

**Report of the Cabinet Member  
Children's Services and Schools**

I have been asked to Report as follows for Full Council on 26 May 2022:

**1. By Councillor Connett as follows:**

Progress towards achieving a 'Good' OFSTED rating for Devon's Childrens Services.

**2. By Councillor Wrigley as follows:**

Savings for children in care, with specific details on how many children currently in care of Devon County Council will receive the £20 a month savings.

**3. By Councillor Biederman as follows:**

Latest figures for Suicide, Attempted Suicide & Incidents that were recorded as not a serious attempt of Suicide in young people in Devon aged 11 – 19.

What are we doing with partners, schools & colleges to reduce & tackle these issues?

How is a not serious attempt of suicide determined?

*Young Minds Charity have recently reported the following.*

- *One in six children aged five to 16 were identified as having a probable mental health problem in July 2021, a huge increase from one in nine in 2017. That's five children in every classroom.*
- *The number of A&E attendances by young people aged 18 or under with a recorded diagnosis of a psychiatric condition more than tripled between 2010 and 2018-19.*
- *83% of young people with mental health needs agreed that the coronavirus pandemic had made their mental health worse.*
- *In 2018-19, 24% of 17-year-olds reported having self-harmed in the previous year, and seven per cent reported having self-harmed with suicidal intent at some point in their lives. 16% reported high levels of psychological distress.*
- *Suicide was the leading cause of death for males and females aged between five to 34 in 2019.*
- *Nearly half of 17-19 year-olds with a diagnosable mental health disorder has self-harmed or attempted suicide at some point, rising to 52.7% for young women.*

## **Responses**

### **1. OFSTED Rating**

Thank you, Cllr Connett for your report request about our aspirations for the future of Childrens Services in Devon. My response relates to Social Care. The service reports on progress to the Improvement Board which is now chaired by our Chief Executive Phil Norrey. This meeting is attended by the Department for Education and a range of stakeholders, including the police, commissioned providers and members. Its function is to challenge the service on its delivery of the plan and to provide guidance to support the improvement journey. At the last board on 9 May, the Head of Social Care presented the improvement plan which set out progress so far and our plans going forward.

We must be realistic that our improvement journey is not a quick fix. This is because the changes we need to make need to be sustainable and based upon securing a stable workforce to get the best outcomes for children.

It is well reported that Childrens Services right across England are struggling to recruit and retain staff. This is something that I will be raising with MPs when I speak to them in the next few months. I will also be raising the issue of affordable housing both in the context of it being a barrier to recruitment and in terms of ensuring that all families in Devon are able to access accommodation that is suitable for their needs when they need it.

As a service rated Inadequate, last year the Department for Education (DfE) allocated an Improvement Advisor and appointed Leeds Relational Practice Centre as our improvement partners. Leeds have worked with us to embed restorative and relational practice and are supporting us in our work to make Devon Child Friendly. We are delighted that the DfE have continued the investment in our partnership with Leeds for a second year which is a good indicator of their confidence in our progress. As you will be aware, Ofsted conducted a visit in February. They told us that we know ourselves well, and that our self-assessment largely reflected what they saw. But they also told us that we still have lots to do, and that children are not yet always being seen by the right people, at the right time, to keep them safe. Ofsted recognised we are on a journey of improvement and said they believed we are going in the right direction. They told us that the appointment of a permanent senior leadership team with a clear understanding of what needs to improve has begun to address the serious weaknesses in Devon. And that the introduction of a new practice model, supported by external partners, has become increasingly understood by social workers, who are enthusiastic about the future. They also recognised that elected members and corporate leaders are prioritising children and families and that we acknowledge the need to make changes more quickly.

The Council has invested approximately £5.5 million to improve social workers terms and conditions, increase numbers of family practitioners, and business support officers to support social workers, and to increase rates to ensure enough agency staff to cover vacancies. I am delighted that 20 overseas workers will join us in September to strengthen the workforce. Recruitment and retention continues to be a priority. We are focussed on ensuring that the package we offer staff thinking about coming to Devon demonstrates that we value good quality practitioners and that we are committed to developing our own home-grown staff through the academy. We also know that we need to do more for our existing staff to ensure that they receive good quality training and are supported to work with our children. This includes building resilience and creating space for staff to develop and to have time to be reflective about their well-being and work.

The service has created solid foundations to hold itself to account on this journey. Its ambitious plans are published in the roadmap, a high-level set of milestones committing to action between now and 2024 and the Improvement plan. The service's improvement plan is underpinned by 4 strategic priorities,

1) The voice and Influence of children, young people, and their families: we believe children and families are experts in their own circumstances, and we will work with them in an empowering and collaborative way to create their own plans, to improve the way we deliver services and to achieve the best outcomes for children that we can.

2) A stable, highly skilled, and permanent workforce: a stable workforce is key to our relational approach to practice and a critical factor in the success of this plan. We will invest in our workforce to achieve stability and will support their continuous professional development.

3) Work restoratively to support families to create sustainable changes that lead to good outcomes for children: we will invest in the development of practitioners and managers, so that they are confident and skilled in their ability to work restoratively with families, share a common language and values, in a culture that supports relational practice.

