

## **Report of the Children's Standing Overview Group – July 2020**

### **1. Introduction**

The Children's Scrutiny Committee Standing Overview Group meets regularly throughout the 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 21<sup>st</sup> July 2020, highlights the key points raised during discussion and details any agreed actions.

### **2. Attendance**

Councillors Rob Hannaford (Chair), Su Aves, Frank Biederman, Julian Brazil, Christine Channon, Iain Chubb, George Gribble, Jonathan Hawkins, Linda Hellyer, Richard Hosking, Tony Inch, Philip Sanders, Andrew Saywell, Debo Sellis, Margaret Squires and Mrs Christina Mabin (Church of England)

Officers: Jo Olsson (Chief Officer for Children's Services), Vivien Lines (Improvement Director), Dawn Stabb (Head of Education & Learning), Rachel Gillott (Locality Director- South) and Ian Hemelik (Virtual School Lead).

Department for Education: Eleanor Brazil (Children's Commissioner)

Children's Scrutiny Special Advisor: Kevin Crompton

Scrutiny Officers: Vicky Church and Dan Looker

### **3. Notes and Actions**

#### **3.1 Rapid Reviews**

The Chief Officer for Children's Services provided members with the findings of two Rapid Reviews undertaken since lockdown began. Relevant details and learning from the individual cases were shared with Members confidentially. Key points from the wider discussion are detailed below:

- Devon Children and Families Partnership (DCFP) has taken the view that significant learning can be gained in some cases by undertaking a Rapid Review where no child death or life changing injury has occurred;
- The Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown period brought additional concern and the DCFP were keen to consider cases which would bring further understanding and learning at this time;
- For one of these cases it was felt that the Rapid Review had sufficiently unpacked the learning to allow the partnership to move into responsive action planning without the need for a local Child Safeguarding Practice Review (CSPR); there had also been

positive feedback from the national panel on the review and outcome, and learning was being taken forward;

- The decision was made for the second case to be taken to a CSPR as it was felt that further investigation and understanding was needed; in this case the CSPR would take an Appreciative Enquiry approach (a strengths-based approach), which involves looking at a similar case where the multi-agency practice worked well; the approach recognises the need to learn from good practice and will bring together practitioners from both cases to share and learn from successful practice; the findings of the CSPR will be published;
- In response to questions from Members, the Chief Officer highlighted the significant role and responsibility of partners providing universal services such as early years settings, schools and GPs in identifying and protecting vulnerable children and families not known to children's social care, and the importance of a multi-agency approach towards safeguarding.

### **3.2 Return to School in September and School Summer Holidays**

The Head of Education and Learning provided Members with an update on plans for return to school in September based on the revised Department for Education (DfE) advice which now outlines the kinds of measures Government would like to see schools put in place, including:

- Guidance on the management of positive cases and outbreaks;
- Further relaxation around the rules on 'bubbles' in school; bubbles in secondary schools can be widened to a whole year group, recognising the need for this in order to run an effective curriculum at secondary level;
- Requirements for risk assessments; the local authority has produced a template for all maintained schools (and made this available to academies) which reflects guidance given by the DfE and existing health and safety guidance; this has also been shared with the relevant unions; schools are currently completing their risk assessments prior to sharing them with the local authority before September;
- The expectation that all pupils will return to school full time from September; the local authority will work positively with families to support the transition back to school, acknowledging that parental and pupil concerns and anxieties around this may remain;
- Curriculums should continue to be across all subjects but will need to have some flexibility to allow pupils to catch up on content missed, particularly in core subjects; schools will need to be informed by pupils' starting points and take steps to address gaps in their knowledge;
- Schools will need to maintain a remote element to education for those pupils who develop symptoms and to provide a backstop for any local outbreaks and lockdown measures;
- A greater focus on pastoral and extracurricular activities including supporting pupils to build friendships and develop good physical, emotional and mental health;
- The DfE expectation that schools will return to a normal curriculum by the Summer Term 2021.

The Head of Education and Learning also updated Members on newly announced future funding arrangements, including:

- £650 million Catch Up Premium which will provide all state mainstream schools, special school and alternative provision with around £80 per mainstream pupil and £240 per special school pupil; this equates to around £16,000 for a primary school with 200 pupils and around £80,000 for a secondary school with 1000 pupils;

- Schools have been given the flexibility to spend this funding in a way which best meets the needs of their cohort, however governors and trustees are expected to scrutinise this spending;
- £350 million National Tutoring Programme will provide additional targeted support for children and young people who need the most help; this will be in the form of high quality tuition for 5-16 year olds and small group tutoring for sixth form students who have been disadvantaged through disrupted studies.

