

CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

17 September 2018

Present:-

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

Apologies:-

Councillors J Brazil and M Squires

Members attending in accordance with Standing Order 25

Councillors J McInnes and C Wright

* 71

Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of Children's Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 4 June 2018 be signed as a correct record.

* 72

Items Requiring Urgent Attention

There was no item raised as a matter of urgency.

* 73

Public Participation

The Chair read out a statement to clarify the Council's procedures for public participation at Scrutiny Committee meetings.

In accordance with the Council's Public Participation Rules, the Committee received and acknowledged 5 oral representations made in relation to a matter to be considered by the Committee, namely 'Foster Carer Allowances' (Minute *74 refers);

Mrs L Taylor spoke against the proposals, referencing in particular the varying and at times volatile nature of the role, the effects the cuts would have on Devon children and foster carers and the number of families that would have their allowances cut between £5,000-£15,000 per year.

Mrs L Strange spoke against the proposals, in particular the consultation process and the need to value the skills and expertise of experienced foster carers.

Mrs M Peters spoke against the proposals, highlighting in particular the challenging aspects of the role and the current difficulties already faced in placing some of Devon's challenging children.

Mrs K Page spoke in favour of the proposals, referencing the support and training received and the need to create a fair system for all foster carers.

Mrs S Turner spoke in favour of the proposals, highlighting the disparity in payments to foster carers when caring for a child with the same needs and the necessity to recruit and attract new carers to the role.

The Chair responded, thanking all speakers for their attendance and presentations which would be considered by the Committee during its subsequent deliberations.

* **74** **Foster Carer Allowances**

(Councillors G Gribble and T Inch declared a Personal Interest in this matter by virtue of their sister and niece respectively, being a foster carer and withdrew from the meeting during its consideration).

(Councillor C Wright attended in accordance with Standing Order 25 (2) and spoke to this item in relation to protecting allowances for experienced foster carers)

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

The Committee considered the Report of the Chief Officer for Children's Services (CS/18/25) outlining proposals for changes to the foster carers fees and allowances scheme. The current fees and allowances system had been adapted and developed over many years and as a result the unintended consequence had been increased complexity, with some confusion and inequities.

Currently, there were five different payment schemes; three tier progression schemes; and four different age bands, which had created inequalities and a complex system of administration. It also did not compare favourably with the local independent sector where there was generally one fee.

Foster carers were not always receiving equal payments for children presenting similar needs. For example, to care for the same 16-year-old child:

- a tier 2 carer would receive £397 in fees and allowances,
- a DYPAS tier 3 carer would receive £471 in fees and allowances, and
- a tier 3 carer would receive £536 in fees and allowances.

The Council valued its foster carers and the contribution they made to the lives of many children and young people, and therefore wanted to create a fair and equitable system, a more transparent fee structure, and to be in a stronger position to recruit more foster carers in the future. The new system aimed to strengthen the focus on children and their needs, matching payments to the complexity of need.

The new model, as set out within the Report, comprised of a weekly allowance, an allocation for engagement with training and support groups, and allocations based on the needs of the child.

The Committee received an Addendum Report outlining the views and feedback of the consultation events held on 11 and 12 September 2018, which addressed any new or significantly different issues that may have emerged. Following this consultation, the recommendation regarding protection of fees to foster carers was extended to include all foster carers experiencing a reduction in allowances for a period of two years or until their current placement ended, whichever came first.

Members discussion points with officers included:

- how assessments for children would be carried out and monitored;
- different tiers of foster carers looking after children with complex needs, not just tier 3 carers;
- the impact on the lives created by foster carers, their homes and employment, should the cuts be implemented;
- the potential to apply the proposed changes to new foster carers only;

- ensuring that children were not labelled under the assessment process;
- payments for Christmas and birthdays to be paid separately as including them as part of the weekly allowance could affect short term placements;
- transport and childminding requirements for those children with disabilities; and
- an aim to make the new system fair, transparent and competitive.

