

Report of the Children's Scrutiny Committee Standing Overview Group of Thursday 8th April 2021

1. Introduction

The Standing Overview Group of the Children's Scrutiny Committee meets regularly as an informal information sharing and member development session where issues are presented to the councillors to raise awareness and increase knowledge. The Standing Overview Group considers key updates and pertinent issues from across different services, with the aim of developing Members' knowledge, and bringing to the forefront any areas which may benefit from further scrutiny.

Any action points arising from the sessions are reported back to the next formal Committee meeting.

This report outlines the topic(s) covered at the meeting of Thursday 8th April 2021, highlights the key points raised during discussion and details any agreed actions.

2. Recommendation

The Children's Scrutiny Committee accepts this report as an accurate record of the meeting and agrees the outlined actions raised during the discussion including the addition of the highlighted issues of concern to the future work programme.

3. Attendance

Scrutiny Councillors: Rob Hannaford (Chair), Debo Sellis (Vice Chair), Su Aves, Frank Biederman, Ian Chubb, Linda Hellyer, Richard Hosking, Philip Sanders, Margaret Squires and Mrs Christina Mabin (Church of England).

Cabinet Member for Children and Schools: Councillor James McInnes

Children's Services Officers: Dawn Stabb (Head of Education and Learning), Rachel Gillott (Head of Children's Social Care), Vivien Lines (Improvement Director)

Other Presenters (Children and Family Health Devon): Crispin Taylor, Annika Palmer and Siobhan Grady.

Special Advisor: Kevin Crompton

Scrutiny Officer: Charlie Fisher

Apologies: Councillors Julian Brazil, Christine Channon, Alan Connett, George Gribble, Jonathan Hawkins, Tony Inch and Andrew Saywell, Melissa Caslake (Chief Officer for Children's Services), Fiona Fleming (Head of Commissioning), Kate Stephens (Head of Public Health Nursing).

4. Notes and Actions

Members began by introducing themselves to presenters who were not from Devon County Council.

4.1 Mental Health and Wellbeing Support

Report of Dawn Stabb (Head of Education and Learning) on mental health and wellbeing support for young people as they return to school and beyond.

The report responded to a request from Scrutiny to give an overview about the information, resources and support available to young people ranging.

Member discussion areas:

- In response to a question, officers confirmed 23 schools across Devon and Torbay were part of the Social Workers in Schools programme and the funding is recurrent.
- Members and officers discussed the return to school for children and the positives of being back in school to support children's wellbeing and safeguarding.
- Officers from Children and Family Health Devon (CFHD) appraised Members about the sharp rise of children presenting with eating disorders. There has been a 39% rise in acute crisis referrals.
- Members and Officers discussed the resources, staffing and increase in demand for mental health services in Devon. Officers commented on the 60% increase in demand over the last 3 years and a recent bid to Devon CCG to recruit more staff.
- Members and Officers discussed safeguarding in schools and the importance of having a trusted person to talk to and the protective quality of schools to spot early signs which could not happen over COVID-19 lockdowns.
- Members asked about the prevalence of mental health issues in society and the comparisons between people in urban and rural areas of Devon.
- In response to a Member's question, Officers from CFHD confirmed that they were moving to an integrated clinical health record for Devon and Torbay to allow for one system to hold records.

Actions:

Currently only Children's Scrutiny Councillors had sight of the information - Scrutiny Officer to share the item paper with all Members.

Scrutiny Officer to liaise with Crispin Taylor to share figures on young people presenting with eating disorders.

4.2 Autism Assessment Service

Report of Beverley Mack (Children's Alliance Director, Children and Family Health Devon) on Autism Spectrum Condition Assessment Services. Crispin Taylor, Annika Palmer and Siobhan Grady presented the report on behalf of Beverley Mack.

The report gave an overview of the service at present, Children and Family Health Devon (CFHD)'s plans to improve the service and an update to the SEND Written Statement of Action on Autism.

Officers stated that autism waiting times is a significant area of concern for CFHD with 2880 children currently waiting for assessment. Demand for services is currently outstripping resources and capacity but there is a plan to clear the current backlog by the end of 2021. The service's current referral to treatment (RTT) target is 92% of patients seen within 22 weeks and officers were confident this would be reached by the end of the year.

Member discussion areas:

- In responses to questions from Members, officers spoke about the plans for improving the service and streamlining processes. Transformation work in this area would need a whole systems approach with partners such as Devon County Council and Devon CCG. CFHD were reviewing internal processes to streamline services. An extra 20 members of staff were being recruited from agencies in the short to medium term to provide 2500 extra assessments this year to clear the backlog.
- Members discussed the prevalence of autism due to the significant rise in demand currently seen. Officers confirmed there is increased awareness of autism and how it presents.
- Officers from CFHD confirmed governance procedures so there is a strong and robust arrangement in place with scrutiny and risk registers to ensure progress is made.
- Members questioned about the narrative surrounding people with autism and the negative connotations associated with autism. Members and Officers recognised the misconceptions of autism. Members which many people live a happy, fulfilling life and have the opportunities to pursue their passions and interests.
- Officers were asked to update the Committee in 6 months on progress made.

Actions:

Scrutiny Officer to add this item to the work programme of the new council to ensure the committee receives an update.

4.3 Recruitment and Retention Update

Presentation of Rachel Gillott (Head of Children's Social Care) on Recruitment and Retention of Social Workers and Front-Line Managers in Children's Social Care.

The report updates Members on progress made since the item was brought before the Committee in September 2020 and the business case presented to Cabinet in December 2020 which agreed additional resources for social worker retention. In addition, a progress report was requested in the Social Worker Workforce Spotlight Review in December 2020 for Spring 2021.

The Head of Children's Social Care appraised Members of developments since December 2020. The proposals within the business case have now been implemented but it is too soon to see it's effect. A refreshed training programme is in place across all services and put into a 'One Stop Shop'. Work has been ongoing to promote recruitment and Devon as an attractive place to work via a recruitment campaign, career pathways, story boards and working with Frontline. In terms of current staffing levels, there are currently 40 vacancies in Devon and a continuing high level of agency staff.

The Head of Children's Social Care highlighted to Members the feedback from Frontline, who stated Devon was the 'most positive place we have been to' and social workers were 'buoyant'.

Member discussion areas:

- Members asked about how we compare to pay and conditions with Torbay and Cornwall Councils. Officers stated that as demand for social workers is so high, it is a competitive market. While Devon is currently benchmarked to Torbay, their package is better in other ways. There is a continuing difficulty to recruit permanent and agency staff.
- Members asked about routes into the profession and work with Higher Education Facilities. Officers confirmed we work with Plymouth and Bournemouth and planned to work with South Devon College on apprenticeships.
- Members asked about the delays to DBS checks and housing for agency staff. Some agency staff have had to live in hotel rooms. Members and officers were open to talking to District Councils about housing for staff in the future.
- Members and Officers recognised this ongoing issue would need continuing discussions in the new council.

Actions:

Scrutiny Officer to add to work programme of new council to ensure the Committee continues to receive updates on the topic.

5. Next Meeting

This was the final Children's Scrutiny Meeting of the council term. Children's Scrutiny Committee and Standing Overview Group meetings would continue in the new term.

The meeting began at 10.30am and ended at 12.38pm

Councillor Rob Hannaford
Chair, Children's Scrutiny Committee

Electoral Divisions: All

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Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers

Background Paper	Date	File Reference
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