

CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16 March 2020

Present

Councillors R Hannaford (Chair), S Aves, F Biederman, J Brazil, J Hawkins, R Hosking, T Inch, A Saywell and Mrs C Mabin

Apologies

Councillors D Sellis, C Channon, I Chubb, G Gribble, L Hellyer and M Squires

Members attending in accordance with Standing Order 25

Councillor J McInnes

* **162** **Minutes**

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the two meetings held on 20 January 2020 be signed as correct records.

* **163** **Coronavirus (COVID-19)**

(An item taken under Section 100B(4) of the Local Government Act 1972.)

(Councillor McInnes attended in accordance with Standing Order 25(1) and spoke to this item.)

The Chair had decided that the Committee should consider this item as a matter of urgency in order that the Chief Officer for Communities, Public Health, Environment and Prosperity and the Chief Officer for Children's Services could brief Scrutiny on the latest position regarding COVID-19.

The Chief Officer updated the Committee as follows:

- a Pandemic Incident Team had been set up, which included representation from Education;
- the Council were in daily contact with and following Public Health England guidance;
- these were unprecedented times, likely to affect lives in the long term;
- schools were being provided with the most up-to-date advice and information, all of which was available on the website;
- further guidance/new legislation from Public Health England and the Government was expected this week;
- the Council's Public Health team were responding rapidly to concerns raised; and
- a toolkit was currently being prepared, to help support communities.

The Chair wished to put on record the Committee's thanks to the Public Health team for all they were doing and all staff involved in responding to the pandemic and keeping vital services running.

The Head of Education and Learning explained that schools were receiving daily briefings; there had been two short school closures as a precautionary measure; and that the situation would stay under review. Schools were currently open.

The Head of Commissioning (Children) reported that Providers were updating business continuity plans; working on issues of staff shortages; and looking at providing care for the most vulnerable young people.

The Chief Officer for Children's Services reported that Public Health Nursing was continuing with business as usual. However, it was noted that, at a national level, nurses may be called upon to prioritise and this may be a challenge in the future.

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

RESOLVED that support be given to a Community Toolkit being made available to all Town and Parish Councils and Community Groups across the County.

* **164** **Public Participation**

There were no oral representations from members of the public.

* **165** **Scrutiny Committee Work Programme**

- (a) Performance reporting would revert to being dealt with at Committee, rather than by the Standing Overview Group.
- (b) a briefing note relating to Agency staffing in Children's social care had been circulated to the Committee.

* **166** **Adoption in Devon (*Minute 54/20 March 2018)**

The Committee received the Report of the Head of Children's Social Care (CS/20/05) reviewing progress of the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), Adopt South West, which managed the adoption services for children and adopted adults in Devon, Plymouth, Torbay and Somerset.

Whilst the recruitment of adopters remained a challenge both nationally and regionally, Adopt South West had seen an encouraging increase in expressions of interest in recent months and continued to develop its recruitment strategy and the support offered to adopters that made it well placed nationally.

Discussion points with Members and Officers included:

- the comprehensive training offered to new adopters;
- access to the National Adoption Support Funding, which provided access to therapeutic support for adoptive families; adoption breakdown figures were very low;
- the national adoption campaign was due to go live on 26 March (depending on the coronavirus situation);
- the capacity to assess applicants and the need to keep this under review; and
- working with the New Family Social to promote LGBT+ groups across the region.

The Committee looked forward to a further update at a future meeting.

* **167** **Progress of the SEND Improvement Plan**

The Committee received a presentation from the Head of Education and Learning (attached) with an update on the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Written Statement of Action.

The presentation included details on Context; the Spread across the age range of Children with EHCPs; Trends since the introduction of the new Code of Practice; Age range for new

EHCP plans; Types of Need; Increase in funding from 2019-20 to 2020-21; Budget v Actual Spend; and Educational Outcomes.

Members and Officers' discussion points included:

- the lobbying of Government for additional SEND funding for Devon was continuing;
- how eligible families could be encouraged to register for free school meals (even if not used) so that schools and the local authority could claim extra funding; and
- the recently approved £19.1 million Council investment to provide 300 additional special school places.

The presentation included sections on Understanding our Strategy; Improving Communication; Timeliness of EHCPs; and Autism. Discussions around these sections covered:

- the rollout of a New to SEN postcard providing links to further information, which had received good feedback;
- user feedback would be used to re-design the website;
- good attendance and feedback had been received from the Short Breaks organised events;
- the launch of the new online case management system, which had received 66 applications in its first week, and was welcomed by parents;
- Members' voiced concern at the 71 week wait for an autism assessment and requested comparison data from other geographical areas; and
- that all those on waiting lists were actively risk assessed.

The Chair thanked the 0-25 team for all the hard work they were doing and continuing to do.

Members requested an update report in six months' time, to include case studies.

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

The Meeting started at 2.15 pm and finished at 4.58 pm