

CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

9 June 2020

Present:-

Councillors R Hannaford (Chair), D Sellis (Vice-Chair), S Aves, F Biederman, J Brazil, C Channon, G Gribble, J Hawkins, L Hellyer, R Hosking, T Inch, A Saywell, M Squires, A Connett, P Sanders and Mrs C Mabin (Church of England Diocesan representative)

Members attending in accordance with Standing Order 25

Councillors J McInnes and S Randall-Johnson

* **168** **Meeting Procedures - Briefing and Etiquette**

The Committee and attendees received a presentation from the Democratic Services Officer on the process and etiquette for remote meetings.

* **169** **Minutes**

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 16 March 2020 be signed as a correct record.

* **170** **Items Requiring Urgent Attention**

There was no matter raised as a matter of urgency.

* **171** **Public Participation**

There were no oral representations from members of the public.

* **172** **OFSTED Improvement Plan**

The Committee received the presentation from Ms V Lines, Improvement Director working closely with the Chief Officer for Children's Services on the post-Ofsted Improvement Plan in the context of the current response to COVID 19 (the presentation had been circulated with the Agenda).

The Department for Education (DfE) had temporarily suspended its usual conventions in response to an inadequate judgment and had instead agreed that the Council should publish an Improvement plan in response to COVID 19 addressing the most immediate risks to children and young people identified in the Ofsted inspection; that the Devon Children and Families Partnership Executive would act as a temporary Improvement Board to check and challenge the Improvement Plan; and that the Council would secure an independent expert to provide consultancy to the Chief Officer of Children's Services.

The following points were included in the presentation:

- National Government had set clear priorities for local government that were shared across Children's Services namely, to maintain the care system; to protect the most vulnerable; and to support the community;
- arrangements were in place for identifying the most vulnerable groups of children, working closely with schools and public health partners;
- there had been a high level of contact with vulnerable families, keeping in touch by using WhatsApp or video calls;

- Schools were making contact daily, twice weekly, or weekly, depending on the RAG rating, providing valuable support for families and professionals alike;
- close work was continuing with partners for those care leavers (currently seven) in unacceptable accommodation to ensure provision was in place to meet their needs;
- additional Personal Advisors had been recruited to reduce caseloads and improve levels of support for care leavers;
- there were currently two children in unregulated provision with high support needs and a national search was continuing to find appropriate provision;
- additional Case Progression Workers had been recruited to support social workers in the neglect and emotional abuse priority group;
- permanence planning had been prioritised with senior managers to ensure all children in care had an appropriate permanence plan in place; and
- the next phase of improvement planning would be a shadow Improvement Board to be chaired by a Commissioner appointed by the DfE, with the first such meeting being on 22 June.

Officers responded to Members' questions that covered:

- one rapid review had been completed in respect of an infant injury, details of which the Chief Officer for Children's Services would share with the Chair and Vice-Chair;
- there had been a deficit in the number of infant referrals, but rates were now back to pre-COVID 19 levels, additionally, there had been an increase in referrals from the general public;
- Public Health Nursing had continued to offer face to face contact for vulnerable families during the lockdown, but were now back as from 1 June delivering face to face contact for new-born babies;
- that Councillor Dewhirst, as the Corporate Parent Member responsible for housing, be invited to a meeting to consider a briefing paper on housing accommodation for care leavers and young people, in advance of a possible task group to look at this;
- Officers undertook to provide a briefing note for Members on Personal Advisors for care leavers and the impact the new recruits would have on the Service;
- Members requested comparable data from Cornwall and Devon's recruitment and retention scheme to aid their discussion on further funding;
- the next phase of the improvement plan would provide further focus on Quality Assurance and Permanence Plans;

The Chief Officer for Children's Services gave an overview of the organisational structure going forward, details of which would be shared with Members, together with the terms of reference for the Improvement Partnership, sight of the Minutes and Specification for the new Commissioner. The second stage of the improvement plan would also be shared with Members.

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services wished to record his thanks for how Children's Services had responded to COVID 19, whilst incorporating the key elements of the Ofsted report, and to recognise the effort and innovation by the Service over the past few months.

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COVID-19 Response

Maternity Services

The Committee received the Report of the Clinical Director of the Devon Local Maternity System (CS/20/07), which explained that the Devon Local Maternity System (LMS) was set up to develop and implement the NHS Five Year Forward View including the maternity strategy Better Births, with the aim of improving the safety, quality and outcomes of maternity services. It further explained how the LMS was responding across Devon during the COVID

19 period; and working in partnership with Public Health Nursing (PHN) and Children's Centres.

Discussion points with Members and Officers included:

- that Early Help across Devon during COVID 19 had developed daily triage meetings and weekly partnership meetings to co-ordinate multi-agency service responses; and
- the Solihull Approach offered a nationally recognised parenting course that had been made available online to all parents across Devon.

The Committee welcomed the report.

Domestic Abuse

The Committee received a presentation (attached) from the Communities and Commissioning Manager of Devon County Council and the General Manager of Splitz Support Services on Domestic Abuse during COVID 19, which covered the service position as lockdown was imposed; changes in demand and need; service and wider system response; and learning and lessons for the future.

