

Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee

4 June 2020 – At a meeting of the Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee held at 10.30 am at Virtual meeting with restricted public access.

Present: Cllr Barling (Chairman)

Cllr Lord	Cllr Hall	Cllr Wickremaratchi
Cllr Baldwin	Cllr Hillier	Mr Lozzi
Cllr Bridges	Cllr A Jones	Mrs Roberts
Cllr Burgess	Clr Lea	Mrs Ryan
Cllr Flynn	Cllr Sudan	Mr Cristin

Also in attendance: Cllr Nigel Jupp, Cllr Marshall and Cllr Russell

7. Declarations of Interests

7.1 No recordable interests were declared.

8. Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee

8.1 Resolved – that the minutes of the meeting held on 14 April 2020 be approved as a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

9. Urgent Matters

9.1 The Chairman asked Cllr Nigel Jupp, Cabinet Member for Education & Skills to update the Committee on the return of pupils to school. The Cabinet Member told the Committee that: -

- 99% of schools would be open by the week commencing 15 June
- Immediately prior to the reopening of primary schools in the week commencing 1 June, the number of children of key workers and vulnerable children allowed to attend our primary and secondary schools under the lockdown restrictions compared to the total of school children in the county was nearly twice the national average
- Attendance figures for the week commencing 8 June would be provided to members of the council when they are known

9.2 The Director of Education & Skills added that there had been no guidance yet from the Department for Education about how schools would open in September, but the Council was looking into possible extra accommodation to comply with social distancing rules.

10. Responses to Recommendations

10.1 The Committee considered the responses to recommendations it made its 4 March 2020 and 14 April 2020 meetings (copies appended to the signed minutes) - the following points were covered in relation to the response regarding small schools: -

- The Cabinet had considered all the points raised by the Committee but felt that the decision should go ahead to comply with the Schools Effectiveness Strategy
- The Education, Health & Care Plans (EHCPs) of children with special needs identified the additional help they required, and this would be provided at new schools. So far three out of four pupils with EHCPs at Clapham & Patching had found new schools

10.2 Resolved – that the Committee notes the responses to recommendations.

11. Forward Plan of Key Decisions

11.1 The Committee considered an extract from the Forward Plan dated 20 May 2020 (copy appended to the signed minutes). The Committee asked questions about the decision on the proposed change of status for Forest Boys' School, Horsham and St Andrews CE Boys' School, Worthing to co-educational schools and received the following answers/assurances

- The proposals had the support of the governors of each school
- The driver for the change to co-educational provision was to ensure sufficient pupil numbers at each school so that they were sustainable in the future
- With the population increasing in each area, the viability of the local girls' schools should not be affected
- The consultation on the proposals was open until the end of June and was available through the County Council's website. The neighbouring girl's schools, parents and neighbourhood Councils would be able to partake in the consultation process to provide their views

12. Children First Improvement - Service Update

12.1 The Committee considered a report by the Executive Director of Children, Young People and Learning (copy appended to the signed minutes) which was introduced by Cllr Russell, Cabinet Member for Children & Young People who made the following points: -

- Referrals to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) were expected to increase now that children were returning to school – staffing levels were sufficient to cope with this
- Face to face visits had increased
- An OFSTED inspector had been seconded to the Council's Adolescent Family Resource Team to provide support during the Covid-19 pandemic
- In Early Help, safeguarding concerns were being dealt with and care packages and resources were still being delivered
- The voice of the child was still being heard though video, texting and phone calls and the Department of Digital Media & Sport has requested to interview the team in relation to examples of good support given during Covid-19
- 1,396 Early Help Plans had been put in place with the proportion of referrals to social care being 2.6% against a predicted 2.8%
- The Early Help service was being remodelled and it was expected that plans would be developed by September

- The Step Across Panel has helped 343 children move to Early Help from Social Care
- Early Help has helped other areas during Covid-19 and will continue to do so during the recovery phase. The service was expecting a spike in demand as pupils returned to school
- The Pause service has continued to help young women through virtual means
- 50% of early years settings remained open at the peak of Covid-19
- 101 vulnerable children have been attending early years settings with support available to 188 who have not been able to attend
- 1,555 children of critical workers had been attending early years provision
- Questions around funding meant that not all early years' settings would open from 1 June
- The service anticipated greater demand in areas of the County hit by unemployment in the travel and tourism industries
- The review of in-house residential services had been delayed by Covid-19
- The Fostering service has met with the United Foster Carers' Association to review the foster care allowance scheme and improve recruitment and retention of foster carers

12.2 Lucy Butler, Executive Director of Children Young People and Learning added the following: -

- 90% of social workers kept working during Covid-19 often using virtual methods to contact children. This was popular with older young people and would be continued
- Assistant Director posts for Corporate Parenting and Quality & Assurance were currently being advertised
- Improvement work had continued as a priority during the pandemic with the Improvement Board continuing to meet. Ofsted inspections had been delayed, with no inspections anticipated before September
- The County Council's Promise for Looked After Children and those leaving care was being digitally launched in June
- The service is continuing to focus on prevention and was working to put a practice model in place
- Establishing a Children's Trust had been paused until August, however the legal and financial work would continue

