

Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday 10 July 2019

PRESENT:

Councillor Mrs Johnson, in the Chair.
Councillor McDonald, Vice Chair.
Councillors Allen, Buchan, Goslin, James and Loveridge.

Co-opted Representatives: Mrs Nicky Williams (Parent Governor Representative)

Apologies for absence: Councillors Downie and Murphy.

Also in attendance: Also in attendance: Ed Coley (Head of Skills and Employability), Judith Harwood (Service Director for Education, Participation and Skills), Councillor Jemima Laing (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People), Isabelle Morgan (Inclusion and Attendance Manager), Councillor Jon Taylor (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Transformation) and Helen Rickman (Democratic Advisor).

The meeting started at 2.00 pm and finished at 4.00 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.

10. **Declarations of Interest**

The following declarations of interest were made by Members in accordance with the code of conduct:

| Member | Subject | Reason | Interest |
|------------------------|----------------|--|-----------------|
| Mrs Nicky Williams | All items | She is a Parent Governor at High View Primary and sits on the Plymouth Teaching School Alliance. | Personal |
| Councillor Mrs Johnson | All items | She is a Governor at Compton Primary School. | Personal |

11. **Minutes**

Members agreed the minutes of the last meeting held on 29 May 2019.

12. **Chair's Urgent Business**

There were no items of Chair's Urgent Business.

13. **Number of Children in Care - verbal update**

Judith Harwood (Service Director for Education, Participation and Skills) advised Members that there were currently 417 children in the care of Plymouth City Council.

Agreed that further details of the trend over the previous 6 month period of children in care would be provided to Members.

14. **Pledge Update**

Councillor Jon Taylor (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Transformation), Councillor Jemima Laing (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People) and Judith Harwood (Service Director for Education, Participation and Skills) advised Members that there were 10 pledges relevant to the panel's terms of reference.

In response to questions raised it was reported that:

- (a) the focus for Pledge 41 was linked to children and young people in care that the council was responsible for, in order to encourage more people to remain living in their own communities, where possible, other than using institutional placements;
- (b) Pledge 47 focused upon the promotion of fostering and adoption in Plymouth with a renewed campaign; this campaign had been completed however it was highlighted that there were continued efforts to attract new foster carers for the city's children;
- (c) Pledge 40, regarding raising school standards, and Pledge 42, regarding the introduction of a fair system to take an annual holiday without penalty, were both linked as school attendance rates were seen to impact achievement – a consultation regarding school attendance was due to go out in the public domain shortly and information from this would be submitted to scrutiny in September 2019;
- (d) there was an ongoing task to identify young carers that were not currently registered with the Council.

Members noted the update and requested that the School Attendance Consultation is added to the work programme for discussion in September 2019 (to include data regarding achievement levels in schools).

15. **Fair Funding for Schools**

Councillor Jon Taylor (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Transformation) and Judith Harwood (Service Director for Education, Participation and Skills) presented the Fair Funding for Schools report.

The following key points were highlighted:

- (a) the inclusion of this report to the Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Panel was as a result of a recommendation from a

Motion that went to Full Council in March 2019;

- (b) the introduction of the National Funding Formula from 2018/19 was an attempt by Local Government to address historic inequities in funding for schools; Plymouth's Schools Block had increased from £143.056m in 2017/18 to £149.550, in 2018/19 however Plymouth was still receiving £283 less per pupil than the national average;
- (c) despite the challenges none of the maintained schools in Plymouth were forecasting a deficit position at the end of 2019/20 financial year; whilst this was positive news there was a desire to understand what actions schools had taken to balance their budgets;

Members discussed the benefit of forming a select committee to look at the issue in greater depth in order to measure the impact of the current funding upon schools in Plymouth.

The Chair echoed the Cabinet Member's praise of schools good financial management and acknowledged the difficult climate they were working in.

It was agreed that the Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Panel would undertake a select review in order to assess the impact of the National Funding Formula (NFF) upon Plymouth schools, with particular attention upon the impact on staffing reduction including teaching assistants, the increase in class sizes, collapsing the school day and concerns schools have for the children over the city.

