

CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16 November 2017

Present:-

Councillors R Hannaford (Chair), D Sellis (Vice-Chair), S Aves, J Brazil, E Brennan, C Channon, I Chubb, G Gribble, J Hawkins, L Hellyer, R Hosking, A Saywell, M Squires and C Mabin

Apologies:-

Councillors F Biederman, T Inch and J Mathews

Members attending in accordance with Standing Order 25

Councillor J McInnes

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Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Children's Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 11 September 2017 be signed as a correct record.

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Items Requiring Urgent Attention

There was no item raised as a matter of urgency.

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Public Participation

There were no oral representations received at the meeting from a member of the public.

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In-Year Budget Briefing

The Committee received the Report of the Chief Officer for Children's Services (CS/17/34) outlining those areas of specific pressures on budgets, potential under and over-spending in the current financial year and on action being taken. The Report noted that need and demand was expected to grow within the Service whilst resource was expected to stay the same or reduce. There were significant challenges faced within the Service with appropriate actions in place to address them. The Head of Service explained that the legal and regulatory frameworks that supported the delivery of Children's Services constrained the discretion the Council had in the management of need and resource.

The three key areas of pressure identified within the Report included placement sufficiency, the Disabled Children's Service and school transport. The Report had revealed that Children's Services was showing a forecast overspend of £1.643 million. This included a forecast overspend in Children's Social Care of £699,000; a forecast overspend in Placement costs of £933,000 and a forecast overspend in Disabled Children's Services of £716,000. These overspends within Children's Social Care had been partially offset by vacancy management, lower legal disbursement and other minor variations of £567,000.

The Report highlighted that the non - Dedicated Schools Grant element of Education and Learning was forecasting an overspend of £944,000 due to increases in personalised transport, with the number of pupils being transported to special schools having increased by 278 (+27%) since the summer term of 2015. Members discussed concerns around the overspend in budget for school transport.

In response to Members' questions, the Head of Service explained that cost savings within the Early Help budget was due to significant restructures within the department and a drive to recruit new staff, with a slight delay in the allocation and appointment of posts. The Service was also subject to 'payment by results' which made the budget unpredictable and fluid, as the Service had to meet targets in order to receive payments. This underspend at month 4 would balance out now that staff had been allocated to positions within the Service.

It was **MOVED** by Councillor Saywell and **SECONDED** by Councillor Channon and

RESOLVED that Cabinet be recommended to lobby Government on updating legislation regarding school transport due to the large pressures faced by rural counties in providing specialist transport provision.

* **24** **Improvement Board - North**

The Committee received the Report of the Chief Officer for Children's Services (CS/17/33) on the progress of Children's Social Care in the North locality and aimed to identify any risk or issues that required further attention. Following a commissioned review of social work in May 2017, it was identified that services in the North of the County were weaker than other areas, in particular concerns around leadership and management and the support and supervision of staff. As a result, an Improvement Board was established which had monitored progress in the North since June 2017, focussing on core issues including leadership and culture, staffing levels, management and supervision, core practice standards and quality of input from support services such as HR.

The Report highlighted key areas of difficulties including the recruitment and retention of social workers and reducing the number or caseloads per worker.

Members' discussion points with Officers included:

- the accessibility of training and development for staff;
- the need for competitive salaries in comparison to other local authorities;
- the number of caseloads per worker;
- the need for permanent Managers following a period of instability and constant change of senior leadership.

* **25** **Early Help Update**

The Committee received the Report of the Head of Education and Learning (CS/17/37) on the progress of Devon's Early Help System with the aim to help more children, young people and families being supported at an earlier stage, thereby preventing the need for escalation to statutory and specialist services.

The Report highlighted that improvement to the Early Help service was being progressed through the multi-agency Early Help Improvement Board, providing a strategic and coordinated overview of improvements and transformations to the Service. The Early Help Service Transformation Maturity Model, published by the Department for Education, provided a framework for local areas to assess their performance against set themes.

The Report highlighted an overall positive view of progress in transforming Early Help services, which has been seen in the development of the workforce, systems and practice. There was a strong commitment across the partnership to deliver change which improved the outcomes and experience for families.

Members' discussion points with Officers included:

- ensuring that families in need of help are identified at the right stage of the Early Help process;
- accessibility to services for rural families;

- a request for a break down in demographics of those families accessing Early Help Services
- the need for Early Help performance indicators.

* **26** **Promoting Inclusion and Monitoring Exclusions**

The Committee received the Report of the Head of Education and Learning (CS/17/38) on promoting inclusions and monitoring exclusions in Devon. There was a clear focus on increasing inclusions and reducing the number of exclusions across the County through the Devon Inclusion Project, which focussed on prevention, intervention and reintegration. The Project worked in collaboration and partnership with schools, looking at five main work streams: Primary Strand; Practice & Charter; Early Help; Recommissioning and Children in Care.