4) Effective management and leadership creating system wide high ambitions and expectations for all children and young people: every manager and leader will share in the responsibility for creating good services for children through effective oversight, in a culture that values learning from quality assurance and continuous improvement

We continue with extensive work to improve the quality of the practice that we currently deliver which is focussed on ensuring that we see children in a timely way and that assessments are of a high quality and of a high standard.

Over 70% of staff have received Restorative Practice Training and 87% Motivational interviewing training. There is emerging evidence of this translating into improved outcomes for children and the retention of staff.

It is our belief that in the vast majority of cases, children do best when they remain in the family home. This is why we have strengthened our Early Help offer, so that we can support families when they experience barriers. By helping families to recognise their strengths and by supporting them to build resilience to find solutions together as a family, we know that outcomes can be better. This way we can reduce the number of children requiring social care statutory intervention.

Ofsted are due to visit again in the summer. In February they looked at the front door which is the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and the initial response teams. Next time they are likely to focus on our children in need, and children in need of protection.

In terms of progress, we had our annual conversation with Ofsted earlier this month where we shared key areas of improvement. In the MASH, the process has been significantly strengthened so that we have a good grasp on our vulnerable children and young people being referred to us. Management oversight has improved, and levels of need are applied more consistently by all partners. The time in which referrals are actioned has been reduced and our relationships with our partners like the police and health, is improving communication and the way in which we safeguard children and young people. Caseloads for staff across Social Care on the whole have reduced over the past few months. The service has embedded a robust quality framework that is driving up the quality of practice with regular audits routinely carried out across the service.

The leadership team has set and is embedding a clear vision and expectations. This includes good supervision both personal and case related. There is a refocus on appraisal so that all staff have dedicated time to discuss development and career aspirations here in Devon. June is well-being month for the whole service and the Children's Equality Diversity and Inclusion group is active in tackling the impacts of discrimination upon staff and our families.

The voice of children and young people is perhaps the most important strategic priority. 'Mind Of My Own' (MOMO) believe that every child should be able to give voice to their lived experience – and also be heard. This App enables young people to stay in contact with their social worker (<https://mindofmyown.org.uk>). Whilst it is still relatively new and has been piloted in the North of the County, the Council made a 400% increase in the use of MOMO across the County. The App company shares celebrations about their clients– so they celebrated the Council's success on social media. The App responds to feedback from young people and improves ways for them to keep in contact with their social worker. The Top 10 tips for practitioners have been created by young people and parents.

This is why as a council we have put families at the heart of everything we do and why I am leading our ambition as a whole council to be Child Friendly Devon.

In summary, I am confident that the service is making incremental steps on our journey towards, one day, being Good. Of course, my ambition is that we are one day in the not too distant future, rated Excellent as a service, but this will take time. I want members to understand that to reach Good, we need to make steady and sustainable change that enables us to create a stable and highly motivated workforce. That our partnership working ensures that families receive the right support from the right person at the right time. That our families know that they are influencing and have had their voice heard in every decision that we make as a council because our future prosperity depends on it.

## **2. Savings for Children in Care**

Thank you Councillor Wrigley for your interest in our commitment to provide additional savings for children in care in Devon.

As at 1st May there were 504 children eligible to receive a regular savings deposit. The full year cost for these children to receive £5 p/w would be £131,000. However, 95 of these children will turn 18 at some point this financial year and their savings will cease; this will reduce the cost by around £13,000. An additional 151 children will become eligible at some point this financial year and this will increase the cost by £17,000. Therefore, the forecast cost for 22/23 based on the current cohort of children would be circa £135,000.

## **3. Suicide Data and Partnership Work**

Thank you, Councillor Biederman, for this report request.

This is a very grey area which is whole system wide, so we do not have an immediate single source of data on 'not serious attempts'.

Many attempts at suicide or self-harming go unreported and 'not serious' is not a term that we specifically collect data on. Any action by a child that puts their personal safety at risk is our responsibility as corporate parents and should be taken seriously.

I would like to offer Councillor Biederman the opportunity to talk to Public Health colleagues about this subject so that they can explain more about the work that they are doing, including a task and finish group that is working on a number of areas. The task force is looking at:

- updating data, looking at both national and local data (including obtaining data from schools where available) to identify gaps.
- Offering support with the Self Harm Health Needs Assessment, recognising that this work already sits with Torbay Council and is not the direct work of this Task and Finish group.

- Continuing system mapping against the Thrive model to identify gaps, specifically identifying what sits underneath CAMHS to support Children and young people with Suicidal ideation so that resource reflects need
- updating a systems map indicating where suicide is dealt with and discussed
- Identifying where child and young people can be better represented and heard on Local Authority Prevention groups
- Offering postvention support to schools, colleges, and youth groups, with a coordinated emergency response

There is work continuing between Pete's Dragons, (an organisation that supports with bereavement following suicide and that works to prevent suicide), CAMHS and Babcock to coordinate the response to schools/ colleges following a potential suicide. Babcock staff will become Devon County Council staff from 1 August this year. They will be working with Pete's Dragons to produce some proactive resources for schools around suicide bereavement.

**Andrew Leadbetter**  
Cabinet Member  
Children's Services and Schools