

Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee

7 January 2021 – At a virtual meeting of the Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee held at 10.30 am.

Present: Cllr Hillier (Chairman)

Cllr Lord	Cllr A Jones	Mrs Hill
Cllr Baldwin	Cllr Kennard	Mr Lozzi
Cllr Bridges	Cllr Pendleton	Mr Cristin
Cllr Burgess	Cllr Sudan	Mrs Ryan
Cllr Hall	Cllr Wickremaratchi	Cllr M Jones

Apologies were received from Cllr Oxlade

Also in attendance: Cllr Russell and Cllr N Jupp.

37. Declarations of Interests

37.1 No declarations of interest were declared.

38. Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee

38.1 The Committee members expressed their disappointment at the lateness of circulation of some of the meeting papers.

38.2 Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 5 November 2020, with the addition under item 30.6 that “Committee members asked that it be recognised that there was little time for them to contact schools for feedback due to the school half term holiday.”, be approved as a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

39. Urgent Matters

39.1 No urgent matters were raised.

40. Responses to Recommendations

40.1 The Committee welcomed the responses to the recommendations made by the meeting on 5 November 2020 and the information they contained.

40.2 The Committee then took the opportunity to acknowledge that the country had moved in to a new Covid-19 lockdown arrangement and sought an update on the impact on schools. The Cabinet Member for Education and Skills and Director of Education and Skills reported that schools were open to the children of key workers and vulnerable children. The criteria for vulnerable children had changed since the first lockdown which meant more children qualified for face to face schooling. Schools were having to look at the safety arrangements of having more pupils in school and service officers were assisting schools to resolve any issues that arise.

40.3 The Director of Education and Skills reported that providers would be supplying hot meals for children in school, including key stage two, and to children who were not statutorily required to receive them. Pupils entitled to a free school meal, who had applied and been approved to receive them, who were not in school, would be able to collect food hampers.

40.4 The Director of Education and Skills confirmed that the Department for Education (DfE) IT scheme had been clearly communicated to schools although the scheme was not yet fully operational. Each school had a link officer to deal directly with the DfE on applications on behalf of children in year 3 and above, as they have been able to do since September 2020 for self-isolating pupils. Committee members asked if there was a central register of IT equipment to establish the percentage of children who, despite best efforts, did not have access to online learning? The Director of Education and Skills confirmed that all information was held at school level and there was no central database.

40.5 The Director of Education and Skills reported that the transport team was working very flexibly to accommodate schools' transport, especially for special schools, and in relation to staggered start times.

40.6 The Committee members expressed thanks to the Director of Education and Skills and his officers, headteachers, teaching and other school staff for all their work during and after the Christmas school holidays. Any further questions should be emailed to the Director of Education and Skills who will prepare a response to Committee members.

40.7 Comments on the response by the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People would be taken as part of the Children First Improvement Update.

40.8 Resolved - That the Committee noted the responses to recommendations.

41. Children First Improvement Update

41.1 The Committee considered a report by the Executive Director for Children, Young People and Learning which updated the Committee on the developments and progress made in the Children First Programme since its last update in November.

41.1 The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Cllr Russell, confirmed that she had been pleased to report to County Council in December the Minister for Children's decision to issue a new statutory direction to pause the setting up a Children's Trust for one year. The milestones included in the Children's Commissioner's report to the DfE, accompanied by the most recent Ofsted report in October 2020 further endorsed an overall positive direction of travel on the improvement journey. With phase one of the improvement journey completed and a broadly stabilised service in place it was now time to commence the next phase of the service redesign, moving at a vastly accelerated pace, consolidating and building on the foundation blocks achieved in 2020 to

provide a new service delivering on the expectation of what good looks like.

41.2 The Executive Director of Children, Young People and Learning, Mrs Butler, highlighted the Ofsted inspection, which was very clear about progress made, the decision to delay the work on the establishment of a Children's Trust and highlighted that the current lockdown would inevitably impact on some of the improvement activity.

41.3 The Children's First Transformation Director introduced the report, highlighting the following key areas:

- There was clear evidence that the service is making progress and is on a trajectory for improvement;
- The Ofsted report acknowledged that the service response to the Covid-19 pandemic had been an effective one;
- Leadership and plans were correct and appropriate, but that the pace of change needed to increase;
- It is important to maintain excellent levels of engagement with staff to ensure they understand the programme of improvement and can fully participate in it;
- A management assessment and development programme was progressing in January 2021.

