

Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee

30 June 2021 – At a meeting of the Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee held at 10.30 am at County Hall, Chichester, PO19 1RQ.

Present: Cllr Hillier (Chairman)

Cllr Linehan
Cllr Bennett
Cllr Burgess
Cllr Charles

Cllr Cherry
Cllr Cornell
Cllr Hall
Cllr Mercer

Cllr Smith
Cllr Sparkes
Mrs Hill

Apologies were received from Cllr Baldwin, Mr Lozzi, Mr Cristin and Mrs Ryan

Also in attendance: Cllr N Jupp, Cllr Russell

1. Election of Chairman

1.1 Cllr Hillier was proposed for the position of Chairman for one year by Cllr Linehan and seconded by Cllr Sparkes.

1.2 Resolved – that Cllr Hillier is duly elected as Chairman of the Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee for a period of one year.

2. Election of Vice Chairman

2.1 Cllr Linehan was proposed for the position of Vice Chairman for one year by Cllr Hillier and seconded by Cllr Bennett.

2.2 Cllr Mercer was proposed for the position of Vice Chairman for one year by Cllr Cherry and seconded by Cllr Smith.

2.3 A secret ballot was held which was won by Cllr Linehan by seven votes to four.

2.4 Resolved – that Cllr Linehan is duly elected as Vice Chairman of the Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee for a period of one year.

3. Declarations of Interests

3.1 No declarations of interest were declared.

4. Urgent Matters

4.1 No urgent matters were raised.

5. Terms of Reference

5.1 Resolved – that the terms of reference were noted by the Committee.

6. Business Planning Group Membership

6.1 Resolved – that the Committee appoints the following members to its Business Planning Group: Cllr Hillier, Cllr Linehan, Cllr Baldwin, Cllr Cornell and Cllr Cherry.

7. Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee

7.1 Resolved – that the minutes of the meeting held on 10 March 2021 are approved as a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

8. Responses to Recommendations

8.1 The Committee welcomed the responses to the recommendations made by the meeting on 10 March 2021 and the information they contained.

8.2 Under the Inclusion in West Sussex recommendation 7 members of the Committee asked what the partnership looked like. The Director of Education and Skills reported the programme was working with secondary schools to engage headteachers as well as with children, their parents and carers via the Fair Access, School Effectiveness and Special Educational Needs Assessment teams.

9. Children First Improvement Update

9.1 The Cabinet Member for Children and Young, Cllr Russell, introduced the item giving the new Committee some background into what had happened over the last few years since the Ofsted inspection in 2019 which had rated Children Services inadequate. She reported that a lot of progress had been made since that time but there was a lot still to do.

9.2 The Executive Director for Children, Young People and Learning, Ms Butler, reported that she expected the service to be on a three to five-year journey. The new permanent management team had a clear understanding of how to improve the service. The West Sussex Children's Commissioner would be writing reports to the Department for Education in July and December on the progress of the service and his view on the need for the implementation of a separate Children's Trust.

a) Children First Programme Update

9.3 Ms Butler highlighted that the update report showed Children's Services had worked well during the pandemic with all teams working in a Covid safe way. The Children's Service was still seeing a surge in demand following the relaxation of restrictions.

9.4 Committee members asked for an explanation of the Ofsted visit arrangements. Ms Butler reported that Ofsted monitoring visits take place on a three-monthly basis, the dates of which are known in advance. The next visit date is 7 and 8 September 2021 and would focus on children with disabilities. Additionally, all authorities have an annual conversation

with Ofsted covering all aspects of the service, including interviewing the Lead Member for Children, Cllr Russell. Ofsted then write a formal letter to the County Council. Ms Butler was pleased to report that our most recent conversation on 16 June 2021 had given positive results and showed progress.

9.5 Members of the committee then asked questions and a summary of those questions and answers follows:

- Culture change is central to the service improvements that need to be made and the new permanent leadership team and service leads would help to filter this down through the service. The strengths and weaknesses of managers was now understood which helped them know what good looks like and they can share that knowledge with other staff. An example was the children with disabilities service which had now been remodelled and the quality and experience for children is now much improved.
- More children are being brought into the room and involved in conversations. The Corporate Parenting Panel now has young people co-chairing and co-facilitating. Every Member and officer of the County Council is a corporate parent and has a responsibility to all our children.
- Regular quality assurance by monthly audit and moderation of up to 40 children cases had been at a 100% rate since October 2020. This gave a window into practice and enabled officers to put in place learning loops. There were monthly performance management inspections which drilled down behind the data to understand what was going on. This meant staff could be held to account when performance was not where it should be. It was hoped this will lead to consistency across the workforce. The Committee Members said they hoped to hear more updates on social work practice in the future.
- Mental health support for young people fell to Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) run the National Health Service. This would be scrutinised by the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee. The Chairman offered to write to the Chairman of the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee on the concerns of the risks to young people during the pandemic raised by Committee.
- During the pandemic young people had been RAG rated to establish priority, so all were visited according to need. Visits had been virtual or sometimes outside. Young people were being seen regularly in schools now lockdown restrictions had been lifted. Young people will be given a choice on how they wanted visits to be held going forward.
- The increased number of children in care since 2018 had happened because the County Council had not been caring for the right number at the start. The County Council had always had low numbers compared to regional and statistical neighbours. The pandemic had also led to more young people remaining in care for longer as the court system had not be operational in the pandemic to move them on to other arrangements. It was felt that the number was about right for

the county and Ofsted feedback reinforced this view and felt all placements were acceptable.

