

CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

14 June 2022

Present

Councillors R Hannaford (Chair), P Sanders (Vice-Chair), S Aves, L Hellyer, F Letch MBE, L Samuel, M Squires and Mrs C Mabin (Church of England representative)

Present (remotely)

Councillors C Channon, J Bradford and J Brazil

Apologies

Councillors P Bullivant, G Gribble, J Hawkins and J Wilton-Love

Members attending in accordance with Standing Order 25

Councillors A Leadbetter and A Saywell

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Minutes

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 6 April 2022 be signed as a correct record.

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Items Requiring Urgent Attention

There was no matter raised as a matter of urgency.

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Public Participation

There were no oral representations from members of the public.

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Scrutiny Committee Work Programme

(a) Work Programme

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

RESOLVED that the 2022/23 Work Programme for the current year be agreed.

(b) Election of Commission 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 to provide a link between Cabinet and Scrutiny on commissioning and commissioned services.

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

RESOLVED that Councillor Sanders be elected as Commissioning Liaison Member for the ensuing year.

* **47** **Children's Social Care Performance**

(Councillor Leadbetter attended in accordance with Standing Order 25(1) and spoke to this item at the invitation of the Committee.)

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Schools updated the Committee on the following points in particular:

- Ofsted's next Social Care monitoring visit would take place on 21/22 June.
- Dawn Stabb, Head of Education and Learning had retired from post on 31 May.

The Committee received the Report of the Chief Officer for Children's Services which provided a performance update on Children's Social Care.

The Report outlined the following key points:

- The monthly percentage of children being re-referred within 12 months was just above the national and statistical neighbour averages.
- The rate of children per 10,000 with a child protection plan was higher than the national average and statistical neighbours.
- The timeliness of initial child protection conferences was a priority area for improvement, and live tracking showed this was an area that required continued focus by managers and the QARRS service.
- The rate of children in care per 10,000 was stable and lower than the national and statistical neighbour averages.
- Outcomes for the 17-18 age range in terms of suitable accommodation and education, training and employment was significant below the national averages.
- The percentage of agency social workers in March continued to be higher than the Council's ambitions. The Cabinet's decision however to improve the rates for agency staff was anticipated to show improvement.
- Twenty overseas social workers would be joining the Service this year in addition to newly qualified, front line and apprentice social workers.

Members' discussion points and questions with Officers in response to the Report included:

- Scrutiny's focus should continue to be around the volume of work and improvement of recruitment and retention of staff and its associated challenges.
- Housing for key workers – initiatives were currently being considered, and someone would be nominated corporately to work with Children's recruitment specialist. Members considered the matter serious enough for the Council to undertake an Intervention.
- A report had been taken to the Leadership Group on the housing situation and the Chief Officer undertook to ask if that report could be shared with Scrutiny Members.
- The rigorous recruitment process and strong inductions that new social workers from abroad had to undergo to ensure they met the Council's standards, including the language skills required to function professionally here.
- West Sussex County Council had experience of overseas recruitment and the Chief Officer would follow up with her counterpart there on any shared learning.
- Referral timeliness was under constant review; and there was a new Partnership Group that met regularly to discuss strategic issues.
- The Early Help review was progressing and it was hoped to have a new Strategy by July/August.
- An update on the percentage of closed cases would be provided to Members.
- Recent data shows that 97% of children had been seen during assessment, and the remainder were usually children that had not yet been born.
- Improvement to the timeliness of ICPCs was likely to be seen in the autumn.
- Reassurance was given to the Committee that the whereabouts of all Care Leavers was known; and Officers would update Members with the current number of rough sleepers (if any).
- There were approximately 603 children currently on child protection plans, although numbers varied daily.
- Of key importance and as part of the improvement journey was the continuity of social workers.
- Officers would revert to Members to clarify if the percentage of Pathway plans not up-to-date were included in the NEET percentage.

The Chair thanked Officers for the report.

* 48 **Education Transport Budget Savings**

The Committee received the Report of the Head of Education and Learning (CS/22/06) on Education Transport budget savings, which set out an update on the school savings programme up until the end of month one, April 2022, in the 2022/23 financial, as requested at the Budget Children's Scrutiny Committee on 18 January 2022.

In the preparation of the 2022/23 Mid Term Financial Strategy a request for funding to meet growing demand and increased costs, specifically related to

personalised transport was unsuccessful. By the time of 2022/23 budget preparation, the funding gap was identified as totalling £6.6million, based on the current level of demand and anticipated growth of 7% in passengers with an EHCP requiring personalised transport.

The Transport Co-ordination Service (TCS) had a strong track record of managing transport contracts and reducing costs, including reviewing routes, providing more sustainable transport options, minimising the number of single occupancy transport and working with parents to provide their own transport.

TCS had made good progress in achieving savings through the route review programme. However, the combination of transport market pressures and the projected growth in the number of SEND passengers requiring transport, meant that the expectation that the Transport team could review transport and save £5.6million on top of existing savings targets was unachievable.

Members' questions and discussion with Officers included:

- Work was underway to try and mitigate cost pressures, particularly in regard to residential placements.
- Clarity was sought on the mileage criteria for SEND transport eligibility, and Officers agreed to provide this information post-meeting.
- Although more school children were using Stagecoach services in Exmouth and Sidmouth, TCS were currently working with Stagecoach to try and prioritise school movements across the sector.

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

RESOLVED that the Committee:

- (a) welcomes the success so far on the school transport route review programme and savings and the actions the work of the Transport Co-ordination Service to reduce the impact of Personalised Transport for passengers with Education, Health and Care Plans;
- (b) welcomes the findings of the Devon Audit Partnership and the exploration of an in-house school transport service as requested at its January 2022 Budget meeting; and
- (c) places on record its concerns that budget pressures of £5.6million cannot be achieved.

Child Friendly Devon Task Group

The Committee considered the Report and Recommendations of the Child Friendly Devon Task Group. Child Friendly Devon formed part of the Council's ambition to be an Outstanding rated authority for its Children's Services.

As part of Devon's improvement journey, Devon had entered a Sector Led Improvement Programme with Leeds City Council's Leeds Relational Practice Centre. Leeds had experience in improving from an Inadequate to Outstanding rating. Devon was taking the lessons learnt from Leeds on best practice and system-wide solutions to form part of a strategic aim to make Devon the best County to grow up in, creating a 'Child Friendly Devon'.

The Chair was pleased to report that Children's Services would have an exhibition stand at the forthcoming Devon County Show.

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

RESOLVED that the Report and Recommendations be endorsed and commended to Cabinet.

* 50 **Children's Social Care Visits Report**

The Committee received the Report on Children's Social Care Visits, which was part of Members' ongoing work in monitoring the performance of local services and ensuring that they heard from front-line staff. Visits had been made to the following:

- MASH, County Hall, Exeter
- Taw View, Barnstaple
- Estuary House, Newton Abbot
- Atkinson Secure Children's Home, Exeter
- Oaklands Court, Tiverton
- County Hall, Exeter

In summary, Members had spoken to at least 57 staff who had said that they felt supported by a great team; that Children's Services was an attractive place to come and work; that staff welcomed the shared vision of the new Senior Leadership team and the stability they brought to the Service; that staff felt the service was going in the right direction and praised the move to prioritising children and young people; but there was more to do on permanent recruitment and retention where full compliments of staff were needed to deal with demand and rising complexity of cases.

The Committee wished to place on record its thanks to the Scrutiny Members and staff who took part and facilitated the visits.

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

The Meeting started at 10.30 am and finished at 12.28 pm