The Report highlighted that the number of permanent exclusions in 2016/17 had significantly increased and now stood at 0.15% of the pupil population. This was compared to 2015/16 data where the number of exclusions was at 0.09% of the pupil population. In Devon, the majority of exclusions could be seen in Key Stage 3, where previously it would have been in Key Stage 4; this was in keeping with national trends. Children in vulnerable groups were more likely to be excluded than their peers; with pupils with Statements or EHCPs ten times more likely to be permanently excluded than pupils with no identified special education need. This was higher than the national average (2015/16) where pupils with a Statement of EHCP were four times more likely to be excluded.

Discussion points with Members included:

- a recognition of a reduction in schools funding and the impact this was having on schools being able to provide the level of support needed for children at risk of exclusion, such as additional pastoral care;
- the breakdown in the number of exclusions by gender and the statistics showing boys were more likely to be excluded than girls;
- screen culture and the use of technology at an early age, affecting the development of children's communication and language skills, thereby attributing to their behaviour linked to frustration around communication;
- the change in GCSE structure and curriculum, with many schools now starting the qualification in Year 9, and the affect this may be having on pupils as a result of a more focused/challenging curriculum;
- the additional guidance available to schools to help support pupils through transition stages, such as starting Reception or Year 7;
- the research into the potential correlation between the number of exclusions and rates of suicide and self-harm amongst young people;
- a change in culture around exclusions within schools;
- the relationship between the reduction in youth provision including youth clubs, SEN provision, pressure on performance results, mental health provision and the overall affect this has had on the ability to support young people and the impact on their behaviour as a result.

* **27** **0-19 Public Health Nursing Service Consultation**

The Committee received the Report of the Chief Officer for Childrens Services (CS/17/35) outlining the process to ensure full contribution by the Committee is made to the consultation process regarding the future of the 0-19 Public Health Nursing (PHNS) in Devon.

It was **MOVED** by Councillor Sellis and **SECONDED** by Councillor Brennan and

RESOLVED that the Children's Scrutiny Committee conduct a Spotlight Review to contribute to the consultation process regarding the contract for 0-19 Public Health Nursing in Devon.

* **28** **SEND Progress Update Report**

The Committee received the Report of the Head of Education and Learning (CS/17/39) outlining progress and development with the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Improvement Board in relation to the SEND strategy and Improvement Plan, with close monitoring of progress ongoing. The Report highlighted that children with SEN in Devon achieved good outcomes and were above the national average. Progress highlighted within the Report included:

- the establishment of a multi-agency SEND Improvement Board;
- work streams commissioned to deliver transformation;
- an SEND strategy implementation plan;
- a new multi-agency EHC assessment process;
- a reshape of the 0-25 SEN Team in line with the locality model;
- LGA Peer Review;
- EHCP training for multi-agency professionals.

* **29** **Children's Social Care Performance Report**

The Committee received the Children's Social Care Performance Report from the Head of Children's Social Care (CS/17/36) on the latest performance measures. Key areas highlighted within the Report and by the Chief Officer included, inter alia, the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH); Children in Need; referrals into statutory children's services; single assessments; child protection enquiries; child protection conferences; repeat child protection plans and Children in Care.

It was **MOVED** by Councillor Hannaford and **SECONDED** by Councillor Sellis and

RESOLVED that the Committee receive an update on progress against recommendations of the Care Leavers Task Group Report.

* **30** **Education and Learning Performance Report**

The Committee received the Report of the Head of Education and Learning (CS/17/40) on the latest performance measures, highlighting key areas including: attainment, Early Years Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1 assessments, Key Stage 2 and 4 provisional results, requests for statutory assessments, transfers from statements and admission appeals. The Report noted that Devon was above average in all key areas of education performance.

* **31** **Children's Scrutiny Committee Work Programme**

RESOLVED that the current outline Work Programme be approved subject to inclusion of the following topics for future consideration:

- (a) Public Health Nursing Spotlight Review;
- (b) Special Guardianship Task Group

[NB: The Scrutiny Work Programme was available on the Council's website at <https://new.devon.gov.uk/democracy/committee-meetings/scrutiny-committees/scrutiny-workprogramme/> and the Council/Cabinet Forward Plan is available at <http://democracy.devon.gov.uk/mgListPlans.aspx?RPId=133&RD=0&bcr=1>]

***DENOTES DELEGATED MATTER WITH POWER TO ACT**

The Meeting started at 2.15 pm and finished at 5.05 pm