16. **Elective Home Education**

Councillor Jon Taylor (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Transformation), Judith Harwood (Service Director for Education, Participation and Skills) and Isabelle Morgan (Inclusion and Attendance Manager) presented the Elective Home Education report.

Key points highlighted to Members included:

- (a) the Elective Home Education support service was delivered by the ACE Multi Academy Trust who held the register of children who were electively home educated; ACE Multi Academy Trust monitored the curriculum and the delivery of home education however there was no requirement for families to register but this was encouraged. This contract was due to end in August 2019 and the monitoring and oversight of home education would be the responsibility of Plymouth City Council;
- (b) Electively Home Educated (EHE) pupils were also monitored through a Local Authority register; appropriate action was taken where it appeared that an EHE pupil was not receiving suitable education;
- (c) the Department for Education was conducting a consultation in relation to establishing a local authority registration system for children who did not

attend state-funded or registered independent schools;

- (d) the Home Education Bill had its third reading at the House of Commons on 24 July 2018 – the outcome was the withdrawal of the Bill at this point in the process however the Department for Education subsequently launched a Call for Evidence regarding children not in school. This call for evidence incorporated elective home education as a theme. This call for evidence closed on 24th June 2019 and officers were awaiting the outcome with regard to the impact for children who were electively home educated;
- (e) Officers considered that parents should be given a two week cooling-off period once they have withdrawn their child from school – this would provide officers with a short window of opportunity to work with parents to find out possible resolutions to problems. Officers also suggested that a child who had withdrawn from school should be able to return to school up to a six month period after they had withdrawn to make it easier for them to return to the formal education system.

In response to questions raised it was reported that –

- (f) there was currently a voluntary registration system for home education therefore it was not known how many children had only ever been home educated as parents were not required to notify the Local Authority;
- (g) a significant number of those who had elected to be home educated had given the reason for this choice to be ‘other’ on the questionnaire instead of specifying why – it was considered that this was because it was a lifestyle choice and they had elected not to be a part of the local authority education system;
- (h) the school was required to notify the local authority if a child had been removed from a school setting to instead be electively home educated;
- (i) schools were working closely with the Council to recognise and reduce pupil movement, specifically with regards to elective home education;
- (j) from the data provided it was highlighted that those who had elective home education were mainly white British;
- (k) the majority of children in the city who were part of the travelling community were enrolled in school settings; an education officer would visit children who had arrived to the city;
- (l) Officers were often unable to identify reasons for a child being home schooled, or to see if a child had previously had multiple school settings or exclusions as the child was immediately removed from roll once the child was withdrawn so this information was not available to them.

Members noted the update and agreed to include the DFE consultation results to the work programme for discussion in the autumn (with reference to the Inclusion and Attendance Strategy).

17. **Bullying and Attendance**

Councillor Jon Taylor (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Transformation), Judith Harwood (Service Director for Education, Participation and Skills) and Isabelle Morgan (Inclusion and Attendance Manager) presented the Bullying and Attendance report.

The following key points were highlighted to Members:

- (a) a sample of 415 of the current open cases referred to an Education Welfare Officer had been reviewed by Officers; within this sample, 5% of the cases cited bullying as a reason for persistent absence;
- (b) schools were required by law to act to prevent bullying and also to address it if it happened; the Department for Education (DfE) had produced guidance for all schools which outlined their duty towards preventing and tackling bullying: www.gov.uk/government/publications/preventing-and-tackling-bullying
- (c) the Education Reference Group (Safeguarding) had identified that the way in which the software used to monitor bullying (CPOMS) was inconsistent therefore a piece of work was underway to develop best practice guidance for schools to use this software and form part of best practice guidance;
- (d) Plymouth City Council had a webpage which provided advice around bullying and signposted to support services and was improving the Plymouth Online Directory to enhance the information available;
- (e) Officers were continuing to work with families and schools to properly support them and had recently sent a letter to Plymouth Head Teachers requesting data in relation in absence.