The Head of Education and Learning also updated Members on plans for the summer holidays including:

- Intensive working between the Early Years team and providers to support them to open safely following the lifting of Government restrictions; parents and carers can search for local provision through the Pinpoint directory, and those struggling to find childcare over the summer holidays can complete a form to request support in finding and securing this;
- Schools have also been asked to advise the local authority of any vulnerable children or families without a social worker who might need additional support with childcare or activity clubs over the school holidays; these families are being offered a variety of support;
- Activities for children in care have been put in place including a virtual summer school and outdoor education experiences.

### **3.3 Ofsted Inspection of Children's Services January 2020 - Improvement Plan / Improvement Partnership**

The Improvement Director updated Members of the progress of the Improvement Plan and the work of the Improvement Partnership, which included:

- The Partnership moving towards Phase 2 (Improvement) of the Plan, whilst still ensuring that key parts of Phase 1 (Covid-19) continued concurrently, including an enhanced model of risk assessment;
- The Partnership now feels in a good position to ensure all eight areas identified during the inspection are addressed;
- Three practice priorities have been identified; Care Leavers, Children in Care and Children at risk of chronic neglect and emotional abuse;
- Care leavers; we are seeing positive moves forward for many of the young people we are working with, but we know there is still a lot more work to be done; our ambition is to have no care leavers in unsuitable accommodation; this will not be easy to achieve but it is a key focus for the Partnership and is the right ambition to have; it is important to remember that provision of accommodation is not the sole issue, we need to ensure that there is package of support around young people leaving care, and help them to make a success of it;
- Children in care; the Partnership is developing and improving permanence planning from the earliest point that a child enters care;
- Children at risk of chronic neglect and emotional abuse; using evidence-based tools in social work and across the Partnership and removing children where necessary;
- In addition, four Pillars of Improvement have been identified; Supervision, Management, Quality Assurance and Leadership which address the impact of leaders and managers on social work practice and on children and families;
- The principles of improvement sit as part of a collective responsibility across the partnership;

- The next steps are to take forward the priorities and develop a framework to monitor and evaluate the progress being made; this will have a clear focus on outcomes and listening to the voices of children and young people and understanding the lived experience of families; Scrutiny will have the opportunity review a number of the plan's performance indicators through future committee meetings;
- We expect Ofsted to return to Devon to monitor progress in January and we are preparing for this, ensuring that we can demonstrate the progress made; Scrutiny has a key role in demonstrating the oversight in place.

### **3.4 Briefing Note: Children's Services Re-Set. Learning from CV 19 and Lock Down**

The Chief Officer for Children's Services outlined some of the key themes arising the briefing note circulated to Members from the Head of Commissioning (Children's Services), including:

- The immediate and more long-term impacts of the lockdown period on the economy, unemployment rates, numbers of benefit claimants, poverty, and the consequential impact of this on children and young people, on their wellbeing and life chances;
- Challenges facing young people leaving school this summer and entering workforce; Devon historically has low levels of youth unemployment but this is expected to increase;
- The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown on young people's emotional health and wellbeing; many will have experienced loss or trauma in some form as a consequences of the past few months;
- Devon Children & Families Partnership (DCFP) has heard mixed experiences from young people; some have said that they feel very well supported by their school and other services, whereas others feel quite abandoned;
- International and national data is telling us that we will have a real challenge in managing the emotional health and wellbeing of our children and young people, but also that of their parents; we have seen increased rates of domestic violence and poor mental health in families during the lockdown period;
- As children and young people have been isolated from their peers we've seen an increased risk of online grooming; there is an expectation that as children return to school we may see higher levels of disclosures of abuse as well as requests for mental health support;
- The DCFP has tried to build a rich and complex picture of children and young people's experiences over the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown period to help us plan services and support going forward.

### **3.5 Next Meeting**

Members agreed that the next Children's Standing Overview Group would be held in October 2020.

**Councillor Rob Hannaford**  
**Chair of the Children's Scrutiny Committee**