

CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

4 June 2018

Present:-

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

Apologies:-

Councillors J Brazil, E Brennan and G Gribble

Members attending in accordance with Standing Order 25

Councillor J McInnes

* 58

Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of Children's Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 20 March 2018 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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Announcements

The Chair reported on the recent sad passing of Rob Hooper, former Head of Democratic Services, who had worked for local government for 47 years, of which over 44 years were with the County Council, and was hugely respected by colleagues and Members across all political parties.

A minute silence was held as a mark of respect and to pay tribute to Mr Hooper.

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Public Participation

There were no oral representations received at the meeting from a member of the public. The Chair read out a statement to clarify the Council's procedures for public participation at Scrutiny Committee meetings.

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Children Centres - Action for Children

The Committee received a presentation from representatives of Action for Children on the re-commissioning of Children's Centres which aimed to strengthen early help and deliver integrated community based services.

The main points covered by the presentation included how Action for Children were delivering services across all four areas, with eight main children's centre hubs each with its own annual service plan and additional satellite hubs; partnerships with services such as, inter alia, early help, social care, public health nursing and schools; 'Grow' and 'Play' by Action for Children commercial services; and supporting community groups such as Axminster Breastfeeding Group and Barnstaple Multiple Births Group.

Members discussion points and questions raised included:

- that transitional funding had been made available to Action for Children;
- whether funding was available for Citizen's Advice;
- ongoing work and training with Devon Universities and public health;
- welfare reform and early help provision and the changes to Universal Credit.

RESOLVED that Action for Children be invited back annually to report to the Children's Scrutiny Committee.

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Special Education Needs and Disability Update Report

(Councillor Biederman declared a personal interest in this matter by virtue of having a child with an Education, Health and Care Plan)

The Committee received an update Report from the Head of Education and Learning (CS/18/20) outlining the specific challenges faced by the local authority and the action being taken to mitigate these risks. Since 2014, SEND 0-25 had operated under the new SEND Code of Practice which brought together joint responsibility of education, health and care services to identify and plan to meet the needs of children with special educational needs (SEN). In Devon, an SEND Improvement Board monitored the joint responsibilities across the services and how these aligned within Devon's SEND Strategy.

Key points raised within the Report included:

- a 10% increase from September 2017 in the number of children with an EHCP, with data reporting 4093 EHCPs at January 2018;
- educational outcomes for children with SEN were higher than the national average and judged Good or Better by Ofsted;
- all transfers from Statements to EHCPs were completed within DfE timescales;
- feedback received from families was generally positive.

The Head of Service explained that current issues related to the First Assessment Process which was under considerable pressure and had resulted in delays in completing assessments within the statutory 20-week timescale. This in part was due to each child requiring professional advice to process their assessment, which had to come from at least an Educational Psychologist, Health and Care Professionals. Where one piece of information/advice was returned late, the plan could not be completed and the whole timescale was delayed. As a result, investment had been made to increase staff capacity and intensive monitoring had been put in place to ensure the impact of this investment was visible.

Discussion points with Members and Officers included:

- the quality of communication with parents;
- the number of special schools available in Devon (currently 10) with approximately 1,000 spaces, all of which were already filled for the start of September 2018;
- the need to expand current Special Schools and the number of places available;
- ongoing work with mainstream schools and the Devon Inclusion Project to provide necessary support for children with SEN to avoid Assessment and the need to attend a Special School;
- issues with ICT around the Council's new phone system which was hindering parents' ability to contact the 0-25 team, as it did not notify parents when a member of staff was engaged or that they were in a queue;
- the need to engage with parents and young people to understand how to make the process of obtaining an EHCP more streamlined and easier to access; and

- an update on the progress of the Dawlish Federation of Special Schools merger, which would open in September 2018; Members and Officers recommended a site visit in the autumn to further understand the running of a special school.

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

RESOLVED that a Task Group be set up to look into the process of Education, Health and Care Plans.

* **64** **Children and Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing Task Group Report**

The Committee received the Final Report of the Task Group (CSO/18/13) which set out its findings and recommendations relating to Children and Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing. The Report looked into concerns over children and young people with mental health and behaviour problems which could be linked to issues that affected adults, such as drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence, sexual exploitation or even genetic disorders. Concerns had been raised regarding young people suffering with anorexia, bulimia, self-harm, stress or bullying, with schools often feeling the only option available to them was an already over-stretched Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), with little early intervention available.

