

CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

25 January 2021

Present:-

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

Members attending in accordance with Standing Order 25

Councillor J McInnes

* 201 **Items Requiring Urgent Attention**

There was no matter raised as a matter of urgency.

* 202 **Public Participation**

There were no oral representations from members of the public.

* 203 **Scrutiny Committee Work Programme**

The Committee received an update on the Scrutiny Work Programme.

* 204 **SEND Improvement**

The Committee received a Report of the Head of Education & Learning (CS/21/01) updating Members on the actions taken and progress made in implementing the Written Statement of Action (WSOA) following the SEND review in January 2019.

The Report provided a summary of progress against the 4 areas of improvement identified in the SEND Review, which were:

- A. Strategic plans and the local area's SEND arrangements were not embedded or widely understood by stakeholders including schools, settings, staff and parents and carers;
- B. The significant concerns that were reported about communication with key stakeholders, particularly with parents and families;
- C. The time it took to issue Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP) and the variable quality of these plans. Plans did not consistently capture a child and young person's needs and aspirations so that they were a valuable tool to support the planning and implementation of education,

- health and care provision to lead to better lived experiences for the child and their families; and,
- D. Weaknesses in the identification, assessment, diagnosis and support of those children and young people with autism spectrum disorder.

The Head of Service advised that the local area strategy for SEND included input from all areas of Education, Health and Care. The Report included bullet points highlighting what had already been achieved and blue text which highlighted the impact of the actions taken to date. Key points highlighted within the Report included:

Section A:

- The Local Offer Webpage had been redesigned in consultation with all users over the last 12 months and was due to be launched in February.
- Induction training for all staff – this had now been rolled out to over 7,000 people and had been recognised as good practice by NASEN and was being rolled out nationally.
- SEND Strategy – the Council's policy had been due to run from 2017-2020, so it was business as usual to update strategy. The new SEND Strategy 2021-2024 had been widely consulted on, and would be launched in January 2021.
- SEND Transformation Programme – aimed to improve parents and young peoples lived experienced of SEN support by designing and implementing an integrated service that worked together to ensure young people received the right support at the right time.

Section B:

- Communication and Engagement – there had been an increase in the number of parents engaged with the Parent Carer Forum.
- Parent Ambassador programme – parents were supporting other parents
- Young Person led Champions for Change – work had moved forward despite the challenge of pupils not being in school.

Section C:

- The number pupils with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) had increased and there had been no slow in the level of demand.
- The number of plans issued on time had increased from 3% in 2019 to 68% in 2020 and was expected to rise to 73% by May 2021.
- The pandemic had impacted the timeliness of some EHCPs. The Council saw a reduction in the number of plans issued in June 2020, after the first lockdown. This was due to needing input from education, health and social work, most of which took in schools and was therefore unable to take place during the first lockdown. The number of Plans issued increased again in September when assessments that took place during the summer could be utilised. Where possible, assessments have been completed at home to avoid additional pressures placed on families due to the pandemic.

- Quality of plans had improved and an EHCP Charter had been developed and agreed with the Parent Carer Forum.

Section D:

- All families on the waiting list had been written to and advised of the support available online;
- Demand in referrals had continued to remain high, with an average of 173 referrals to the autism assessment service each month;
- The length of time children were on the waiting list had increased by 14% from December 2019 to December 2020. The impact of COVID-19 had meant the service adapted the way it undertook assessments and moved to online platforms.

Discussion points with Members included:

- There was not a reduction in demand for EHCPs but a reduction in the ability to conduct face-to-face assessments in schools.
- The continued high demand of EHCPs and whether more staff were still required to meet this demand. The Service would evaluate how the current increase in staffing had coped with the level of demand. There had been an improvement in the timeliness of wider professional advice; however due to the pandemic, where they could not access children or observe them appropriately, that had held up assessments.
- The Council's web team were making all webpages accessibility friendly, including the Local Offer webpage. The Service had also spoken to young people who advised they preferred video clips; therefore the team was working on developing YouTube videos to target young people.

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Domestic Violence and Abuse and Early Help

The Committee considered a Report of the Head of Public Health Nursing (CS/21/02) providing an update on the work to address domestic violence and abuse across Devon with a focus on Early Help arrangements.

The Report highlighted that the Community Safety Strategic Assessment brought together key information to assess crime, disorder and safety issues across Devon, which included domestic abuse. The Assessment for financial year 2019-20 showed a 3% increase in incidents recorded by the police linked to domestic abuse in Devon (11,000 incidents, 16.8 incidents per 1,000 population) on the previous year. There had been a steady increase in referrals and requests into domestic abuse services for specialist support for victims of domestic abuse in Devon in recent years, and a sharp increase since the Spring COVID-19 lockdown.

The Specialist Domestic Abuse Support Service for Devon commissioned by Devon County Council and led by Splitz Support Service had seen a 60% increase in calls in April 2020 compared to April 2019. This demand had since

eased but was still around 50% higher than the previous year. An increase in the complexity of cases included mental health and drug and alcohol issues being worsened by lockdown pressures, child contact issues, perpetrators moving back into the family home and other factors. The Council had responded to these pressures by allocating an additional £250k of funding from the COVID-19 emergency funding received from Government.

In addition to the £250k, the Council had allocated £150k of COVID-19 emergency funding to strengthen the ability of the multiagency Early Help locality teams to provide direct support to families experiencing domestic abuse where appropriate. Additional funds had also been allocated to enable locality teams to commission support for children and families to recover from the impact of abuse.

The Council currently had no specific statutory duty in the area of domestic abuse support services. The Domestic Abuse Bill that was before Parliament would introduce a new duty on the Council to provide domestic abuse support for victims and their children who were living in safe accommodation.

Discussion points with Members included:

- funding for the Service was fragile and relied on short term grant funding. Further involvement from Scrutiny to look at how a more robust and sustainable service could be created was welcomed.
- work was ongoing with colleagues from Plymouth and Torbay, looking at the lived experience of sexual violence and abuse.
- an update on how Operation Encompass was working during the pandemic, given that this was more difficult when a child was not in school.
- an overview of where domestic violence was occurring across the County to ensure funding was in place to support services.
- during the pandemic, services were working hard to engage with those individuals who could not leave their home.
- the Active Bystander training which had been very useful and would be worthwhile rolling out to all councillors.

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

RESOLVED that a reference to the Member Development Steering Group be made to discuss Active Bystander training for all Councillors and a joint Spotlight review with Health and Adult Care Scrutiny and Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny be undertaken on Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse.

206 Youth Offending Service Peer Review

The Committee received a briefing paper on the Peer Review of Devon Youth Offending Service by Essex Youth Offending Service. The Report outlined that following an inspection by HMI Probation in July 2015, there were areas of excellent creative work and areas that were not so adequate within Devon Youth Offending Service. A Peer Review was therefore undertaken by Essex Youth Offending Service, rated as Outstanding by HMI Probation in October 2018, to provide a sense check on the quality of service that was currently being delivered and serve as valuable preparation for the forthcoming HMI Probation inspection.

*** 207 Children's Standing Overview Group**

The Committee received the notes of the Standing Overview Group from December 2020.

208 Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) Joint Scrutiny Group

The Committee received the Report of the Regional Adoption Agency Joint Scrutiny group from November 2020.

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

The Meeting started at 2.15 pm and finished at 3.43 pm