

CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

18 January 2024

Present:

Councillors P Sanders (Vice-Chair), T Adams, J Bradford, J Brazil, F Letch MBE, P Maskell and M Squires

Apologies:

Councillors S Aves, P Bullivant, I Hall, L Hellyer, J Wilton-Love and C Mabin (Church of England Diocesan representative)

Members attending in accordance with Standing Order 25:

Councillors A Leadbetter, C Leaver and L Samuel

* 125 **Minutes**

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2023 be signed as a correct record.

* 126 **Items Requiring Urgent Attention**

There was no matter raised as a matter of urgency.

* 127 **Public Participation**

There were no oral representations from members of the public.

* 128 **Responses of the Cabinet to Reports of the Committee**

(Councillors Leadbetter and Samuel attended in accordance with Standing Order 25(1) and spoke to this item at the invitation of the Committee.)

Councillor Leadbetter (Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Schools) reported that Cabinet thanked the Committee for the Children's Services Recruitment and Retention Spotlight Review and that Cabinet would report back to this Committee in due course on progress against the 12 recommendations made.

Councillor Samuel (Cabinet Member for Children's SEND Improvement Services) would update the Committee at the next meeting.

* **129** **Scrutiny Committee Work Programme**

The Scrutiny Officer updated the Committee as to the Work Programme and as follows:

- Standing Overview Group in April – topics requested from Members.
- Terms of Reference were now agreed for the Budget Monitoring Standing Overview Group.
- Annual frontline visits were being arranged as per suggestions received.

Any other suggestions for inclusion in the work programme including topics for investigative work should be emailed to the Scrutiny Officer.

* **130** **Children's Services Improvement Plan & Social Care Performance**

The Committee received the report of the Deputy Director and Head of Children's Health and Wellbeing (Interim) (CS/24/04), with attached report provided to the January 2024 meeting of the Improvement Partnership Board.

The Children's Services Improvement Partnership Board monitored the implementation of both the Social Care Improvement Plan and the Partnership Improvement Plan at its monthly meetings, including consideration of the performance measures agreed for each of those Plans.

The Partnership Board report considered performance measures under the following headings: Volume of Activity; Process; and Impact.

Members' questions and discussions points included:

- Members requested that future reports reference just numbers, rather than percentages or both.
- Concern at the number of care leavers not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET): Officers confirmed this was work in progress; that offers of apprenticeships had increased for care leavers; and that discussions were taking place with Exeter College to offer a rolling programme.
- Assurance that children in unregistered accommodation were monitored on a weekly basis together with plans to move to registered accommodation.
- The need for accurate recording of children visits.
- Link between those children missing education and those NEET; that around 25-30% of care leavers had EHCPs making finding suitable education for them more difficult; and ongoing work with Districts and Devon Colleges on the NEET challenge.

- The social care thresholds document was being reviewed; and a peer review was taking place with Hertfordshire County Council colleagues and staff at the front door.

It was **MOVED** by Councillor Sanders, **SECONDED** by Councillor Letch and **RESOLVED** that the Committee asks that:

- (a) To support a reduction of the number of young people who are NEET (Not in Education, Employment and Training):
 - (i) that the number of opportunities within the Council for Care Leavers are increased at pace and these targets are shared with the Committee.
 - (ii) the Council works with our Higher and Further Education providers in Devon to support young people in education and training.
- (b) The service ensures that data collection is improved and this is reported back to the Committee when it meets again to discuss Social Care Performance in two areas:
 - (i) visits to children or young people are recorded correctly by practitioners to improve data collection for Children in Need, Children on a Child Protection Plan and Children in Care.
 - (ii) The completion of supervision record for each child or young person.

* 131 **Education Annual Report Autumn 2023**

The Committee received the Education Annual Report for Autumn 2023, based on published data to 25 October 2023, noting Summary of Achievements and Challenges.

Points to note and questions and discussion with Members and Officers included:

- Officers referenced the performance data document LAIT (Local Authority Intelligence Tool), available on the Department for Education website
- An additional Challenge to note was on the variability of school performance and school improvement generally: KS1 was below the national average on phonics; some KS2 and KS4 indicators showed Devon in the bottom quartile; and KS5 in the top quartile.
- 87% of Devon schools were judged good or better by Ofsted, although numbers needed to be understood.
- A significant challenge was the large cohort of children with SEND (40%) eligible for free school meals who were persistent absentees.

- Attendance hubs was a consideration being looked at for Devon, as used in other areas, as well as other interventions to address attendance issues.
- The number of children in Devon in Elective Home Education was particularly complex and challenging and much work was ongoing with regional and other groups.

Members were happy with the information shared today and looked forward to receiving an update report on progress made to improve attendance in schools in June.

* 132 **Children's Standing Overview Group**

The Committee received the Report of the Children's Scrutiny Committee: Report of the Standing Overview Group meeting on 26 September 2023.

It was **MOVED** by Councillor Sanders, **SECONDED** by Councillor Maskell and

RESOLVED that the Committee:

- (a) Accept this report as an accurate record of the issues explored in the meeting ensuring transparency in scrutiny activities.
- (b) Endorse the recommendation from the meeting, that Members present:
 1. Welcomed and supported the approach of the Family Hubs model.
 2. Raised concerns about:
 - (i) ensuring the expertise, connections with families and important work from Action for Children is retained and not lost;
 - (ii) access to local services in rural areas; and
 - (iii) the potential of closures to local Children's Centres.
 3. Would welcome all Councillors working with the Cabinet Members and Head of Service on the design of the future Family Hubs model and the potential locations of services.

* 133 **Children's Scrutiny Visits: Autumn Term School Visits**

The Committee received the Report of the Children's Scrutiny Committee: Autumn Term School Visits.

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

The Meeting started at 2.15 pm and finished at 4.00 pm