

CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

8 September 2020

Present:-

Councillors S Aves, F Biederman, J Brazil, C Channon, G Gribble, R Hannaford (Chair), J Hawkins, L Hellyer, R Hosking, T Inch, P Sanders, A Saywell, D Sellis and Mrs C Mabin (Church of England Diocesan representative)

Apologies:-

Councillors A Connett and M Squires

Members attending in accordance with Standing Order 25

Councillor J McInnes

* **176** **Meeting Procedures - Briefing and Etiquette**

The Committee received a brief statement from the Democratic Services Officer on the process and etiquette for remote meetings.

* **177** **Minutes**

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 9 June 2020 be signed as a correct record.

* **178** **Items Requiring Urgent Attention**

There was no matter raised as a matter of urgency.

* **179** **Public Participation**

There were no oral representations from members of the public.

* **180** **Scrutiny Work Programme**

The Committee were updated as to the Scrutiny Work Programme and it was agreed that future Scrutiny reviews would take place on Early Help and Social Work.

* **181** **SEND Transformation Plan (including CAMHS and Autism)**

The Committee received a joint presentation by officers from Devon County Council, Children and Family Health Devon and NHS Devon Clinical

Commissioning Group entitled 'SEND Transformation: Children and Young People Emotional Health Wellbeing and Autism'.

The presentation covered the delivery of services during COVID-19 and highlighted in particular:

- That crisis support for CAMHS was being delivered 24/7;
- Waiting times (CAMHS) for urgent and Eating Disorder referrals were on target;
- The impact on staff from remote working, wellbeing and shift work;
- Autism waiting times for assessment had gradually increased, impacted by staff recruitment and retention;
- EHCP requests had increased;
- Average waiting time for CAMHS was 14.4 weeks, from start of treatment; and
- The support available for children and families whilst waiting.

Officers responded to Members' questions that covered:

- The effectiveness of virtual diagnoses and the availability to young people of online resources and face to face contact;
- The waiting time for autism was currently in excess of two years, although a high-risk priority would automatically be expedited;
- Online resources were available on the Children and Family Health Devon website which could be accessed by parents during Autism waiting times;
- There was an increase in eating disorders being presented in young people, especially girls, due to lockdown and of parents becoming more aware; and
- Inadequate funding for children's mental health.

It was agreed that a wider discussion around CAMHS and Autism waiting times with Children and Family Health Devon and Devon CCG colleagues should take place at a future Scrutiny Standing Overview Group or Masterclass.

[NB: A copy of the presentation would be circulated to Members.]

* 182

Return to Schools

The Head of Education and Learning reported verbally to the Committee on the Return to Schools, highlighting the following in particular:

- Some schools had opened last week, and 93% of pupils attended. The majority of schools were opening this week and a full return was anticipated by 14 September;
- Initial figures for ECHP attendance was at 88.54%;

- Figures would continue to be collected on a daily basis for all vulnerable children and daily updates would be obtained as they returned to school;
- The Council's website provided parents and families with a lot of online support and guidance;
- A special Connect Me Back to School Special bulletin had been circulated;
- School transport had been especially challenging, but 99% of pupils known to the team had transport in place for the first day of term. Any issues tended to relate to late bus pass applications, no notification of new address or a change in time of school day;
- Interim arrangements had been put in place to transport children to a school just over the border in Cornwall. This was because the normal bus service for this school had been withdrawn by the bus company.
- The number of cases of Covid in the County were still very low;
- Schools had been asked to keep in place all of their arrangements for remote education in case needed;
- The Department for Education had funded over 2000 laptops for distribution to vulnerable children; and if further were required they could be ordered directly through schools (only for those isolating); and
- The Government had put in place two funding streams for catchup funding to cover all schools, paid over the academic year, and the other for schools in disadvantaged areas for tutoring/mentoring work.

Councillor McInnes wished to put on record his thanks for the hard work of all the Teams involved in the organisation of the return to school.

Members requested a briefing note be circulated to them detailing the number of laptops already distributed to vulnerable children and where schools could apply for further ones for those children who were isolating.

* 183

Progress on the Improvement Plan, Improvement Partnership and Preparation for Monitoring Visit

The Committee received the Devon Improvement Plan report that had been presented to the Improvement Partnership on 20 August 2020, which included an updated action matrix, key areas of progress and risk and preparations for the first Ofsted monitoring visit. This Improvement plan had been in place since July and replaced the previous Covid-19 improvement plan.

Officers responded to Members' questions that covered:

- Progress not being made on some priorities as quickly as planned due to some actions being de-prioritised and others where focussed work has started with partners;
- A score card would be provided with future Committee reports on the improvement plan;

- Members would have preferred to see a covering report, giving an overview of the improvement plan identifying where the weaknesses were, and progress made against them; and
- The first Ofsted monitoring visit would take place across two days, 22/23 September.

* **184** **Re-set for Children's Services**

The Committee received the Report the Head of Commissioning of Children's Services on the re-set of Children's Services' priorities post Covid-19 lockdown. International data had shown that lockdown had had a significant and harmful impact on the most vulnerable children, with children who already lived with parental domestic abuse, drug and alcohol harm and mental ill health being worst affected, with the most life-threatening risk for infants.

A presentation was also given on the Children and Young People's Plan Reset for 2020 to 2021.

Members' questions and Officer responses included:

- Focus was on the most vulnerable children, who had lost four months of education, and the re-set would take this forward;
- Careers South West, in partnership with schools and colleges, were working to ensure everyone had access to targeted support and information;
- The Government had announced a range of programmes to ensure young people could return to work and training;
- A detailed action plan was being prepared responding to all local data; and
- The impact of furlough on the County where most furlough was seen in the tourism and hospitality industries.

* **185** **Social Work - Workforce Comparison Data**

The Committee received the Report of the Acting Head of Children's Services on social work recruitment and retention, which set out the national and local context regarding social worker recruitment and considered the challenges currently facing Devon.

A proposal had been put forward to establish a social work career pathway in the context of offers made by neighbouring authorities, recommending that the rationale and proposals for aligning Devon Children's Services against the national framework for career progression and the case for improving Devon's offer to social workers, in order to stabilise and value current workforce and promote better outcomes for children and young people. These measures would help to be able to meet the statutory obligations to children and families and would promote the development of a skilled and effective workforce.

The Committee welcomed the Report and agreed that these issues would form the basis for the Scrutiny Review into Social Work.

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

The Meeting started at 10.30 am and finished at 2.07 pm