

CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

20 March 2018

Present:-

Councillors R Hannaford (Chair), D Sellis (Vice-Chair), S Aves, F Biederman, J Brazil, E Brennan, G Gribble, L Hellyer, R Hosking, T Inch and A Saywell

Additional Members for Educational Issues:-

Mrs C Mabin

Apologies:-

Councillors C Channon, J Hawkins, J Mathews and M Squires

Members attending in accordance with Standing Order 25

Councillor J McInnes

* 46

Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Children's Scrutiny (Budget) and Children's Scrutiny (ordinary) Committee meetings both held on 23 January 2018 be signed as a correct record.

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Items Requiring Urgent Attention

There was no item raised as a matter of urgency.

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Public Participation

In accordance with the Council's Public Participation Rules, the Committee received and acknowledged oral representations made by Mrs L Strange on a matter to be considered by the Committee, namely 'Placements for Children in Care' (Minute *52 refers), and Councillor H Packham on 'Children's Centres' (Minutes *49 refers).

The Chair responded, thanking both speakers for their attendance and presentations which would be considered by the Committee during its subsequent deliberations.

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Children's Centres

The Committee received a Report from the Chief Officer for Children's Services (CS/18/18) on the implementation of Children's Centres and the new contract arrangements with Action for Children from April 2018. A risk register provided by Action for Children, outlined how they intended to mitigate the risks associated with moving to a targeted service within the first year of the contract.

Members' discussion points with Officers included:

- the planned delivery and level of provision available at West Exe Children's Centre;
- delivery of the North Devon Multiple Births Group, which had become a constituted community group and could employ a member of staff and was supported by volunteers from Action for Children; and,

- the possibility of implementing similar practices in other Children's Centres across Devon.

It was **MOVED** by Councillor Brennan, **SECONDED** by Councillor Biederman, and

RESOLVED that Action for Children be invited to a future Children's Scrutiny Committee to discuss future plans and ideas, including more detail on the Thrive approach.

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Internal Audit Plan 2018/19

The Committee received the Report of the County Treasurer (CT/18/28) outlining the proposed internal audit activity within Children's Services for 2018/19; the work undertaken and provided an overall adequacy and effectiveness of the service area's internal control environment.

Members' discussion points included:

- the need to review homelessness in 16 – 17 year olds, including those that 'sofa surf', to gain a greater understanding of the extent of this issue within Devon;
- suitable accommodation for Care Leavers; and
- considering an audit of internal fostering within Devon.

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

RESOLVED that a review of homelessness amongst 16 and 17 year olds be considered at a future Committee meeting and District Councils be invited to discuss ongoing work and plans to tackle this issue.

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Care Leavers

The Committee considered the Report of the Chief Officer for Children's Services (CS/18/15) which provided a summary of a self-assessment that took place during November and December 2017, evaluating the quality of provision provided by the locality Permanence and Transition Teams and identified areas for continued improvement. This activity provided the opportunity for preparation for a Peer Review, due to take place between May and June 2018.

Areas of strength identified by the self-assessment included, inter alia, the participation of young people in their pathway plan and their voice being evident throughout the planning process, pathway plans being reviewed in a timely manner, evidence of good quality visits and regular advice about entitlements and the complaints process, young people deemed to be safe based on regular contact and review and aspirational pathway plans completed in partnership with young people and key organisations.

Some areas identified for improvement included too many pathway plans lacking a contingency plan, too few cases having a separate needs assessment to support the development of the initial pathway plan and a lack of confirmation that care leavers had received copies of their pathway plans.

Members noted an increase in the percentage of care leavers with whom the Council remained in contact with, and felt it would be useful to receive further information about the methods used in establishing and maintaining contact.

* 52

Placements for Children in Care

The Committee considered the Report of the Chief Officer for Children's Services providing an update on the current position with regard to placements of Children Looked After and the work in progress to improve placement sufficiency.

The Report outlined the importance of delivering the Council's Corporate Parenting responsibilities and achieving good outcomes for Children Looked After by meeting their accommodation needs. There was a focus on family based care, with the in-house fostering service currently totalling at 356 approved places, whilst there were 186 children placed with external foster placements. There were currently 103 residential childrens home beds, having dropped as low as 67 over the past three years due to the impact of inadequate Ofsted results. There was a drive to increase the number of in-house foster placements, with ongoing recruitment drives and a new Digital Advertising Campaign and social media posts.