It was **MOVED** by Councillor Channon, **SECONDED** by Councillor Biederman, and

RESOLVED that the Committee endorse the principles behind the changes to the Foster Carer fees and allowances structure, as set out in the Report and Addendum Report (CS/18/25), but that Cabinet be strongly urged to:

- (i) guarantee income protection for carers until all current foster placements come to an end;
- (ii) pay birthday, holiday and festival allowances on or near the relevant date, rather than as part of the weekly allowance; and
- (iii) ensure that the fostering service look favourably upon requests for additional support, in circumstances where there are childminding and/or transportation needs, where this is consistent with the child's care plan.

* **75** **DYS Space Ltd**

The Committee received a Report from the Head of Communities and the CEO of DYS Space Ltd providing a progress update at the halfway point of the initial core youth service with the Council. As well as providing the core contract services, DYS Space had developed strong partnerships to help deliver more diverse opportunities for the young people of Devon. Areas of challenge included providing support on the Duke of Edinburgh for young people with protected characteristics and supporting an increasing number of young people who felt isolated and lonely. Young people had also been involved in decision making relating to areas that affected them across the whole service, including spending allocation. Members were encouraged to attend their local youth centre.

* **76** **Care Leaver's Peer Review**

The Committee considered a Report of the Chief Officer for Children's Services (CS/18/26) which provided a summary of a peer review that took place during June 2018, carried out by Cornwall County Council who had been judged as 'Good' by Ofsted for their care leaving service.

Devon's Service to care leavers had been previously deemed inadequate by Ofsted when last inspected in 2015, and the Review sought to evaluate progress since the last Ofsted inspection against key lines of enquiry.

The Peer Review team concluded that considerable progress had been made since the last inspection of Devon Children's Services by Ofsted in 2015. This finding was supported by the data evidence, feedback from care leavers themselves, and from other activities undertaken by the Peer Review team.

A number of areas were identified as having been significantly improved, most notably the percentage of Care Leavers the Council was in touch with had increased from 45% (in 2015) to at least 84% in June 2018.

Concerns were raised over ensuring there was enough suitable accommodation available for Care Leavers and the need to engage with district planning authorities to ensure there was sufficient provision across the County.

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

RESOLVED that progress be reported to the Corporate Parenting Board and that a report on the education progress of Care Leavers be brought to a future meeting of the Children's Scrutiny Committee.

* **77** **Performance - Social Care**

The Committee considered a Report of the Head of Children's Social Care (CS/18/27) on the annual census return for Children Looked After and Children in Need to March 2018. The number of children Looked After by the Council increased marginally on the previous year (rising from 682 on 31 March 2017 to 694 on 31 March 2018).

The Report highlighted several areas of concern, including the number of children and young people identified with a substance misuse issue; a reduction in the number of single assessments completed within 45 working days of commencement from 89.5% in the previous year to 77.3% and an increase in the number of Initial Child Protection Conferences.

The Committee also raised concerns over the number of children in need with one or more disability, recording a rise of 34.4% in the year to 1,228 children and represented 29.6% of the overall number of children in need cases open to the service at 31 March 2018. This was being further looked into by the Service.

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

RESOLVED that the Report be noted and an update be provided to the Committee in three months.

* **78** **Performance - Education**

The Committee received the Report of the Head of Education and Learning (CS/18/27) on the latest performance measures, highlighting key areas including: Early Years, Children in Care, requests for Statutory Assessments, transfers from statements, rates of absence, Parental Responsibility and Penalty Notices and Ofsted outcomes. The Head of Service advised that initial results for KS4 exams indicated an improvement in outcomes for Care Leavers, however this would be formally reported to the next Committee meeting when results were finalised.

* **79** **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:

- Self harm and young people, and
- Sex and Relationships Education

[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?RPIId=133&RD=0&bcr=1>]

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

The Meeting started at 2.15 pm and finished at 5.12 pm