’s workforce would be helpful. There were no bounds in relation to how you would like to be involved, developing and shaping the materials, contributing to the delivery of the materials and using Natalia’s excellent graphics and we would like to take this forward with you.

Q9) Do you have an estimated date for when these promises would be fulfilled?

We are gradually working through things but I cannot give you a full estimate when everything would be fulfilled but we are working to a timetable of certain things as we had a SEND inspection which was not very good and recognised a lot of work required. We need to make sure we get some things in place for another inspection, likely to be in January 2025 and we needed to make sure we were working at pace.

It was important that Plymouth didn’t only put things in place for the inspectors but that Plymouth needed to ensure things were better for our children and young people in our city and city schools and in our community and that is what drives us and makes us work. If you make some positive contributions we could perhaps make progression at a faster rate. You could also advise us and provide comments as to how well you think we are doing in supporting you.

Q10) Criteria for help inside and outside of schools: Could the criteria be lowered as your case was not ‘bad’ enough for one service but too serious for another.

Plymouth needed to have consistency and we were working on early intervention and giving support to our young people and parents and carers as early as we can. This is an aspiration and we haven’t managed to achieve all of that criteria. Plymouth needed to ensure that its workforce had good knowledge of SEND and supporting young people in schools so that as many as possible could remain in mainstream school and were fully included.

DH – we need to talk to Health about this as well and we have asked people in Health to contribute to these questions. There is scope for Health to come and speak to you, to gain specific examples of what would be helpful and what your experiences are to inform their practice.

Q11) Are there particular methods to talk to young people? Henry advised that some young people may not have felt safe discussing in front of their peers or alternatively young people that were being home educated.

Plymouth needed to make sure people were comfortable to speak to us. We needed to seek out and talk to young people around what the most suitable environment for them. What you have said is right and you should be in a comfortable environment and school isn’t always the best place to talk about things and you need to feel comfortable and relax before putting the best points of view across. We would appreciate that as you have a lot to offer us in how we work better, smarter and provide better outcomes for yourselves.

Q12) Can you clarify the situation of bus passes and not being able to use them before a certain time to get to school.

Recommendation: The Committee would go to a Youth Ascends meeting.

Action: Officers would investigate Youth Ascends feedback that the time taken to between applying for a bus pass and receiving it was too long.

48. **Work Programme**

The Committee agreed to:

1. Hold a select committee on Emotional health and wellbeing of children in the city
2. To add to the work programme 'school toileting'

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