- It was difficult to have an agreed number for caseloads for social workers as the requirements of each case varied due to the need of the young person/people involved. However the Department strives to ensure all social workers have a balanced and achievable workload.
- Recruitment and retention of social workers was still a key area of concern. A new pay structure would go live for Social Workers on 1 July 2021 and this seemed to be encouraging a good number of newly qualified social workers to come to work for the County Council. There were also 12 apprenticeships due to start in September which would be a three-year programme to become a newly qualified social worker. Work on a long-term strategy would be undertaken. Some agency social workers had taken permanent positions with the County Council reducing the cost to Children's Services. The Committee expressed a wish to be kept up to date on staff turnover and receive further information on staffing statistics at the Business Planning Group.
- Young people who were anxious about the return to school were being supported by a blended approach. Some additional funding for the Post-16 team being made available for the team to visit 230 Key Stage 4 young people. The Educational Psychology Team were engaging with families to help them. Younger children were receiving support through schools and SENAT advisers to assist children working from home. Some children thrived whilst learning at home whilst others did better in school.

9.6 Resolved - That the Committee:

1. Highlights that Youth Mental Health and Emotional Health and Wellbeing is a key area of concern and the Committee will consider, with HASC, how scrutiny can be taken forward of this issue.
2. That areas of focus for future Children First Improvement Update reports be considered by the Committee's Business Planning Group to help provide evidence and assurance that steady progress continues to be made on the improvement journey. Areas for consideration to include:
 - The outcomes of the recent Ofsted Monitoring visit and areas highlighted by the recent Commissioner update, for example consistent social work practice.
 - The Social Work Retention offer and the impact this is having on reducing social worker turnover for children.
 - Any examples of evidence and/or modelling being presented to the Commissioner and Ofsted to demonstrate the progress the service is making.
 - Monitoring the progress of cultural change within the service to improve the quality of service to residents.

b) Fostering Initiative

9.7 The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Cllr Russell, introduced the item reporting that phase one of the initiative had started in April 2021 with the modification to the allowance payments bringing the

County Council in line with neighbouring local authorities. Phase two is now underway, with an introduction date of early 2022.

9.8 The Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting, Mr Ruaux, reported on the key areas of the new initiative to increase the number of local carers, to keep our own arms around our children and enable them to remain connected to their family, friends and schools.

9.9 Mr Ruaux was pleased to announce a 36% increase in fostering enquiries in the period April to May 2021. It would take time to translate these into approvals due to the regulatory process. Additionally, more requests had been received to transfer from existing foster carers supporting other areas or agencies.

9.10 Members of the committee then asked questions and a summary of those questions and answers follows:

- There is currently no established policy for building adaptations, but a policy is being written, particularly for kinship and special guardianship carers, so that housing will not be a limitation in the future.
- The initiative would focus on keeping sibling groups together in the same placement and in Autumn 2021 a new panel would be looking at the arrangements for how children are coming to the service's attention.
- The Mockingbird Programme involved an experienced hub foster carer supporting 4-5 other foster carers by offering advice, relief, respite support and peer mentoring. The County Council is looking at how to work with the family safeguarding model to help children remain with family/extended family.
- Committee members expressed a wish to remain actively involved in the development of phase two that was scheduled for the autumn, as well as be kept updated on the impact of phase 1 on the recruitment and retention of foster carers.
- The pandemic causing closure of courts had had an impact on kinship and special guardianship cases. However, it was reported there was an improving picture as restrictions were easing. The Executive Director for Children, Young People and Learning reported she had regular meetings with a local court representative so perhaps any concerns could be raised that way.
- Committee members expressed interest in the out of hours services that had gone live on 1 April 2021 and were keen to see how the service could be extended to support kinship carers and special guardians.

9.11 Resolved - That the Committee:

1. Agrees and welcomes the fostering service review and asks to be kept updated on the impact phase 1 is having on foster carer recruitment and retention.
2. Requests that members are involved in the phase 2 service review as it develops and that a further item is brought to the Committee following the review to consider the findings and proposed

improvements to the service and how these will provide an improved service for children and foster carers.

3. Welcomes the improving picture of the court processes following the pandemic and agrees for the Chairman to speak with Service officers and the Cabinet Member to explore how the Committee can assist in lobbying government to further improve this service.

10. Work Programme Planning and Possible Items for Future Scrutiny

10.1 The Committee sought an update on the Woodlands Meed project from the Cabinet Member for Learning and Skills, Cllr Jupp. Cllr Jupp reported that since the last meeting in March the planning consent had been granted and work on more detailed items of design and specification and been running at pace. Initial placement of the building contract was made with ISG and work had progressed through various stages. Some legal issues were being worked through as the school foundation owned the freehold of the site. In recent weeks the County Council had been in consultation with the college on late alterations they had requested, and these would be discussed this week. It was anticipated the project would still meet the development date and there was no doubt about the commitment of the County Council towards the scheme. The Cabinet Member would report further at the next meeting.

10.2 Committee members were pleased to see items on Elective Home Education and Post-16 and NEETs were on the Work Programme.

10.3 Committee members raised the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children entering the country via Kent and asked if the County Council had the resilience to handle a significant increase in numbers. The Executive Director Children, Young People and Learning agreed it would be a good area for scrutiny to explore as the County Council had taken in 10 extra children in the last month.

11. Requests for Call-In

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

12. Date of Next Meeting

12.1 The next meeting would be held on 20 July 2021 and would review the Early Help Redesign consultation outcomes and proposals.

The meeting ended at 12.34 pm

Chairman