

Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday 20 June 2018

PRESENT:

Councillor Mrs Beer, in the Chair.

Councillor Murphy, Vice Chair.

Councillors Mrs Aspinall (substituting for Winter), Derrick, Downie (substituting for Johnson), Goslin, Samantha Leaves, Rebecca Smith and Tuohy.

Apologies for absence: Councillors Johnson and Winter.

Also in attendance: Councillor McDonald (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People), Councillor Jon Taylor (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Transformation), Neelam Bhardwaja (Service Director for Children, Young People and Families), Judith Harwood (Service Director for Education, Participation and Skills) and Amelia Boulter (Democratic Adviser).

The meeting started at 2.00 pm and finished at 4.35 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.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

3. Chair's Urgent Business

There were no items of Chair's urgent business.

4. Terms of Reference

The Committee noted the Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Terms of Reference.

5. Work Programme

Councillor McDonald (Cabinet Member for the Children and Young People) has responsibility for Children's Social Care and the lead member for Children and Young People introduced the item. Neelam Bhardwaja (Service Director for Children, Young People and Families) gave Alison Botham's apologies. Alison was

currently involved in Torbay's Children Services Ofsted. Neelam provided an overview of children's social care. It was highlighted that –

- (a) they were working with schools and partners to offer assistance to people and young families when difficulties start to emerge as part of the early help offer;
- (b) they use best practice standards to ensure that the child was central to everything they do;
- (c) they were engaging with children and young people by listening to their voice and were working in partnership with agencies to give a united response to keep children and young people safe and supported;
- (d) they were undertaking a 10 year programme called Together for Childhood with the NSPCC which focusses on preventing child sexual abuse;
- (e) another project they were hoping to have in place in September 2018 called PAUSE which supports women that continually have their children taken away This project started in Hackney and has been very successful in building self-esteem for these women;
- (f) with regard to recruiting and retaining of staff, they had improved the offer to staff by providing development opportunities and reviewing caseloads;
- (g) the challenges for Children's Social Care -
 - continuing to manage demand;
 - managing 16/17 year old with complex behaviours and needs;
 - containing cost of residential placements;
 - planning for 0-25 agenda for Care Leavers;
 - successful transition to Regional Adoption Agency (RAA);
 - recruiting qualified experienced social workers.

In response to questions, it was reported that –

- (h) an independent person was brought in to quality assess their audit work and to give them an overview and assurance that they were on the right track with the grading of their work and to ensure that the were Ofsted ready;
- (i) caseloads were split across 150 social workers with each being allocated around 20 cases each, it was highlighted however that social workers work across a wide spectrum and caseloads would vary from team to team. Weekly workload meetings take place to ensure that caseloads were manageable for social workers;

- (j) the current level of sickness was currently at 6.82% and the turnover of staff was currently at 14% with the national average currently at 15%. It was highlighted that you would expect people to move and change jobs and exit interviews were conducted when an employee leaves the council;
- (k) they follow best practice standards on referrals and assessment;
- (l) with regard to long term stability of children in care, it was highlighted that the integrated team would help with the smooth transition and planning of young people post 18 years;
- (m) they want to reduce institutional placements and provide placement stability by building support around the person and the placement to stop the placement from breaking down.

Councillor Jon Taylor (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Transformation) has responsibility for learning and skills introduced the item. Judith Harwood (Service Director for Education, Participation and Skills) further highlighted –

- (n) that the main purpose was facilitating partnerships so that all children, young people and their families in Plymouth have the best access and opportunities, this is done by –
 - championing for children;
 - commissioning with others and working in partnership to secure high quality services, and
 - convening collaborative relationships to secure outstanding provision;
- (o) the nine key functions of the department -
 - school improvement
 - health and wellbeing
 - transport
 - admissions and organisation
 - safeguarding and inclusion (including the virtual school)
 - skills
 - special educational needs and disability
 - sport development
- (p) that from April 2018 there were only 25 maintained schools left in the city. The local authority can use their powers of intervention to challenge schools that were underperforming and help them improve;
- (q) that the local authority works together with the Department of Education (DfE), Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC), Teaching School Alliances, Schools and Multi Academy Trusts to support and improve the education system;

