

CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

21 January 2019

Present:-

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

Apologies:-

Councillors C Channon, I Chubb and J Hawkins

Members attending in accordance with Standing Order 25

Councillor J McInnes

* 96 **Items Requiring Urgent Attention**

There was no item raised as a matter of urgency.

* 97 **Public Participation**

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

* 98 **Announcements**

The Chair welcomed Mrs Saltmarsh who was attending the meeting in her capacity as a Co-opted Member of the Council's Standards Committee to observe and monitor compliance with the Council's ethical governance framework.

* 99 **Children and Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing Task Group - update on progress of recommendations**

The Committee received a Report from the Head of Education and Learning (CS/19/01) outlining further progress made against the recommendations contained in the Task Group Report dated June 2018, which was subsequently endorsed by the Cabinet.

The Report highlighted progress including:

- Early Help 4 Mental Health (EH4MH) continued to work with schools to promote positive emotional health and wellbeing and offer early intervention and support to children and young people; this Service included access to Kooth, an online counselling and information website specifically for young people;
- the Department for Health and Social Care had selected seven higher education providers to offer a new mental health practitioner course – Exeter University had been selected as part of this programme;
- revised guidance on supporting children with mental health issues was provided by the DfE in November 2018 and had been circulated to all schools;
- schools continued to be encouraged to have a mental health champion and to access the free training on offer from the EH4MH programme, which included mental health awareness, bereavement training, anxiety training, difficult conversations and attachment patterns;

- EH4MH practitioners had provided resources and information to schools on local agencies and sources of support available;
- support for children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder was ongoing and a focus area of the SEND Improvement Board; and
- an updated Early Help action plan was submitted to the Ministry for Housing, Local Government and Communities in December which outlined how policy and practice in the local area was moving from the development stage to a more mature model which provided a system wide response to Early Help.

RESOLVED that the progress made against recommendations of the Children and Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing Task Group be welcomed.

* **100** **Exploitation Strategy 2019-2021**

The Committee considered the Report of the Head of Children's Social Care (CS/19/03) on the agreed Exploitation Strategy for Children 2018-21, which had been agreed by the Safer Devon Partnership in November 2018 and the Devon Children and Family Partnership in December 2018.

The Report highlighted that the previous Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) Strategy 2015-18 had been agreed by the then Local Safeguarding Childrens Board. The South West CSE Peninsula Group had agreed that 'exploitation' should be considered more widely to include the challenges posed by economic, criminal and sexual exploitation. This had included issues around County Lines, radicalisation, exploitation, modern slavery and the Prevent Strategy.

Devon had also been successful in gaining innovative funding through central Government to undertake a project in Exeter and a project in South Devon, with a joint response from both Torbay Council and Devon County Council with the Safer Partnerships in both authorities to target the challenge of youth gang activity in South Devon.

RESOLVED that Devon's Exploitation Strategy 2018-2021 be noted and that further Member Development around Exploitation in Devon be arranged.

* **101** **Atkinson Secure Children's Home**

The Committee received the Report of the Head of Childrens Social Care (CS/19/05) on the Atkinson Secure Children's Home which provided secure accommodation to children across England. The Report highlighted that demand for beds far outstripped the supply available and it was not uncommon to be unable to provide a place in a secure children's home. The Atkinson Secure Children's Home was a welfare secure home where children were placed by professionals and courts who had determined that it was in their best interest, because of the risks to which they would be exposed in a non-secure setting.

The Atkinson Secure Children's Home was the only secure children's home in the South West and was very highly valued by neighbouring local authorities. The next closest home was in Hampshire. As a result, the DfE had invested significant capital in the Atkinson Secure Children's Home to support the Local Authority in the delivery of the function.

The Home had space for up to 12 young people; however staffing levels had not been sufficient to enable this number of placements; there were currently 5 young people in placement. These low levels of occupancy impacted adversely on budget forecast and the current occupancy level was not sustainable. Recruitment of residential care workers, who had the required resilience and skills necessary, was ongoing. Since April 2018, there had been three recruitment cycles and the process had been changed to offer candidates information sessions prior to making an application, and those candidates who were offered employment were invited to undertake a series of 'shadow shifts' to try before their final recruitment was confirmed.

Discussion points with Members included:

- intensive induction and therapeutic processes, including input from CAMHS, had been introduced to help recruit and retain staff in this specialist and highly demanding role;
- some Devon children had been turned away from the Atkinson Secure Children's Home due to lack of places; however it was noted that children did not automatically receive places as it depended on the current make-up of the children already placed at the Home; admissions decisions were the responsibility of the Registered Manager, who took into account the matching of children and staff and children with other children, ensuring they could all be safely cared for; and
- cross agency training to include the Police as well as social care staff, to ensure all agencies were appropriately trained.

RESOLVED that the Report be welcomed and an update be provided at the June Committee.

* **102** **Education Performance Report**

The Committee received the Report of the Head of Education and Learning (CS/19/02) on the latest performance measures, highlighting key areas including: Early Years, Children in Care, requests for Statutory Assessments, transfers from statements, rates of Elective Home Education, rates of absence, Parental Responsibility and Penalty Notices and Ofsted outcomes.

The Report highlighted a fall in the number of pupils claiming Free School Meals (FSM); this was not believed to be linked to Universal Credit as the numbers of FSMs dropped before this was introduced. It was also not linked to the take up of free child care or other benefits, and the Council was looking into the cause in the fall of numbers which could have been due to low unemployment rates in Devon which could mean that some families were no longer entitled to claim FSM.

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

The Committee considered the Report of the Head of Children's Social Care (CS/19/04) on the challenges and pressures that continued to exist in parts of the Service, as well as the impact of significant efforts in recent months to bring about improvement in a number of practice areas. The majority of business information now available to leaders and managers in Children's Social Care Services was provided via an online portal which allowed users to better interrogate the available data. Members noted the launch of the Eclipse system on 21 January which would provide a full range of reports to managers with data updated daily.

Performance information related to contacts and referrals, single assessments, social care team caseloads, Children in Need, Children in care and care leavers, Child Protection (CP) plans, Service Priorities and Accelerated Improvement Periods.

* **104** **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:

- SEND Ofsted visit; and
- SEN Annual Report.

[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>]

CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
21/01/19

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

The Meeting started at 2.15 pm and finished at 4.15 pm