Discussion points with Members and Officers covered:

- working with housing associations and providers for places of safety provision; and
- working with Children's Centres and other mental health professionals building specialist capacity and confidence across the system; and
- the pilot to remove the 'perpetrator' from the family home included use of the Behaviour Change Programme which was a wraparound support intervention not only for families but for the 'perpetrator' also.

* 174 **Special Educational Needs & Disability (SEND) Transitions Task Group**

The Committee considered the Report of the SEND Transitions Task Group which included themes and areas for development that aimed to support the Council, the NHS and other partners to develop further improvements and ultimately better outcomes for young people with SEND in Devon.

The Committee welcomed the report and wished to thank the Scrutiny Officer in the preparation of this comprehensive report.

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services welcomed the report and agreed to take the Report to Cabinet in order to take forward the areas highlighted.

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

RESOLVED that the key themes and potential areas for development contained in the Task Group report be commended to the Cabinet.

* 175 **Children's Standing Overview Group**

The Committee received the notes of the Standing Overview Group.

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

The Meeting started at 10.30 am and finished at 1.13 pm

Childrens Scrutiny – Domestic Abuse and Covid 19 –

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Kristin Tomblin (Devon County Council
Communities and Commissioning
Manager) and Chrissy Stower (General
Manager Splitz Support Service)

Context –

- Written from the perspective of specialist service – working with people who fall in the Govt. Definition of DVA – 16plus

The presentation covers -

- The service position as lockdown was imposed
- Changes in demand and need
- Service and wider system response
- Learning and lessons for the future

Pre Covid 19 position from specialist service for the year 19/20

- Splitz Support Service received 3946 referrals via the Helpdesk in 19/20 (average 80.5 per week)
- Number of high risk cases – 1038
- Average Independent Domestic Abuse Advocate case loads – fte. Av 30 at any one time – average 128 over a year.
- Industry recommended (Safe Lives) – 20-25 case load (60-80 per year)
- Professionals line – average incoming calls per week – 3-4 per week

COVID-19 Domestic Abuse Devon and Cornwall Overview (30th March to 4th May 2020)

Average- black text, **increase in red text** and **below average in green text**

	Pre - lockdown weekly average	30 th March 2020	6 th April 2020	14 th April 2020	20 th April 2020	27 th April 2020	4 th May 2020
Devon - figures from Splitz and NDADA (includes all high and medium risk referrals from both organisations)							
Referrals, including repeats	80.5	57	96	181	164	177	145
ARAC (includes all non-ARAC high and medium risk referrals)	57.75	41	81	158	141	154	128
ARAC	22.75	16	15	23	23	23	17
Professionals Line	3-4 per week			16	33	38	50

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Minute Item 173

Increased demand on Helpdesk since lockdown (to w/c 11th May 2020)



Feedback from MASH

- In April 132 contacts where primary concern was domestic abuse (18% of all contacts – 718)
- In May (to 20/05/2020) 101 contacts where DA was the primary concern – (15% of all contacts 675)
- Domestic abuse (approximately) composes twice as many contacts as any other area of concern.
- The Police in MASH are not seeing a significant increase in DA reports but are seeing more instances of serious/high risk incidents over this period (primarily more intense and prolonged episodes).
- Police are concerned that victims are reluctant to report at this time as they may feel that such reporting could increase risk

Booked calls for professional advocacy and support

- A new service of has been established to support those working with families and young people to identify and engage around family conflict and abuse.
- ^{Pass} In the three days the service operated between 18th and 21st May 12 consultations were held with schools staff, health visitors, social workers and Children's Centres
- Consultation themes included-
 - How to ask questions and offer support around DV
 - Supporting a family where the children report DV but parent denies it
 - How to safely and effectively engage with people perpetrating abuse

Compounding Challenges and Increasing Complexity

- Issues that are being reported include:
 - The pressure of lockdown exacerbating mental health and drug and alcohol issues
 - Increased number of ‘incidents’ for existing clients living with perpetrators.
 - Cases are being held open longer than average
 - Increased incidents (both existing clients and new referrals) around child contact. (Both victims and perpetrators using lockdown and fears around contagion as a reason for stopping contact or refusing to return the child to the parent that the child/ren resides with).
 - Perpetrators moving back in to the family home, escalating risk and trauma for both victims and children.
 - Increased numbers of victims looking to flee
 - Increased proportion of male victims (from 7% to 12% with Splitz)
 - Increasing numbers of calls from perpetrators looking for support
 - Impact of increased complexity, volume of cases and new ways of working on staff

Feedback from staff

- “Taking longer to get in touch with allied professionals”
- “...intensity of the work has increased. Struggling to keep up with amount of calls and emails”
- Page 8 am working more and longer hours trying to deal with it [caseload]
- “Phone calls taking longer as client anxiety gets higher”
- “I have 10 clients I cannot make contact with at this time”
- “again another intense working week. Main issues are housing and breaches of bail”

Developments in response to the pandemic

- New ways of working –
 - Telephone and online support
 - Moving MARAC online
 - Communication campaigns to try and reach into people's homes / lives
- Increased capacity of 'professionals line' to provide support and guidance
- Booked clinics for case discussions
- Better working relationships and a less siloed approach
- Strategic housing response agreed by Devon Home Choice
- Pilot to remove 'perpetrator' from the family home
- £400k from Pandemic Response Fund to increase capacity to respond to high risk victims of abuse

