

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 2 December 2016, with Councillors Randall Johnson (Chair), Dewhirst, Hannaford and Hannan in attendance, the following issues were raised:

### **Children in Care**

- Concern about delays in Initial Health Assessments for looked after children.
- A detailed improvement plan is being provided to Corporate Parenting Board in January 2017. It is vital that this issue is addressed to improve Devon's rates on immunisations, health/dental checks.
- It was reported that the capacity of school nurses is taken up with the universal offer, and this makes it problematic for them to do targeted work.
- Placement stability is still a critical issue. The CAMHS pathway is a key factor in ensuring the right support to children in care.
- Waiting times for children with an eating disorder is an issue both in Devon and nationally.
- There is a need for the County Council to do more to keep in touch with care leavers.
- Pathway and progression planning has improved with the increase in the number of Personal Advisors.
- Concern from members about the number of young homeless, some of whom may be care leavers.
- While there has not been a net gain for foster carers over the last year, the profile and quality of those carers has improved, particularly in relation to improving sufficiency in placements for adolescents.
- The need to offer and support children in care through school holidays with a range of activities.
- The performance in children being involved in their looked after reviews has not been good enough.

### **Performance: Children's Social Work and Child Protection**

- Work is underway to improve the in-house fostering offer to reduce reliance on high cost external residential placements and the length of residential stays.
- The County Council is out of line with other LAs with its lower ratio of children placed in in-house fostering compared to external provision.
- Social workers are reporting that referrals from the MASH are increasingly more appropriate.
- Looking at how to record a more intelligent range of outcomes from Single Assessments.
- More work and support could be undertaken in terms of professionals adopting a 'team around a child' approach before social worker involvement. Schools and public health nursing are key to working with vulnerable families in this way.

### **Children's Social Work Offices Site Visits**

Members reported back on their 'extremely positive' site visits on 11 November 2016 to the Tiverton and Barnstaple Children's Social Work offices noting significant improvements since their last visits in 2014.

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