

CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

18 November 2019

Present:-

Councillors R Hannaford (Chair), D Sellis, S Aves, J Brazil, C Channon, G Gribble, J Hawkins, L Hellyer, R Hosking, T Inch, A Saywell, M Squires, C Mabin and P Sanders

Apologies:-

Councillors F Biederman and A Connell

Members attending in accordance with Standing Order 25

Councillor J McInnes

* **140** Minutes

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 16 September 2019 be signed as a correct record.

* **141** Items Requiring Urgent Attention

There was no item raised as a matter of urgency.

* **142** Public Participation

There were no oral representations from members of the public.

* **143** In-Year Budget Briefing

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

The Committee received the In-Year Budget Briefing Report of the Chief Officer for Children's Services (CS/19/30) outlining those areas of specific pressures on budgets and on action being taken to address this. The Report noted that the budget for the Service had been increased year on year, partly in response to the growth in demand/unit costs and partly to enable important developments, although the latter had also been supported through the earmarking of Business Rates Retention reserve monies.

The Report noted that, at the time of writing, the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant was projecting a funding gap for the end of the financial year of £18.8 millions. Both the Council and Government recognised the national context of rapidly increasing demand and a legal framework driving demand without the corresponding investment. The Chancellor, in his 2019 one-year spending review, committed an additional allocation of £700 millions into Local Authority for SEND nationally in 2020/21 and the Council's share of this funding was confirmed at £5.5 millions.

The Report highlighted that the Council had determined to hold the SEND funding gap on the balance sheet rather than showing it as an overspend, which was in line with proposals currently being consulted upon and, subject to the outcome of this consultation, the Department for Education was proposing that from the end of 2019/20 local authorities must carry forward the whole overspend to the schools budget in future years.

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Members noted that Children's Social Care had seen a sustained increase in the number of children in care, which related more to the rate of children leaving care than to the rate of children entering care. However, adolescent care entry continued to be challenging. Also, School transport and legal disbursements were areas of significant pressure.

The Report highlighted that the Public Health Nursing Service was in-sourced in 2019 and the end of year forecast position for 2019/20 was satisfactory, but costs in future years exceeded the allocated budget, which was fully funded by the Public Health Grant. Work was underway with Public Health and Corporate Services to explore how costs could be brought within budget without staffing reductions.

Members' discussion points with Officers included:

- that adolescent care entry was higher in Devon compared to other local authorities;
- challenges in the sufficiency of placements and alternative placements; getting the right service at the right time; and the development of an 'edge of care' service which was hoped would impact next year;
- the staffing of Public Health Nursing; and
- that assessment of EHCPs were independently reviewed and being confident that threshold was correct.

In response to questions, the Head of Commissioning for Children's Services advised the Committee that the contract with Young Devon to deliver Early Help for mental health services was a three-year contract which had had two one-year extensions. Being now in the final year of the contract, commissioners were considering future funding arrangements for these services. If future commissioning was taken forward in this area, normal process would be on at least a three-year funding arrangement.

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

RESOLVED that the Committee welcomed the approach of commissioners to provide longer term funding arrangements for children's mental health services through future commissioning arrangements.

* 144

Progress following Ofsted Focussed Visit (Minute*126/10 June 2019)

The Committee received the Report of the Head of Children's Social Care (CS/19/29) on progress following Ofsted's focussed visit on 1-2 May 2019. Focussed Visits were part of the Inspection Framework for Local Authority Children's Services designed to support improvement. Devon had identified Children in Need as a priority for improvement and the subsequent Children in Need Focussed Visit letter had identified four areas for improvement of practice.

The Report highlighted that more children open to children's services had an annually updated assessment and more assessments were of a better quality. The proportion of cases sampled where the assessment was good, had increased significantly over the past year. Changes had also been made to the Council's Quality Assurance Framework to increase the focus on outcomes whilst maintaining a proportionate focus on activity and practice standards.

Also highlighted was the continuing challenges with performance and management information from Eclipse and focussed activity to remedy all residual challenges following implementation was being driven by a Mobilisation Board of key partners chaired by the Council's Head of Commissioning for Children's Services.