The Task Group therefore explored the options of early help available to schools, including the Early Help for Mental Health Services (EH4MH) and examples of best practice relating to support and intervention that could be rolled out across the County, specifically in relation to secondary schools.

Members noted the importance of ensuring the findings and recommendations of the Task Group Report be widely circulated to primary and secondary Headteachers.

RESOLVED

- (a) that the report and intention of the recommendations be endorsed; and
- (b) that the Chair of the Children and Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing Task Group work with Officers to review the phrasing of the recommendations to ensure that they are 'SMART' (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-Bound) before being commended to the Cabinet.

* **65** **PRU Provision**

The Committee received the Report of the Chief Officer for Children's Services (CS/18/21) updating Members on the current position of Devon's Alternative Provision and Schools Company Trust (SCT). The SCT had been running Devon's Alternative Provision since March 2015, where initially its performance was considered acceptable. However, in the last 18 months, concerns had been raised directly with the Trust over its performance, and directly with the Regional School Commissioner (RSC). As a result, the Trust was now under new interim leadership, with a new CEO and Board of Trustees appointed by the DfE.

Devon was undertaking a deep-dive into the commissioning of Alternative Provision to ensure its strategic overview and operational approach were aligned and provided appropriate education and a therapeutic offer to match the learners' specific needs.

Members were informed that the Regional Schools Commissioner had agreed upon a new sponsor for the three academies, who was an existing provider with two schools already graded as outstanding; with the current school improvement provider remaining in place during the transition phase until the contract for the new provider began.

RESOLVED that the new PRU provider be invited to a future Children's Scrutiny Committee to provide a progress update.

* **66** **Performance - Education**

The Committee received the Report of the Head of Education and Learning (CS/18/22) on the latest performance measures, highlighting key areas including: Early Years, Children in Care, requests for Statutory Assessments, transfers from statements, rates of absence, Parental Responsibility and Penalty Notices and Ofsted outcomes. The Head of Service undertook to explore and report back to the Committee on the relationship nationally between Ofsted results and school funding.

* **67** **Learning from Audit in Children's Social Care 2017-18**

The Committee received the Report of the Head of Children's Social Care (CS/18/23) on the activity being undertaken to further develop Devon's learning from quality assurance activity. The Quality Assurance Framework set out the approach used to provide continual assurance that the Council was achieving positive outcomes. Messages of best practice would be shared to replicate across the service and any identified issues for corrective action would also be shared to support improvement.

Other key areas highlighted included improving outcomes for young people, a focus on quality, themed audits, self-assessment activities and a response to Children in Need. Areas of good practice highlighted included evidence of effective multi-agency working, practitioners evidencing that they knew and understood the needs of the children they were working with and that the wishes and experiences of the children were effectively captured in many cases. Areas for improvement included the quality of single assessments, visits, supervision and management oversight.

* **68** **Commissioning Liaison Update Report**

The Committee received a Report from the Chief Officer for Children's Services (CS/18/24) outlining the work of the Commissioning Liaison Officer in reviewing the current and future children's services commissioning activity. The Report highlighted key areas of focus, including Community Health and Care Contracts and pre-procurement preparations, disabled children's short breaks, placements for children in care and the Regional Adoption Agency.

The Commissioning Liaison Member highlighted the valuable work undertaken by the Commissioning Group, acting as a link between Scrutiny, Cabinet Members and Chief Officers and the significant commissioning activity undertaken at the Council.

COUNCILLOR SELLIS IN THE CHAIR

* **69** **Election of the Commissioning Liaison Member**

In line with the recommendations of the '*Scrutiny in a Commissioning Council*' Task Group Report, the Committee was asked to select a Commissioning Liaison Member, whose role was to work closely with the relevant Cabinet Members and Chief Officers/Heads of Service, developing a fuller understanding of commissioning processes, and provide a link between Cabinet and Scrutiny on commissioning and commissioned services.

The Commissioning Scrutiny Task Group Report can be viewed here:

<http://democracy.devon.gov.uk/documents/s1830/Scrutiny%20in%20a%20Commissioning%20Council.pdf>

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

RESOLVED that Councillor Hosking be appointed as the Commissioning Liaison Member for the Children's Scrutiny Committee.

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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:

- Behind the EHCP Task Group
- Individual Member Investigation led by Cllr Channon on the Council's preparedness for the new Ofsted inspection framework

[NB: The Scrutiny Work Programme was available on the Council's website at <https://new.devon.gov.uk/democracy/committeemeetings/scrutinycommittees/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 5.15 pm