- (r) that the business plan priorities were linked to plans such as the Children and Young People's Plan, STEM Plan, Plan for Sport and the Skills Plan. They also work very closely with Plymouth Children Safeguarding Board (PSCB) to ensure there was a clear priority around safeguarding. These plans sit within the Plymouth Plan;
- (s) that this service area was funded by Plymouth City Council, money received from schools trading with the vast majority of the funding received from the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG);
- (t) that since the change to how schools were funded, Plymouth received one of the highest uplifts of 5.2% which amounts to around £7.5m a year. Plymouth compared to other local authorities had a very low baseline to start with and consequently would not feel well compensated for at least another 3 years;
- (u) the challenges for Children's Education, Participation and Skills -
 - children being ready for school
 - we are below the national average in performance at KS4
 - falling school attendance
 - growing numbers of complex cases in SEND
 - fragmentation in the system
 - school governance, we no longer have oversight of governors in the city.
- (v) the Plymouth Challenge was recently set up to address KS4 performance and the focus of the challenge was to bring a coherence to help people to collaborate, developing strong leadership, challenge groups at schools to raise standards and to offer a wraparound advice and aspiration to young people.

In response to questions raised, it was reported that -

- (w) with regard to school admissions, if a school was oversubscribed a criteria would need to be followed and if we can't find the right outcome we can ask the school to go over the planned admission number. A discussion also took place around whether there were catchment areas within the city;
- (x) with regard to Longcause School and the change to the school's finishing time on a Friday. It was reported that schools were at liberty to consult on the length of the school day and discussions had taken place with the school and assurances given that an after school club would take place to enable children to stay on after the school day had finished;
- (y) the timeframe for Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) would normally be completed within 20 weeks. It was highlighted that this may seem like a long time scale however, it was important to invest

the time to get the plan right for the child and family. Two EHCPs did go over the 20 week period but this was at the request of the parents. However, some were completed well within the 20 weeks because the parents were very clear about what was required for their child;

- (z) they currently do not have adequate services in place to support people with autism post 18 years and this was a national issue. It was further reported that families with children that had special educational needs and disability (SEND) were supported up to 25 years;
- (aa) they have undertaken a new holistic approach by working with adult social care, the care leavers team and a range of partners to look at supported work experience and internship. However, building the infrastructure around housing had been more difficult with parents electing to keep young people at home and deal with the employability first thus delaying the reality around future housing;
- (bb) they collaborated with housing partners across the city to provide a wraparound support to the family to help the young person with SEND as part of the preparing for adulthood programme;
- (cc) with regard to performance data it was highlighted that most of the indicators were not comparable from year to year;
- (dd) the Plymouth Education Board wanted to address the issues around key stage performance in the city which resulted in the Plymouth Challenge. This was launched with schools and was now a schools led project with full support from the local authority and the Regional Schools Commissioner's Office;
- (ee) it was their understanding when talking with early years settings that a small number of children were not absorbing language within the home and this inevitably would have an impact on children engaging with education.

It was agreed –

1. A glossary of the Children Service's acronyms and terminology to be circulated to the Committee.
2. The Children Service's Best Practice Standards to be circulated to the Committee.
3. A briefing paper explaining the school admissions process, criteria and catchment areas, if any, to be circulated to the Committee.
4. The Committee to be provided with the Children Service's Business Plans including action plans.

5. Visit to the Gateway for the Committee to meet the team and gain a better understanding of the 'front door'.
6. To enable the Committee to scrutinise more effectively, headline performance data going back 2 - 3 years to be provided with the caveat that data received was not comparable year on year.

To add to the work programme –

7. To receive a report on high cost of placements and how the scrutiny committee can effectively monitor these placements.
8. To receive a report outlining the NSPCC's Together for Childhood project and how progress of the project is monitored over the next 10 years.
9. To monitor the progress of the Plymouth Challenge.
10. The Committee to receive a report on school readiness around assessments undertaken in early years and reception to ascertain speech and language levels and the support provided to the child and family.
11. To receive a report on the support received by families with children and young people with high functioning autism and SEND, in particular, exploring housing support and transition into adulthood.

6. **Work Programme**

The Committee agreed that for the following items to be scheduled into its work programme for the current year:

Refer to minute 5.

- The role of the Regional Schools Commissioner.
- Update from the Plymouth Children Safeguarding Board.
- The legal framework for undertaking assessments.
- A report on the Plymouth Education Board to include overview of the board, membership and terms of reference.
- A report on School Transport (in relation to an untaxed school vehicle).