41.4 A summary of responses to Committee members' questions and comments is as follows:

- The Children First Board, a sub group of the Health and Wellbeing Board, is made up of members at a strategic level, however there are clear escalation routes from the tactical groups to ensure that views from the front line are fed into the Board which can make decisions and hold their organisations to account.
- Each area of concern outlined by Ofsted, is referred to as a practice area and each area has its own action plan. Future Ofsted monitoring visits will focus on specific practice areas, for which the County Council will be able to produce a clear set of actions and demonstrate how things have progressed since the previous visit.
- The Improvement Plan which had been set against the first Ofsted inspection report had been updated against progress made including any input from the Commissioner. The Improvement Plan could be brought to the meeting if required.
- The service is good at hearing the voice of the child, however there are plans to improve how the voice of all children is recorded.
- Referral rates to end of 2020 were lower than in 2019. This was primarily due to the closure of schools in Spring 2020 as schools are the main source of referrals. Work is continuing across the service and with partners to ensure that the County Council picks up referrals for vulnerable children. The re-referral within a 12-month period rate for the County is in line with the national average. Samples of re-referrals are regularly audited to check for poor practice patterns as well as being inspected by Ofsted. The service thresholds have been endorsed by Ofsted and the Commissioner.

- The Integrated Front Door brings together early help services and the Multi- Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) to provide a more effective triage at that front door for all levels of concerns.
- The Virtual School works with Children Looked After and is dedicated to ensuring educational plans are tailored to achieve the best educational outcomes for each child. School attendance figures are reviewed monthly. **Action:** The Director of Education and Skills was asked to provide a written update on how the Virtual School managed particular issues with children during the lockdown.

41.6 The Committee welcomed the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's offer to present a 2020-21 year-end report on the number of referrals, child protection plans and children entering care since the start of the pandemic to a future committee meeting as outlined in the response to recommendations. The Committee also reiterated the importance of Partnership working in the improvement journey and welcomed the that partnership arrangements, initiatives and the assessment of their impact would form part of future update reports.

41.7 The Committee were also pleased to hear that the Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP) received updates on work with health partners, however they reiterated their concern about the timeliness of initial health assessments for children looked after and would welcome an update from CPP at a future meeting on the progress being made.

41.8 Resolved - That the Committee:

1. Thanks the service for the huge progress made on its improvement journey, as demonstrated by the recent Ofsted visit and pause in the set-up of the Trust.
2. Recognises the importance of partnership working to the improvement journey and will forward this to the Business Planning Group to explore a future item on the effectiveness of partnership working.
3. Welcomes the update on demand trends as set out in Appendix 1 and request that this information is included in subsequent improvement update reports to Committee.
4. Asks the Corporate Parenting Panel to monitor the improvement of Health Assessments for Children Looked After and provide feedback to the Committee on its progress at a future meeting.

42. Early Help Redesign

42.1 The Committee received a report by Executive Director of Children, Young People and Learning outlining the proposals for a new Early Help Service model and the proposed plans for consultation and engagement.

42.2 The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Cllr Russell, introduced the report on the proposed redesign of the Early Help offer, which was a key component of the overall service transformation. The aim was to provide an enhanced targeted approach, with greater alignment between Early Help and Children's Social Care to provide an agile, robust and targeted early help offer to the most vulnerable children

and families in West Sussex and reduce the need for statutory intervention. The focus of the meeting would be on the offer and suggested consultation process. Cllr Russell reported that today marked the very beginning of a process which would start with initial informal partner engagement sessions in January/February. Subject to a decision by Cabinet on 23 February 2021, a 10-week consultation would be launched in March which would involve elected members, schools, partners and members of the public. A final decision report was expected to Cabinet in July, followed by a staff consultation in August with a proposed implementation date of October 2021.

42.3 Cllr Russell highlighted that the service had continued to function during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns when the centres had been closed and uptake of services were high and proving the service did not need a fixed position in a building in order to reach the families that most needed it.

42.4 The Executive Director Children, Young People and Learning, Mrs Butler, told the Committee that the number of children within our social care and early help system had increased over the past few years. The changes proposed followed an in-depth review and hoped to become an integral part of the modernisation and redesign across the whole of children's social care. Mrs Butler assured the Committee that many local authorities had moved to this new way of working and been commended by Ofsted for being innovative and community focused.

42.5 Claire Hayes, Service Lead for Early Help, took the Committee through a presentation on the key points to the proposal.

42.6 The Committee thanked staff who had worked hard to keep the service moving whilst buildings were closed during lockdowns. The Chairman reminded the Committee that the focus for scrutiny was to comment on the aims and principles of the redesign and the proposals for the consultation which was subject to a decision by Cabinet in February. The Committee would have an opportunity to scrutinise the outcome of the consultation and final proposals in the summer.

