

Report of the Children's Scrutiny Committee Standing Overview Group

1. Introduction

The recently established Children's Scrutiny Committee Standing Overview Group meets five times a year to consider key updates and pertinent issues from across Children's Services, with the aim of developing Members knowledge and understanding, and bringing to the forefront any areas which may benefit from further scrutiny.

This report outlines the topics covered at the meeting of 14th October 2019, highlights the key points raised during discussion and lists the agreed actions. The papers considered at this meeting are available to view at the links provided in the table below.

2. Attendance

Councillors Rob Hannaford (Chair), Su Aves, Julian Brazil George Gribble, Richard Hosking, Andrew Saywell and Debo Sellis

3. Notes and Actions

Item	Key points raised	Agreed Actions
<p>3.1 Children and Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The value of the work being undertaken by the Devon CCG and Public Health to better understand the self-harming behaviours of children and young people across Devon, Plymouth and Torbay, which will be used to inform future commissioning intentions across the CCG area; • Concern from Members around the impact of isolation, particularly in rural areas, on children and young people's emotional health and wellbeing and any potential correlation with self-harm. These impacts will be explored and understood better through CCG and Public Health work in this area; • Concern around the negative impacts of social media on young people. The Children's Commissioner is due to publish a report very soon on this particular issue; • There are sufficient beds and plans in place in Devon meaning that no young person needing a 'place of safety' bed under the Mental Health Act would ever be held today in a police cell; • The recruitment and retention of skilled staff is a key focus for Children and Families Health Devon (CFHD), with an emphasis on 'growing their own' workforce; 	<p>(a) Members to be provided with a full briefing on Places of Safety and Tier 4 bed capacity;</p> <p>(b) Members to be updated on the outcome of the CCG and Public Health team's work on self-harm in children and young people.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Mental Health Support Team will be delivered through CFHD and has a clear grading and progression structure which should attract and retain skilled and motivated staff; • The majority of schools had bought into the Early Help for Mental Health programme and officers feel that there is a much improved, positive culture in schools in Devon around promoting and support good mental health and wellbeing. Peer to peer support and mental health ambassadors are now common place in schools; • Support from Members of the key deliverables laid out in NHS England's long-term plan for children and young people's emotional health and wellbeing and Members look forward to receiving more information from the CCG about how these will be met locally. 	
<p>3.2 Impact of Public Service Vehicle Accessibility Regulations on School Transport</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council already provides dedicated school transport for children with additional needs and these vehicles are all below 22 seats. As such the vehicles affected by the recent ruling would not actually transport any students who would require or benefit from an accessible vehicle; • Concern about the potential impact of the ruling in, which could result in a significant loss of income to the Council, and/or the withdrawal of school transport services for a number of fare paying students; • The need to ensure that the Department for Transport (and the Department for Education) understand the potential impact of this ruling on local authorities, schools, students and families. 	<p>That the Children's Scrutiny Committee be consulted on and kept informed of the Council's proposals to address the issues raised by the Department for Transport's current interpretation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1997 and its application for regular school transport contracts.</p>
<p>3.3 Budget Round Considerations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The considerable challenges and budgetary pressures which children's services continue to face into the next financial year; • The Chancellor has now committed to increase the funding allocation for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) following the one year spending review, allocating an additional £700 million for SEND, of which Devon will receive an additional £6 million for 2020/21; • The additional funding is welcomed by both Members and officers but this will still leave the Council with a considerable funding gap in the High Needs Block; • Schools block funding is however higher than anticipated with an additional £19 million being allocated for next year, although this still leaves Devon schools as some of the lowest funded in the country; • The pressures of increased demand for special school places and the challenge facing local authorities who are no longer able to open new special schools themselves as a result of the free school presumption. 	<p>That the Children's Standing Overview Group consider school place planning and developers compliance with Section 106/CIL legislation at a future meeting.</p>

	<p>This challenge is predominantly managed by creating additional ‘satellite’ places at maintained special schools through adding additional buildings either on the main school site or nearby. The Council will also be making a bid for a new free school in Devon when the next WAVE is released by the Department for Education (DfE);</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The impact of new housing developments on school place and planning pressures, including the number of developments which fall just short of the Section 106 or Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) thresholds; • The budgetary pressures facing children’s social care, particularly in terms of placement mix and demand in the disabled children’s service. 	
<p>3.4 Education Performance (including Attainment and Exclusions)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The timeliness of issuing Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) is a particularly pertinent issue, having been a key focus of a recent Task Group review and having been highlighted by during the Ofsted/CQC joint local area SEND inspection; • The positive impact of additional staffing and improved processes on the timeliness of plans being issued, noting still the continuing increase in EHCP requests; • The surge in plan requests towards the end of the summer term which leads to a backlog of requests over the summer holidays and causes additional anxiety for families. The Council’s 0-25 team is working with schools to address this; • The correlation between increasing class sizes at key stage 2 and cuts to school funding, has a potential impact on educational attainment and outcomes for all children. 	
<p>3.5 Children’s Social Care Performance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For looked after children, placement stability continues to be a significant challenge, particularly for children and young people with complex needs. Commissioners are undertaking work to stimulate the market with the aim of creating a better placement mix. This is a key priority as placement stability is fundamental in improving education and life outcomes for looked after children; • Adopter sufficiency is a national as well as local issue, and this may have had an impact on the number of looked after children being adopted in 2018/19, which is lower than the previous year; • The number of care leavers the Council is ‘in touch’ with has improved this year, although the percentage of care leavers in suitable accommodation has decreased very slightly. Those classified as not 	<p>Members to be provided with a briefing note outlining adopter sufficiency and recruitment, adoption support and adoption breakdown figures.</p>

	<p>being in suitable accommodation by the DfE definition would include care leavers living in multiple occupancy student accommodation and custody;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The new children's social care case management system Eclipse has led to some information management challenges. Members have already agreed to look at the full impact of Eclipse at a future meeting of the Children's Standing Overview Group. 	
<p>3.6 Public Health Nursing Performance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment and retention of Health Visitors and School Nurses has been a particular issue for the service, and concerns were raised over the potential impact of the reduction in Health Visitor visits for universal service users and a reliance on services which put the onus on parents to proactively engage or ask for help, such as 'self-weigh' and texting services; • Staffing issues in Devon are reflected across the country, with fewer nurses choosing a career in the health visiting or school nursing services. The Public Health Nursing Service in Devon is focussed on improving recruitment and retention and Members supported innovative initiatives which included the creation of roles for students and staff nurses, who would then go on to complete the Public Health Nursing training through an apprenticeships scheme. 	