It was noted that work had been commissioned to examine placement sufficiency and to consider whether there was a need to open in-house capacity and develop proposals for a multi-disciplinary 'Edge of Care' approach. This included an examination of the profile of children in care and the type of placements available, the utilisation or residential capacity, the profile of in-house foster carers and recruitment and retention within the fostering service. This would lead to the production of a sufficiency strategy.

The Committee noted that at the current time, the evidence did not support the opening of in-house children's homes, and the Chief Officer confirmed that more information on this point, along with the sufficiency strategy would be shared with Members in due course.

* **53 Adolescent Risk Pathway**

The Committee considered the Report of the Chief Officer for Children's Services (CS/18/11) outlining plans to develop and implement a multi-agency adolescent risk pathway in order to provide a safety planning response to young people where they were exposed to risk emerging from their contacts outside the family network. This aimed to provide an operational response to protect young people who were at risk of harm outside of the home and who did not meet the criteria for a child protection plan but required a risk management plan that co-ordinated professional network activity and supported the family and young person to remain safe.

* **54 Regional Adoption Agency**

The Committee considered the Report of the Head of Children's Social Care (CS/18/16) outlining proposals to move towards a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), hosted by Devon County Council, which aimed to improve the process for children and adopters, leading to an increased number of children being adopted, a better experience for adopters and improved timeliness overall.

The business case for the RAA outlined the benefits of local authorities coming together as a regional service, including Plymouth City Council, Torbay Council and Somerset County Council along with Devon County Council. Approval of this business case by all the local authorities would enable transition from four separate adoption services to a single service hosted by Devon, with effect from October 2018.

As a single host local authority model, the adoption service functions from Plymouth, Torbay and Somerset would be delegated to Devon County Council. Governance arrangements involved an RAA Operational Board led by senior managers from the local authorities to oversee service performance and have responsibility for the annual plan and budget. There would also be a Strategic Partnership Group, with a broader more strategic role bringing together partners and key stakeholders, including Council Members, to set the strategic direction for continuous improvement of the RAA and reflect national policy as well as local considerations.

It was noted that the Children's Scrutiny Committee would be updated on progress of the RAA in April 2019, which would be 6 months after implementation.

* **55** **Performance - Children's Social Care**

The Committee received the Children's Social Care Performance Report from the Head of Children's Social Care (CS/18/12) on the latest performance measures. Key areas highlighted within the Report and by the Chief Officer included, inter alia, population profile and caseloads, the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and referrals; Children in Need; Child Protection, Children Looked After and Care Leavers, Adoption South West comparative data and Children's Social Work Workforce data 2017.

The Head of Service also demonstrated to Members the use of the new Eclipse database, which would provide an online interactive system allowing for more timely and extensive use of performance and management information. Work was ongoing to ensure that when Eclipse was implemented there would be a continuity of performance and management information provision and that the overall range of information was increased, with a greater ability to analyse information at a worker, team, locality and service level.

* **56** **Performance - Education**

The Committee received the Report of the Head of Education and Learning (CS/18/13) on the latest performance measures, highlighting key areas including: Early Years Foundation Stage, Free School Meals, Special Educational Needs pupils, requests for Statutory Assessments, and transfers from statements. The Report noted that Devon was above average in all key areas of educational performance, with positive outcomes for those with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and rates of transfer from statements to EHCPs were on target and due to be completed by April 2018.

Members noted that a significant number of first assessments for children with SEN were being completed outside of the statutory timescales. Greater resource had been allocated to address this and it was agreed that a briefing paper would be circulated to Members later in the year, updating on progress.

* **57** **Children's Scrutiny Committee Work Programme**

RESOLVED that the current Work Programme be approved subject to inclusion of the following topics for future consideration and also those agreed at the meeting:

- Foster Carer Allowances
- Homelessness in 16 & 17 year olds and care leavers

[NB: The Scrutiny Work Programme was available on the Council's website at <https://new.devon.gov.uk/democracy/committee-meetings/scrutinycommittees/scrutinyworkprogramme/> and the Council/Cabinet Forward Plan is available at <http://democracy.devon.gov.uk/mgListPlans.aspx?RPId=133&RD=0&bcr=1>

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

The Meeting started at 2.15 pm and finished at 6.05 pm