

CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

11 September 2017

Present:-

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

Apologies:-

Councillors I Chubb and G Gribble

Members attending in accordance with Standing Order 25

Councillor J McInnes

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Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Children's Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 15 June 2017 be signed as a correct record.

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Items Requiring Urgent Attention

The Vice Chairman reported the positive news that Devon had ranked second in the country for supporting parents in making their applications for funding through the HMRC, and validated by the local authority, for the 30 hours free child care. Thanks were extended to the Officers for guiding parents through this process and the Vice Chairman recommended that this achievement be commended to Cabinet.

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Public Participation

In accordance with the Council's Public Participation Rules, the Committee received and acknowledged oral representations made by Ms H Rose, Ms J Sanchez, Mr H Barnes, Mr P Ferlie, and Ms V Benfield on a matter to be considered by the Committee, namely 'Special Educational Needs and Disability Update' (Minute *13 Refers), on the provision of funding for pupils with additional needs.

The Chairman responded, thanking the speakers for their attendance and presentations which would be taken into account by the Committee during its subsequent deliberations.

The Chairman was also presented, by Ms H Rose, with a petition containing 2,600 signatures asking the Council to "withdraw harmful funding changes for pupils with SEND in Devon". Members would have regard to this petition, during the Committee's consideration of that matter at this meeting (Minute *13 refers), accepting that the Petition had not yet been verified or validated in line with the Council's Petition Scheme.

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Special Educational Needs and Disability Update

The Committee considered a Report from the Head of Education and Learning (CS/17/30) on Special Educational Needs funding arrangements in schools following the development of plans to make some changes to the funding arrangement in the future.

The number of requests for statutory assessments had increased by 99% in the past eight months which was due to a number of factors including, inclusion of the Further Education

sector, use of SEN assessments to attract further funding, parental preference and demographic change.

Non-statutory funding was introduced by the Local Authority in April 2014 with the aim of increasing school funding, thereby reducing the need for statutory assessment for children with lower level or short term Special Educational Needs. The large increase in statutory assessment had shown that this strategy had not worked. The Council had also seen a sharp rise in the number of requests for additional funding to support pupils who did not have a statutory assessment.

The cost of non-statutory plans had risen from £275,000 in 2014/15 to £3,200,000 in the 2016/17 financial year. There were 800 pupils currently on a non-statutory plan, with the average cost in a mainstream school at £4,785 compared to an average cost of a statutory plan of £4,383. Therefore, if a child's needs required this level of funding on a non-statutory plan, they should have the protection that a full statutory plan offers and schools should have the consistency, openness and transparency that the statutory process provided.

The Head of Service explained that funding was controlled by the Department for Education and managed by the local authority; however it was not Devon County Council's budget, but ring-fenced for the Dedicated Schools Grant. This funding was divided into three areas: the Schools Block, which was funding given directly to schools; the High Needs Block to deliver the Council's responsibility to support children with SEN; and the Early Year's Block, which included the 30 hours free childcare provision. Whilst there was some flexibility to move funds between the blocks, the overall funding available from the Department for Education remained the same and under no circumstances could the Council overspend on this budget.

In responding to questions from Members, the Head of Service:

- clarified that there would be no cut in actual SEN funding available;
- confirmed that statutory assessments did not need to be completed by January 2018, but a request had to be submitted by then;
- explained that once requested, no child would lose any funding until an assessment had been completed;
- advised that the same information used to create a non-statutory plan was required to complete a statutory assessment, schools should have this information on file and a plan already in place;
- explained that the £44m budget to support SEN was not changing, and that changes to the process would only affect the 800 pupils currently on a non-statutory plan;
- confirmed that of those 800 pupils affected, 200 additional requests for statutory assessments had already been received;
- advised that a Statutory Plan/Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) protected funding and ensured that necessary steps were in place to protect the pupil;
- confirmed that the Council would continue to work with schools to support any child currently on a non-statutory plan that did not receive an EHCP, although it was felt this would be a very small proportion of the 800 pupils given the level of support and funding already received;
- informed Members that the funding used for the transitioning of statements to EHCPs was a separate budget and used to employ staff to complete this transfer by March 2018;
- stated that schools had been consulted on this process through representatives on the Schools Finance Group and the SENCO Practitioners groups;
- apologised for misunderstandings that had occurred following the initial letter sent to schools on 18 July 2017;
- agreed that further communication with parents and schools would be undertaken to clarify these changes and provide some assurance to families, including a key facts document for SENCOs and a document to each school outlining all levels of funding and how this should be allocated within schools, and working with Parent Carer Voice in Devon to improve communication with parents;

- ensured that further communication would also be made with Members in the future to make sure they were up to date with any changes before proposals were made public.