42.7 The Committee made comments including those that follow:

- Questioned whether closing centres would deprive families of access to wider services such as midwives and health visitors? It was confirmed that whilst Early Help supported new mums, midwifery and health visitor services were not part of the Early Help offer but they often shared buildings, which were not always owned by the County Council. Removing the Early Help service from centres did not equate to centres not being used by other services. Additionally, some services such as toy share schemes and groups were duplicated in places like community libraries. The consultation would be fundamental in working out what the consequences of any closures might be.
- Asked how staff had been consulted on the proposed changes. Mrs Hayes reported that the staff were considered the most valuable asset to the Early Help service and were being fully involved. The proposed offer had been shared with staff who

had known it would be coming for some time. Staff would be able contribute to the public consultation as well as the formal staff consultation.

- Requested more information on footfall at the centres by district. Mrs Hayes reported that footfall statistics were not the most useful tool in seeking how much of the Early Help service is delivered at a location. Impact and reach are important to help understand where early help is making the most impact. Levels of deprivation in an area were a key factor when deciding which buildings to retain. Over two thirds of the work the service undertook did not take place in centres.
- Sought further clarification on the opportunities and impact on young people in the proposed new model. Mrs Hayes reported that the youth offer would be reviewed as part of the wider transformation work. The service work with around 1,500 children aged 11-17 years on early help plans and there were a number of services working with young people such as mental health in schools teams, the young carers offer, the domestic abuse young people's offer. The remaining centres would all be open full-time hours and would be available for young people to drop in and receive a face-to-face service if that was felt to be critical.
- Expressed concern at how public health issues could be picked up by a virtual service. Mrs Hayes explained that the County Council already had a collaborative working agreement on public health matters in place. Early help staff assessed the public health need in each contact, not just the initial presenting issue. There was also close working with health partners to ensure early identification of issues and the identification of clear pathways.
- Sought clarification on how the proposed model would improve the lives of children and enable them to perform better in school. Mrs Hayes reported that the aim would be to have a dedicated school's team who could be much more reactive and respond flexibly to meet the needs of children, rather than the current termly conversation approach. There would be early workshops direct with headteachers to work out how to enhance and shape this provision.
- Highlighted the importance of communication, both in terms of the current work on the redesign and also ongoing communication to residents on what the new service is and how they can access it.
- Recognised the importance of the development of an asset plan on how to manage any buildings where early help services would be withdrawn and working closely with partners and community groups on potential uses for the space moving forward.

1.07pm Mr Cristin left the meeting.

- Highlighted the importance of an equality impact assessment (EIR) to understand the impact the proposal could have on those with protected characteristics and the unintended consequences of the reduction of delivery points. Mrs Hayes confirmed that

the assessment would be available in the paper going to Cabinet on 23 February 2021 and would form part of the final proposals.

1.45pm Mrs Ryan left the meeting.

42.8 The Committee considered a recommendation "That the Cabinet Member defer the decision to proceed to consultation on the Early Help redesign until the information requested had been reviewed by the scrutiny committee."

42.9 The revised recommendation was rejected based on a majority vote recorded with 9 votes against and 3 votes for the recommendation.

42.10 Resolved - That the Committee:

1. Broadly supports the need to investigate an improved and targeted early help offer for vulnerable children and families and request that work is progressed in order to achieve this.
2. Raised concern on the potential implications on the universal offer and how this will impact on future service demand.
3. Request that the following is provided in a further report to the Committee following the consultation and to inform the final proposals:
 - Clarity on how the proposals will help improve the identification and support of vulnerable children and families to access early help support.
 - Includes a communication plan on the new proposal and ongoing support for residents on how they will be able to continue to access the services, especially for those areas where delivery points will be withdrawn.
 - A robust Equality Impact Report.
 - Clarity on the impact of the proposals on wider services, including partners who use the delivery points to deliver their services.
 - Further data and information on usage and services provided in each children and family centre by all partners.
 - The breakdown of consultation responses by hub area
 - How the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on families has been taken into consideration when assessing the proposals and their resilience.
 - Information on the outcome of early help redesign in other Local Authorities and how this learning is taken into account in the proposals for West Sussex.
 - More detail around proposals for service delivery to remote service users.
4. Highlights the importance that the consultation proactively approaches service users and stakeholders and requests that the consultation document, including the list of prospective consultees, is shared with the Committee prior to launch so that they can be satisfied that it is fully inclusive.

43. Strategic Budget Savings - Pre decision scrutiny

43.1 The Committee considered a report by Executive Director of Children, Young People and Learning, on the proposal to implement a National House Project (NHP) in West Sussex that was due for decision by Cabinet on 22 January 2021.

43.2 The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Cllr Russell, told the committee that there was an identified need to provide a robust housing pathway for older looked after young people and care leavers. The National House Project became a charity in 2018 and has helped eleven local authorities set up local schemes in co-production with partners.