In response to questions raised it was reported that –

- (f) there was no single route for parents to report bullying to the local authority;
- (g) the Plymouth Online Directory was advertised on the Council's website and included on the bottom of letterheads.

It was agreed that the Committee:

1. recommend to Officers to extend an invitation to both a Primary and Secondary Head Teacher to attend a future Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee in order to advise Members on how they react to bullying within their schools;
2. recommend to Officers to explore the feasibility of inviting a parent whose

child had been bullied to a future Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee in order to share their experiences;

3. would hear from Mrs Nicky Williams (Parent Governor Representative) at a future scrutiny committee regarding a case of bullying she was aware of which she could share with Members.

18. **Care Leavers and NEET - plan (to follow)**

Councillor Jemima Laing (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People), Judith Harwood (Service Director for Education, Participation and Skills) and Ed Coley (Head of Skills and Employability) presented the Care Leavers and NEET Plan.

It was highlighted to Members that Pledge 48 focused upon the work involved in providing support to care leavers up to the age of 25 years old; it was recognised that a coordinated approach was required from a variety of partner agencies to achieve a sustainable offer for all young people in care or leaving the care of the local authority.

In response to questions raised it was reported that:

- (a) the I10 Club consisted of representation from several council departments, a wide range of partners including Barnardos, the Virtual School Team and a Head Teacher;
- (b) it was recognised through analysis that work experience for young people and the planning for it needed to happen much earlier in order to engage children and offer them the correct support to develop their skills;
- (c) 17% of care leavers between the ages of 18-25 years old were NEET (not in education, employment or training) because of ill health or disability;
- (d) the Care Journeys work with Barnardos focused upon achieving outcomes for care leavers; the programme included volunteering opportunities. One Plymouth was also working to create a system for volunteers to easily identify what opportunities were available.

Agreed that a progress report on Care Leavers and NEET (Pledge 48) would be scheduled on the panel's work programme for 6 months' time.

19. **Strategic Risk and Opportunity Register - update**

The Chair advised Members that the Strategic Risk and Opportunity Register was attached to the agenda in order for the panel to be aware of risks that specifically linked to their terms of reference.

It was agreed to include information upon the Failure to Reduce Health Inequalities to the committee's work programme as this was an amber risk; for an action plan and future mitigations to be provided to Members.

20. **Work Programme**

Members discussed the work programme and agreed the following:

- (a) Ofsted Improvement Plan – to be discussed on 11 September 2019;
- (b) Child Exploitation – to be discussed on 11 September 2019 (for Members to be provided with the scope of child exploitation and include information upon cyber issues, modern slavery and the framework for the multi-agency group);
- (c) Education and Skills Strategy – refresh (date not specified);
- (d) Plymouth Challenge Update - to be discussed on 11 September 2019;
- (e) New Ofsted Framework – (impact on the inspection framework) to be discussed on 13 November 2019;
- (f) School Attendance Consultation - to be discussed on 11 September 2019 (to include data regarding achievement levels in schools);
- (g) Fair Funding for Schools – Select Review (to assess the impact of the National Funding Formula (NFF) upon Plymouth schools, with particular attention upon the impact on staffing reduction including teaching assistants, the increase in class sizes, collapsing the school day and concerns schools have for the children over the city);
- (h) Elective Home Education (DFE consultation results to be added to the work programme for discussion in the Autumn with reference to the Inclusion and Attendance Strategy);
- (i) progress report on Care Leavers and NEET (Pledge 48) would be scheduled on the panel's work programme for 6 months' time (8 January 2020);
- (j) Failure to Reduce Health Inequalities - this was an amber risk on the Strategic Risk Register (for an action plan and future mitigations to be provided to Members)

21. **Tracking Decisions**

The Chair advised Members that all tracking resolutions from previous meetings had been completed as information had been emailed out.

Members noted the completed tracking decisions document.

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