Members' discussion points with Officers included:

- training and supervision - training in schools was available through e.g. the Dedicated Safeguarding leads, the annual conference and forum meetings; and recognition that there was more to do around social work supervision;
- clarification that assessments were single assessments carried out at the point of referral and updated annually or if circumstances changed significantly;
- the challenges posed by Eclipse due in part to data migration from one system to another; and
- Members were encouraged to visit their social work locality teams and the Chief Officer undertook to circulate to Members contact details for locality and area managers.

* **145 Children's Social Care Self-Assessment**

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

The Committee received the Report of the Chief Officer for Children's Services (CS/19/31), which presented Members with the Children's Services Annual Self-Assessment. The self-assessment was in two parts, the first part covered most of Children's Services; and the second part covered in more depth social work in the Service and was closely linked to the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services framework. The self-assessment also formed the basis of the Ofsted Annual Conversation.

Discussion points on the Children's Services self-assessment included:

- clarify was requested regarding fuel poverty and the statement '*12% of all households are above the England rate*', which the Chief Officer undertook to provide;
- the uptake of free school meals and the stigma attached thereto particularly in deprived rural and coastal communities;
- elective home education and safeguarding visits carried out by Children's Services to unregistered education providers who were not inspected by Ofsted,
- that Personal Advisors were available to provide help and support to those care leavers living in 'unsuitable accommodation' (as defined by Ofsted), which included custody and shared student accommodation;
- the resource and travel burden of having placements outside of Devon; and
- the Oracy project in Torridge which was a joint project looking at the outcomes for disadvantaged children.

* **146 Children's Centre Services**

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

The Committee received the Joint Report of the Head of Commissioning, Children's Services and Head of Public Health Nursing (CS/19/27), which updated Members on the performance of the Children's Centre services delivery, the changes that had been implemented to deliver a targeted service and the opportunities being explored for integrated working with Public Health Nursing Service.

The Operational Director of Action for Children also attended and spoke at the invitation of the Committee.

The Report highlighted the Impact of Changes in Year One; Performance Management Data from April 2018 to March 2019; and Service Development and integrated working with Public Health Nursing next steps.

Members' discussion points with Officers included:

- how Children's Centres should not be looked at as 'buildings', but as a delivery of services to children;
- active recruitment to vacancies across Public Health Nursing, offering a comprehensive induction programme;
- the lack of affordable housing for key workers in rural areas and how this should be monitored going forward;
- how local communities could approach their local Member for Locality funding to support universal services for young families; and
- that visits from the Committee to Children's Centres would be welcomed.

* **147 Children's Standing Overview Group**

The Committee received the Report of the Scrutiny Committee Standing Overview Group which outlined the topics covered at its October meeting, highlighting the key points raised during discussion and listing the agreed actions.

The Head of Transport Services updated Members on the impact the Public Service Vehicle Accessibility Regulations would have on school transport, which followed a recent Court case where the Department for Transport had interpreted that the Regulations would also apply to rail replacement services and school transport which was fare paying. Further information and guidance from the Department for Transport was expected shortly and would then be shared with the Committee.

* **148 SEND Written Statement of Action - Progress**

The Committee considered the Report of the Head of Education and Learning (CS/19/28) which detailed progress following the SEND Written Statement of Action that had identified four areas requiring significant improvement.

The following in discussion was highlighted:

- significant funding had been made available to improve capacity within SEN teams; and a Development Lead had also been appointed;
- CCG - a bid for £700,000 investment had been successful to help tackle Autism waiting lists;
- two new Special schools (Tiverton and Glendinning); and a business case for capital investment for 300 additional Special school places had been made and was awaiting Council ratification;
- all new staff would receive Induction training - to be rolled out in December 2019; and
- that pupils with EHCPs were above the national average in all the key stages.

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

RESOLVED that the Committee welcomed proposed additional funding and investment in SEN to support additional provision in special schools and meet the statements laid out in the Written Statement of Action.

* **149 Scrutiny Committee Work Programme**

RESOLVED that the current Work Programme be approved.

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

The Meeting started at 2.20 pm and finished at 5.25 pm