12.3 Summary of responses to committee members questions and comments: -

- The Commissioner for Children's Services in West Sussex received monthly updates on the County Council improvement progress and also provides updates to the Department for Education
- Service remodelling meant less buildings, not a reduced service which would in fact be enhanced
- An impact assessment by Human Resources and a new recruitment & retention offer in September would hopefully offset deferred resignations and the end of the recruitment & retention offer that could lead to a high number of social workers leaving in the autumn

- The journey of the child from the child's point of view was being looked at as part of the service redesign with the aim of there being the least number of disruptions possible e.g. fewer changes of social worker
- The aim was for social workers to have between 13 and 16 cases at one time to maintain quality of service, so caseloads were monitored weekly with extra resources used where necessary
- Newly qualified social workers were supported and fed back on their experience near the end of their first year
- A preventative practice model helped reduce caseloads and the amount of time children and families spent in social care
- It was not possible to grade caseloads due to the complexity and difference between individual cases
- The Council employed more agency staff than it wished and was working towards a more sustainable workforce – **ACTION:** Lucy Butler to provide the Committee with the number of agency workers in the Looked After Children service
- Thirty social workers were about to join the Council and it was hoped a further ten would join in September
- The number of children harmed had remained consistent over the last five months – **ACTION:** Sally Allen to provide relevant data to the Committee
- Households identified by the early help hubs as suffering due to loss of income during Covid-19 were given help
- The Committee recognised that reduced social worker caseloads were critical in the improved quality of work and outcomes for children and wished to be kept informed on caseload numbers at a future meeting
- The Committee noted the amount of work that had progressed during the Covid-19 pandemic and thanked officers for their work to continue the improvement journey
- The Committee also requested to be kept updated on the impact of Covid-19 on workforce numbers at a future meeting as workforce stability was also key to improve the outcomes for children

12.4 Resolved – that the Committee is satisfied with the direction of travel and progress being made on the Children First improvement journey.

13. Practice Improvement - Neglect

13.1 The Committee considered a report by the Executive Director for Children, Young People and Learning (copy appended to the signed minutes) which was introduced by Cllr Russell, Cabinet Member for Children & Young People who told the Committee that Children's social care had launched virtual neglect training and webinars for all staff to complete by the end of June.

13.2 Lesley Walker, Chairman of the West Sussex Children's Safeguarding Board told the Committee: -

- Children and young people were spoken to directly if they were involved with the Child Protection service in the preceding three months – information from this showed where improvements could be made

- The Neglect Strategy had been reviewed with tools and individual action plans developed
- There had been excellent sign-up from partner agencies, all of which had their own action plans in place
- There was quarterly scrutiny and an impact framework measured the effectiveness of work that had been put in place

13.3 Sally Allen, Deputy Director, Children's Services told the Committee: -

- In developing the toolkit, the Council consulted partners and looked at best practice in other authorities, especially Hampshire and East Sussex from which the following four components were taken: -
 1. Chronology – recognising the accumulative impact of neglect
 2. A day in the life of the child – to understand the child's experience
 3. Parent/child observation – to see how they interact together
 4. Assessment check list – to prompt practitioners what to look for
- Partners have agreed to complete the chronology and the day in the life of a child tool
- Partners were also given an analysis tool to help identify the level of risk
- 24 neglect champions lead on training and support with staff and practitioners through webinars and e-learning

13.4 Summary of responses to committee members' questions and comments: -

- There was positive feedback from practitioners and staff that had used the toolkit
- The toolkit and chronology were now being used frequently
- It was hard to say whether an increase in identification of children needing help was good or bad, what was key was the amount of time they were classified as children in need or had protection plans
- The numbers of those taking part in e-learning was recorded
- Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) practitioners had taken part in training
- The neglect champions were pivotal in embedding the neglect strategy and toolkit and received feedback on them from practitioners
- The Council was keen to promote the neglect strategy with district/borough councils and the voluntary sector and would tweak training sessions to fit their needs if necessary
- The Committee highlighted the importance of this area of work and its impact on reducing the numbers of children entering social care. It was vital that there was demonstrable evidence that this work was making a difference to children and families. On that basis, the Committee requested an update on the work at its next meeting to see how the work was bedding in

13.5 Resolved – that the Committee welcomes the work being undertaken and is satisfied with the direction of travel and would welcome an update at its next meeting to assess the difference the work is making to children and families.

14. Possible Items for Future Scrutiny

14.1 Cllr Nigel Jupp, Cabinet Member for Education & Skills, gave the following update on Woodlands Meed school following a decision by Cabinet on 26 May: -

- The the £20m funding for the new building had been approved and work was taking place on the design - the planning application is programmed to be submitted in November
- Only 2% - 3% of the building layout was yet to be agreed but it was expected that the build would be completed on time

14.2 Cllr Barling, Chairman of the Committee, reported that there would be a Task & Finish Group on the Education & Skills Annual report in July. Members of the Group are Cllr Lord, Cllr Hillier, Cllr Flynn, Cllr Sudan, Cllr Anne Jones, Cllr Baldwin and Cllr Burgess.

15. Requests for Call-In

15.1 There had been one request for call-in since the last meeting - Small Schools proposals - Cabinet Decision ES 20/21. The Director of Law and Assurance concluded that no valid grounds for a call-in had been provided. The call-in request was therefore declined.

16. Date of Next Meeting

16.1 The next meeting of the Committee will be held on 24 September at 10.30 am.

The meeting ended at 1.09 pm

Chairman