

CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

23 January 2018

Present:-

Councillors R Hannaford (Chair), D Sellis (Vice-Chair), S Aves, F Biederman, E Brennan, C Channon, I Chubb, J Hawkins, L Hellyer, R Hosking, T Inch, J Mathews, A Saywell and M Squires

Apologies:-

Councillors J Brazil, G Gribble and C Mabin

Members attending in accordance with Standing Order 25

Councillor J McInnes

* 36

Items Requiring Urgent Attention

(An item taken under Section 100B (4) of the Local Government Act, 1972)

The Chair had decided that the Committee should consider this item as a matter of urgency in order that Members may be updated on the current consultation around the fees and allowances in relation to internal foster carers.

The Chair furthermore exercised his discretion, and in the spirit of the Council's Public Participation Scheme, the Committee received and acknowledged oral representations made by Mr D Leyland, Mrs M Peters and Mrs L Strange on this matter.

The Chair responded, thanking the speakers for their attendance and presentations which would be considered by the Committee during its subsequent deliberations.

The Chief Officer for Children's Services advised Members that the current payment scheme in relation to internal foster carers was complex and had not been updated in the past 15 years; consultation was ongoing to update the current scheme and ensure equity and fairness to all foster carers. There would be an overall investment into the internal fostering Service of £1.3millions over the next two years, to achieve an additional 27 foster placements. There would also be a £1.5million investment in the Independent Fostering sector to fund an additional 52 fostering places; allowing for an overall £2.8million investment in fostering services to create 79 fostering placements over the next two years.

The Chief Officer explained that there was currently an inequity within the fee structure, as a child with a certain set of needs could be placed in any one of three families who all currently got paid a different fee. The Consultation with foster carers would look at how to resolve any inequities and ensure the system was fair, whilst minimising the impact on placement stability. No savings had been planned from the restructuring of this services and the Council had already made investments into the Service.

It was **MOVED** by Councillor Biederman, **SECONDED** by Councillor Squires, and

RESOLVED that an update be brought back to a future meeting of the Committee on the progress of the consultation and that Members will have the opportunity to input into the review process being undertaken by the Council on the Internal Fostering fee structure.

* **37** **Public Participation**

There were no further representations from Members of the Public (see minute *36).

* **38** **Children's Social Care Site Visits**

The Committee considered the findings of the Report (CS/18/04) in respect of Children's Social Care Site Visits, undertaken by Members of this Committee to monitor the performance and effectiveness of the Council's arrangements to protect and safeguard children from harm. Key findings of the site visits included, inter alia:

- good staff morale;
- recruitment and retention issues across the county in relation to permanent and agency staff which had caused instability for staff; this had been exacerbated by neighbouring authorities paying higher rates than Devon;
- reduced caseloads;
- the need for improved multi-agency working;
- better support for schools to help manage their risk;
- placement sufficiency and suitability with a lack of option for those young people with complex needs
- limited support for care leavers in terms of independent living;
- time spent for social workers waiting for car parking at County Hall.

Members had highlighted the dedication and hard work of staff over and beyond their contractual arrangements and wanted to ensure that Children's Social Care Staff were valued accordingly.

It was **MOVED** by Councillor Sellis, **SECONDED** by Councillor Mathews and

RESOLVED that the Report be commended to Cabinet and the issues raised regarding car parking difficulties for Social Workers and Social Worker professional development be further reviewed.

* **39** **Strategic Review of Special Educational Needs Provision**

The Committee received the Report of the Head of Education and Learning (CS/19/04) on the Strategic review of Special Educational Needs Provision, with the Council undertaking a strategic level review of educational provision for those children and young people (aged 0-25 years) with Special Educational Needs (SEN). The review had been undertaken due to the SEND Strategy Improvement Plan and the Department for Education requiring Local Authorities to undertake an assessment of the provision for children with complex needs and had provided guidance on how those reviews should be completed. The Department for Education had made available a capital fund for the next three years to carry out the work, commencing in 2018/19, of which £749,000 per year which would be ringfenced.

Current progress on the Project included:

- a desktop analysis of available data which included home transport;
- a detailed Asset Management Review of Devon's Special Schools;
- a review of support centres in mainstream schools;
- an external demographic review of Devon's SEND future needs;
- a review of out of county placements and learners in Alternative Provision; and
- a survey of children/young people with complex SEN, their parents and providers of education.

* **40** **Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Report**

The Committee considered the Report of the Chief Officer for Children's Services (CS/18/05) on the Devon Domestic, Sexual Violence and Abuse (DVSA) Strategy 2016-2021 that set out the vision to *end domestic and sexual violence and abuse in Devon*. A multi-agency DSVSA Strategy and Delivery Group had been established to oversee the implementation of the action plan, who were accountable to the Safer Devon Partnership.

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

RESOLVED that a briefing paper providing further information on Operation Encompass, be circulated to Members.

* **41** **Development of the Disabled Children's Service**

The Committee received the Report of the Chief Officer for Children's Services (CS/18/06) outlining plans to refocus the Disabled Children's Service (DCS) towards building independence, choice and control that would better support service users and their families into adulthood. The aim of the DCS was to offer services that were closer to the communities in which the children lived and to create a service that was more accessible to families and was safe and fit for purpose.

The Disabled Children's Services focussed on:

- rebalancing residential short breaks and community short breaks in line with the SEND strategy which increased the focus both on aspirations for children and raised carer support;
- reviewing the impact of Personal Budgets;
- reviewing the eligibility criteria to ensure the best response to the right families at the appropriate time; and
- emphasising inclusion in mainstream services, rather than relying on separate specialist provisions.

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

RESOLVED that an update Report be brought back to a future meeting of this Committee.

* **42** **Children's Centre Contract Implementation**

The Committee received the Report of the Chief Officer for Children's Services (CS/18/07) outlining the implementation of the Children's Centre Contract, which had moved toward an integrated system of delivery, working together with Health and Public Health, including Public Health Nursing Services. Changes to Children's Centres were consulted in 2014 and the following principles were agreed, based on feedback from families and communities:

- to focus services on the most vulnerable;
- reduce building costs;
- fund front line delivery;
- encourage others to deliver some universal services from Children's Centre buildings;
- reduce the number of contracts aligning to city/council boundaries.

The new contract was awarded to Action for Children for three years with the option to extend for one year, with the new contract focussing on delivering targeted intervention and support for children 8 years old and under to prevent the need for statutory intervention.

* **43** **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/18/08) on the latest performance measures. Key areas highlighted within the Report and by the Chief Officer included, inter alia, population profile and caseloads, the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and referrals; Children in Need; Child Protection, Children Looked After and Care Leavers, and Adoption.

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

RESOLVED that future performance reports be clear and concise and reformatted to highlight key themes and any areas for improvement.

* **44** **Education and Learning Performance Report**

The Committee received the Report of the Head of Education and Learning (CS/18/03) on the latest performance measures, highlighting key areas including: Early Years Foundation Stage, Free School Meals, Special Educational Needs pupils, requests for Statutory Assessments, and transfers from statements. The Report noted that Devon was above average in all key areas of educational performance. An Annual Report on the Devon Virtual School was also provided, analysing key data including outcomes for Looked After Children and Children in Care, attendance and absence, and outcomes for each key stage.

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

RESOLVED that the current Work Programme be approved subject to inclusion of the following topics for future consideration and also those agreed at the meeting:

(a) a future Report on Missing Children and Young People

[NB: The Scrutiny Work Programme was available on the Council's website at <https://new.devon.gov.uk/democracy/committee-meetings/scrutiny-committees/scrutinyworkprogramme/> 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 5.30 pm