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

RESOLVED that a masterclass session on SEN funding and budgets be held for all Members and that an update be provided at the next Committee Meeting so that Members were kept informed of the progress and were fully aware of any concerns or issues that may arise.

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Children's Social Work Improvement Plan 2017/18

The Committee received and noted the Report of the Head of Children's Social Care (CS/17/27) on the Social Care Improvement Plan which had been developed to support a clear focus on the priority areas for improvement. The Plan detailed the actions which would ensure improved service delivery and focused on targeting improvement action on the top ten areas for development, which included Children in Need, Early Help and practice in North Devon. Delivery of these improvements required a service wide approach through which change and improvement was embedded and owned at all levels.

The Plan focussed on key areas which included Leadership and Management, high quality statutory services and looked after children.

Members' discussion points with Officers included:

- the reduction of caseloads in North;
- the level of staffing in North Devon having improved with less reliance on agency staff and permanent Team Managers now in place;
- the need to ensure the voice of the child was embedded in all Children's Social Care plans and strategies;
- an update on the recruitment of a new Head of Children's Social Care in Devon.

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Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) Redesign

The Committee received the Report of the Head of Children's Social Care (CS/17/26) on proposals to develop a more effective 'front door' to the service for members of the public. Following the Service Review in May 2017, which looked at progress on the improvement journey, the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) was identified as one of the top ten areas for improvement highlighting: staff capacity and resilience, volume and quantity of referrals and contacts and the impact this had on how initial contacts are dealt with, the Initial Response Teams and Early Help.

Reducing contact that did not lead to social care intervention would help to improve consistency, timeliness and the quality of decision making at an early point in the families journey; whilst better integration with early help offers would improve access to support at the most appropriate time and improve outcomes for children and families. This in turn would provide a more effective and less costly service, whilst helping to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of MASH in responding to those most in need of statutory services.

Members were informed that the proposed model was to develop four Integrated Children and Families Hubs in each locality area: North, Mid and East, Exeter and South. Each Hub would have a number of partners co-located or virtually co-located to cover the following service areas:

- Children and Families Locality Advice and Support Service
- Children's Social Care Services
- Early Help
- Health (Public Health Nursing)

- Education (SEND 0-25 and EET)
- Business support functions

The Head of Service explained that establishing locality Hubs would help the Service achieve a 'good' OFSTED status by making services more localised.

* **16** **Independent Reviewing Unit Annual Report**

The Committee received a Report of the Head of Children's Social Care (CS/17/28) on the annual report of the Independent Reviewing Unit (IRU), which was a statutory requirement on local government. The IRU Report was an internal quality assurance function for social work in Children's Services and detailed the work and performance of the IRU and the system for child protection and children in care within Devon. Having a strong and independent reviewing system ensured that children had appropriate plans which met their needs, had the appropriate resources allocated to meet their needs and placed improving outcomes for children and young people at the heart of the plan.

Key themes of the Report included, inter alia, the implementation of the strength based model for child protection conferences, positive work undertaken in listening to young people, listening to and involving parents, rise in the overall percentage of children experiencing neglect, escalations and the Local Authority Designated Officer.

* **17** **Performance - Education and Learning**

The Committee received the Report of the Head of Education and Learning (CS/17/29) on the latest performance measures for the first quarter, highlighting key areas including:

- increased take up of Early Years funding for two year olds;
- improved performances in KS1 and KS2 results across all subject areas;
- Devon being in the top percentile nationally for good attendance rates;
- the number of penalty notices issued for unauthorised absences had increased since the Isle of Wight case, during which time the service was suspended whilst awaiting the outcome of the case; Members noted concerns for those families working in the tourism industry;
- whilst still lower than national levels, the Council was concerned over exclusion rates in Devon, with the issue being considered as part of the Devon Inclusion Project.

* **18** **Performance - Children's Social Care**

The Committee received the Children's Social Care Performance Report from the Head of Children's Social Care (CS/17/25) on the latest performance measures in the first quarter. Key areas highlighted within the Report and by the Chief Officer included, inter alia, the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH); Children in Need; Referrals into statutory children's services; single assessments; child protection enquiries; child protection conferences; repeat child protection plans and children in care.

* **19** **Children's Scrutiny Committee Work Programme**

RESOLVED that the current outline Work Programme be approved subject to inclusion of the following topics for future consideration:

(a) Early Years Funding

[NB: The Scrutiny Work Programme was available on the Council's website at <https://new.devon.gov.uk/democracy/committee-meetings/scrutiny-committees/scrutiny-work-programme/>

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 5.25 pm