43.3 The Executive Director for Children, Young People and Learning, Mrs Butler, commended the tried and tested scheme to the Committee reporting that it had good outcomes for the young people involved by empowering them and giving them a much more settled early adult life.

43.4 Mrs Tanner, Assistant Director Children's Commissioning, reported that initial conversations had taken place with some partners and there had been positive feedback. The recent housing conference had shown there was great enthusiasm within West Sussex for this type of project.

43.5 The Committee as Corporate Parents welcomed and supported the proposals and reviewed the report.

43.6 Committee members questioned whether the timing of contract review would allow enough time for the procurement process. Mrs Tanner explained that under the contract there would be constant review and evaluation of the effectiveness of the project. The initial contract was for three years, with an opportunity after two years to extend the contract further or seek alternative procurement options.

43.7 Committee members asked what help was available for young people to give them the best possible opportunities. Mrs Tanner reported that the contract included a trauma project to support young people at every stage, including preparing them for transition to their own tenancies, ensuring they settle in, helping with any problems and assisting in any future changes to accommodation needed.

2.38pm Mrs Hill left the meeting

43.8 The Committee were reassured that the scheme involved young people in finding the right accommodation for them, whether it be on an individual basis or a property share. The County Council does not have the expertise in-house to run such a scheme so becoming part of a larger, experienced arrangement was felt to be more beneficial. Committee members asked if there were County Council properties that could be used or repurposed for young people to use. Mrs Tanner agreed that they would look at all options available.

43.9 Committee members asked how the project would save the authority money and Mrs Tanner reported that it would help move young

people of out expensive residential accommodation, to an arrangement suitable for them which would help build their independence skills.

43.10 Resolved - That the Committee:

1. Fully supports the implementation of a Local National House Project in West Sussex.
2. Welcomes the enthusiasm and support from District and Borough partners.
3. Welcomes the evidence that the enhanced support for care leavers provided by the project improves the quality of their lives, resilience and prospects.
4. Given that the service will be constantly reviewing the project, suggests, that a report on the outcomes of the project for West Sussex care leavers is presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel on at least an annual basis.

3.07pm Cllr Jones left the meeting.

44. West Sussex Reset Plan and Key Performance Indicators

44.1 The Committee considered a report by the Chief Executive which set out the draft Reset Plan and Key Performance Indicators relevant to the Committee's portfolio area.

44.2 Mr Mackintosh, Consultant, introduced the report and KPIs confirming that the reset plan had been considered at a Members Day on 12 November 2020 and County Council on 11 December 2020. The KPIs were ambitious and had been selected to give a sense of the journey of the child from early help onwards and covered the improvement journey that the Children's Services were on.

44.3 The Committee noted that the targets for the education measures were yet to be confirmed and highlighted the need for these to be ambitious and linked to national data, for example statistical neighbours and national averages. The Committee also highlighted the measure for attainment gap, and that there could be merit in ensuring this was broken down by key stage or age group.

3.17 pm Cllr Kennard left meeting.

44.4 Resolved - That the Committee:

1. Supports the proposed KPIs relevant to this scrutiny committee's remit and is satisfied that these will enable members to measure performance management of the Plan.
2. Agrees that the targets for the Education and Skills KPIs should be ambitious and set against national figures (e.g. top quartile) or statistical neighbours.

3. Suggests that there is more granularity on the attainment gap KPI to provide more detail on performance by key stage.

45. Work Programme Planning and Possible Items for Future Scrutiny

45.1 The Committee reviewed the current draft work programme and the Forward Plan of decisions.

45.2 The Committee received an update on the Woodlands Meed College project from the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, Cllr Jupp who reported that, following a successful virtual consultation on the existing college site, the planning application had been submitted in mid-November 2020. The application was due to be heard in March 2021.

45.3 The Director of Property and Assets, Mr Edwards, reported that the project was running to programme for delivery of the building element by May 2023 and the external works by October 2023 and within the £20 million budget. It was hoped to be able to announce the award of contract for the project by the end of January 2021.

45.4 The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member and officer for the update and congratulated them on the project so far, which was one dear to many of the Committee members.

45.5 The Committee noted the current work programme.

46. Requests for Call-In

46.1 There had been no request for call-in to the Scrutiny Committee within its constitutional remit since the date of the last meeting.

47. Date of Next Meeting

47.1 The next meeting of the committee would be held virtually on 10 March 2021 at 1030 am. Probable agenda items include:

- Themed Session on Inclusion
- Children First Improvement programme update.

Any member wishing to place an item on the agenda for the meeting must notify the Director of Law and Assurance by 26 February 2021.

The meeting ended at 3.35 pm

Chairman