

Report of the Children's Scrutiny Committee Standing Overview Group

1. Introduction

The Children's Scrutiny Committee Standing Overview Group meets five times a 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 9th December 2019, highlights the key points raised during discussion and lists the agreed actions. Papers considered at this meeting are available to view at the links provided in the table below.

2. Attendance

Councillors Rob Hannaford (Chair), Su Aves, George Gribble, Richard Hosking, Debo Sellis and Margaret Squires

Officers: Dawn Stabb (Head of Education & Learning), Darry Freeman (Head of Children's Social Care), Fiona Fleming (Head of Commissioning), Julie Wilcockson (Public Health Nursing), Emily Youngman (Consultant in Public Health) and James Tisshaw (Operations Manager, Early Help), Vicky Church (Scrutiny Officer) and Charlie Hall (Scrutiny Intern)

3. Notes and Actions

Item	Key points raised	Agreed Actions
3.1 Overview of Devon's serious cases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local partnerships are required to undertake a review of all cases of child deaths or serious injury where neglect or abuse are suspected to be factors in the death/injury; • Partnerships may also review cases that fall outside this criteria; • The Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 (Chapter Four) changed the way that serious cases are reviewed; • Historically, Serious Case Reviews were resource intensive, took a long time to complete and the evidence of their impact on practice improvement is uncertain; • Rapid Reviews are completed within 15 days; a Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review (LCSPR) may also be undertaken in some circumstances; • Focus of reviews is on learning; • Devon Children & Families Partnership is responsible for reviewing serious cases in line with these new requirements; 	Neglect Strategy and Toolkit to be shared with Members of the Children's Scrutiny Committee

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Neglect Strategy and Toolkit has been developed, based on a shared understanding of what neglect is across partners and a common understanding/pathway for referrals; the toolkit provides a graded care profile tool which allows families and social workers to focus on what needs to change to improve the child's lived experience; • Reviews have shown the value of having a lead professional, particularly in cases of neglect; • The importance of practitioners considering the full record for a child when working with children and families was also raised; • Local authorities continue to face challenges to intervene in cases of elective home education due to having such limited powers. 	
3.2 Early Help Update	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Right for Children is a multi-agency platform which enables practitioners from a range of agencies to input and share information about the families they are working with (with consent); • Numbers of children who are accessing Early Help are going up; data is showing that we are working successfully with families; this is reflected in a reduction in Children in Need cases; • A high percentage of early help referrals come from schools and we see significant peaks in referrals in July (before summer holidays); Early Help teams are working with schools to support them to access Early Help throughout the school year; • Early Help teams in each locality have developed profiles/priorities for their area, informed by local knowledge and local data. 	Local Early Help strategies to be shared with Members of the Children's Scrutiny Committee
3.3 Public Health Nursing Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There continue to be some challenges around data extraction from the clinical systems, following the transition to Devon County Council from the previous provider; • Overall staffing levels in public health nursing have been reduced through natural wastage due to the reduction in the Public Health grant; in addition there have been a number Health Visitor and School Nurse vacancies due to a national deficit of people trained in these roles. 	
3.4 Education & Learning Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The take up of Early Years funding for two and three year olds in Devon is currently exceeding the national average. 	
3.5 Children's Social Care Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demand in Children's Social Care remains a key challenge; • Re-referral rates to Children's Social Care have decreased which reflects a focus on how and when cases are closed, transfers to Early Help and improved practice in the MASH; 	Members to be provided with a briefing notes on suitable/unsuitable accommodation for care leavers and on Lifelong Links

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timeliness of single assessments has improved; • Caseloads are being maintained at manageable levels; • Stability of the social care workforce is currently good, even for agency staff; there is an ongoing conversation with agency staff about terms and conditions for permanent social work staff; • We have significantly increased the number of care leavers we are in touch with; there are also more care leavers in suitable accommodation (as defined by the Department for Education); • Unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people receive the same offer as any other care leavers at 18 (i.e. keeping in touch, Personal Advisor etc). 	
3.6 Virtual School Annual report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Reducing Exclusions in Devon Schools (REDS) Programme aims to reduce exclusions for Children in Care and has been very successful through the trial period; • The percentage of Children in Care attending university has been low historically in Devon but numbers have increased this year with six young people (20% of Year 13 cohort) starting university; this equates to twice the national average. 	
3.7 Annual Exclusions report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work of Devon Inclusion project; exclusions in Devon are reducing, which is in contrast with national picture; • Significant programme to help children who aren't able to attend school due to medical needs (often anxiety) to get them back in to school; • We have seen a slight upward trend in fixed term exclusions; this is expected where there is a reduction in permanent exclusions; • Ofsted now have a greater focus on exclusions, as well as support for pupils with SEND, however we need to be alert to schools removing pupils from role in other ways, including through Elective Home Education. 	