

## **Children's Standing Overview Group**

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The Children's Standing Overview Group (CSOG) of the People's Scrutiny Committee meets bi-monthly to review performance/service matters relating to children's safeguarding and social care services respectively.

At the last session on the 23 September 2016, with Councillors Randall Johnson (Chair), Dewhirst, Hannaford, Hannan and Mathews in attendance, the following issues were raised:

### **Eclipse Migration**

- Eclipse is more user friendly than Care First, helping staff to spend less time inputting data and allow them more time on the frontline. Eclipse will also aide partnership working. Members noted that while IT systems can help support the service, it is the quality of staff and leadership that makes a local authority 'Good'.
- The Eclipse system will be implemented by September 2017.
- Eclipse will not cover Adult Social Care (ASC). Eclipse however could be integrated much more seamlessly with other systems than Care First, including that operated by ASC which is also provided by OLM. There is however no national join-up of children's social care data, and no particular drive to do this currently.
- Concern from members that there is no offline element to Eclipse given the network connectivity issues in Devon.

### **Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND)**

- Devon has been late in implementing the SEND reforms. The County Council had been a Pathfinder authority but for various reasons had not capitalised on this and was now 'playing catch up'.
- Local authorities are required to convert existing statements of SEN into Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans by the end of March 2018. Considerable work is underway, and Devon is now on course to meet this target date. It is however a major undertaking and a rise in new EHC assessments currently adds further challenge.
- The move away from statements to EHC plans also represents a significant cultural change in Devon, which has relatively high rates of children with statutory plans compared to other areas.
- Devon Parent Carer Voice has been supported and encouraged to fulfil its potential role in capturing and feeding back issues to the Council and its partners. Meetings in the spring of 2016 collected parents "burning issues". These have been written up, shared with partners and parents will be responded to in meetings in November.
- It was extremely alarming that children in Devon are 3 to 6 times more likely to be permanently excluded if they have an SEND, in particular for those that have been statemented. Some young people are unfortunately being excluded from school because they are not high achieving enough; the children most in need of education are those most likely to be removed.
- There is a good deal of pressure on the Council's High Needs Block (HNB), which is overspending. Work is going forward on establishing a clearly graduated response in which expectations; support and access to the HNB are all clearly understood and applied consistently.
- The Cabinet Member commented that after the Peer Review it would be extremely useful for People's Scrutiny to focus on SEND.

## **Integrated Children's Services**

- There have been some issues with Virgin Care and the Integrated Children's Services (ICS) contract.
- The contract is large (£34.748m) and complicated, but given that it will terminate in March 2018, it does provide the opportunity to look at how the system could more effective as a whole for children.
- The contract does not however need to be let in the same way, the procurement could be offered with an option to bid for component lots instead of as a whole.
- Waiting times is a key issue, both for assessment and services. Need to understand whether this is due to organisational issues or under commissioning.
- Not clear if contract for ICS will remain jointly commissioned. Legal advice is being sought.
- The lack of integration in terms of the discharge of the ICS contract.
- Scrutiny could focus on what the ICS frontline service should look like and how staff can work together for better outcomes for children and families. There are challenges measuring the service's impact.
- Members flagged up the need in the pre-procurement process for Virgin Care's performance with this contract to be taken into account when evaluating tendered bids.

## **Budget Monitoring 2016/17**

- There are some key risks particularly with SEND and placements for Children in Care.
- Concern from members over the impact on the budget of the historical closure of Devon's children's home and the need for further work to be undertaken to look at this area of business.
- There are questions to consider in terms of if the County Council determined to create children's home provision in Devon whether it would be to support those with higher end needs or those less complex young people.
- There should be an exploration of a stepped down service for those young people moving out of the Atkinson Unit, as such a provision would appeal to those LAs currently placing in the secure unit.
- A key issue is finding suitable placements for Children in Care with complex needs.
- Work is being undertaken to recruit more foster carers. There are more children who could be with families if there was better planning in the system. There have been less very young children in the system, which is likely to be a factor in the reduction in the number of foster carers.
- More work is needed investing in young people as soon as they come into care particularly in terms of cognitive therapy and CAMHS. The issue is about identifying what a child needs at the earliest point to make sure intervention is timely.
- 85 children came into the care system in Devon in June/July 2016.
- Concern about the number of agency social workers. There is still a reliance on agency staff to a level that the County Council would ideally not have. There are however significant issues in part of Devon where it is difficult recruiting staff, even those from agencies.
- The need for a performance dashboard to track the number and location of all Devon Children in Care placed out of County.

**Cllr Sara Randall Johnson**  
**Chair**