

Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee

29 September 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 Linehan
Cllr Baldwin
Cllr Burgess
Cllr Charles

Cllr Cherry
Cllr Cornell
Cllr Mercer
Cllr Smith

Cllr Sparkes
Mr Lozzi
Cllr Evans

Apologies were received from Cllr Bennett, Cllr Hall, Mrs Hill, Mr Cristin and Mrs Ryan.

Also in attendance: Cllr N Jupp and Cllr Russell.

18. Committee Membership

18.1 The Committee were asked to note the change to its membership with Cllr Evans being appointed to the Committee as a substitute (Conservative) and to welcome Cllr Evans to the meeting in her role as substitute for Cllr Bennett.

19. Declarations of Interests

19.1 In accordance with the County Council's code of conduct, the following declarations of interest were made for Item 7 Performance and Resources Report – Quarter 1:

- Cllr Burgess declared a personal interest as a member at Crawley Borough Council.
- Cllr Linehan declared a personal interest as the parent of a child with an EHCP.
- Cllr Mercer declared a personal interest as the Chair of the Orchard Hill College and Academy Trust.
- Cllr Smith declared a personal interest as the parent of a child who uses school transport and has an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

20. Urgent Matters

20.1 The Chairman raised the Woodlands Meed school project as an urgent matter and asked the Cabinet Member for Learning and Skills, Cllr Nigel Jupp to update the Committee on recent developments.

20.2 Cllr Nigel Jupp gave a brief resume of the project so far for new members to the Committee and updated that the necessary legal agreements had not been signed in time for the work to begin over the school summer holidays. There remained a small number of areas to be finalised and the design work had progressed considerably. The Cabinet Member stated there was no lack of commitment from the County Council and he remained hopeful that legal agreement was close and that the

programme and costs could be agreed, and a formal works contract could be entered into.

20.3 The Cabinet Member agreed to keep the Committee and all County Councillors updated and reminded them that the dedicated [Woodlands Meed update page](#) would keep them up to date.

20.4 A Committee member referred to an email which had been circulated to members of the Committee from the Woodlands Meed Governing Body. The Cabinet Member agreed to include Committee members in the response to the points raised in the email.

21. Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee

21.1 Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 30 June 2021 be approved as a correct record and that minutes of the meeting held on 20 July 2021 be approved with one amendment to item 13.1, first bullet point, to correct the text to read Horsham District Council.

21.2 Several members raised the circulation of the Early Help Redesign Communications Plan to Committee Members and asked when there might be an opportunity to scrutinise it. The Chairman agreed that any comments on the Plan should be emailed to him, the Cabinet Member and Democratic Services to pass on to the service.

22. Responses to Recommendations

22.1 The Committee welcomed the responses to the recommendations made by the Committee at the meetings on 30 June and 20 July 2021 and the information they contained.

22.2 Under item 1 of the response to recommendations of 30 June 2021 Committee Members were concerned about how support for children and young people's mental health and emotional wellbeing was practically translating. The Executive Director of Children Young People and Learning reminded that Committee that the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) service was run by the National Health Service Sussex Partnership and perhaps that could be raised with the Health and Adult Services Scrutiny Committee. She did let the Committee know that a communication was planned with all County Council members which might answer many of the questions. The Committee agreed to see that and decide if there were any areas for future scrutiny.

22.3 The Committee restated the importance of this issue for young people and were keen to see how the threads of the child experience drew together with social care, safeguarding, schools and special educational needs.

23. Children First Improvement Update - Workforce

23.1 The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Cllr Russell, introduced the item reporting that she was pleased the Committee were reviewing the workforce area. She reported that work had resulted in the County Council being a more stable place for employment and the new

Social Worker offer, which replaced the interim package, had gained a 98% take up by eligible staff. This showed a strong commitment from staff to the improvement journey.

23.2 The Children First Transformation Director, Mr Clark, led the Committee through the headlines in the report and then members of the Committee asked questions and a summary of those questions and answers follows:

- The extensive **staff engagement** had been with all staff to ensure all needs were met, staff were supported through training and supervision sessions and the service offer improved. All staff were being trained in motivational interviewing and the broad range of training opportunities were constantly updated.
- The **staff survey** had been right across the workforce and had received a higher response rate than ever before. There were some areas of improvement raised, such as technology not working consistently, less face-to-face peer support and feelings of isolation, many of which related to the pandemic arrangements. Each team has a representative on the Recovery Group and who feeds back ideas and top tips to their team. The next survey was programmed for January 2022 and information from that could be shared with the Committee.
- All Members would receive an update on the **Early Help Redesign** proposal progress so they can keep residents updated. The health service is looking to retain about 10 centres separately from the County Council. Libraries are retaining many health provisions and voluntary and community groups. Work is underway looking at the most sensible use of the non-retained Early Help centres with asset plans for each centre being collated and reviewed.
- **Progression for Social Workers** to either management or higher performing social work roles is still possible. The removed limits on the higher end social worker level means they can provide mentoring to less experienced members of staff to provide consistency and encourage quality assurance.
- **Delaying of the structure** and improvements to the scheme of delegation now meant that decision making was improved and quicker.
- **Caseloads** had been stabilised through performance monitoring of case work through monthly analysis and by the Commissioner at the monthly Improvement Board. Recent comments by Ofsted suggested caseloads appeared to be about the right level. The difficulty with caseloads comes more from complexity rather than numbers.
- **Customer Feedback** is collected through a range of methods and is something the service want to develop particularly as part of the family safeguarding model. Ofsted use several different

ways to form a judgement including speaking to individual children, parents, carers and partners. Children's homes are normally inspected twice a year. The Assistant Director – Corporate Parenting explained that the Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP) has key groups engaged with it, including the Children in Care Council (CiCC) and the Care Leaver's Advisory Board (CLAB). The young people can feed back on their experiences through CiCC, CLAB, CPP and via an annual survey. There are also a series of CPP sub-groups, one of which is managed and co-chaired by the Chair of CLAB which the information/actions raised were collated and feedback through a "You said, we did" action plan approach. **Action:** The Assistant Director – Corporate Parenting agreed to share an example of the action plan with Committee members.

- A close eye is kept on **re-referral** numbers. There are regular audits to check the threshold for referrals is correct. In addition to internal monthly checking, referral rates are reported to the Improvement Board and Commissioner. Numbers regularly fluctuate and if a spike was sustained it would be investigated with particular attention paid to re-referrals. **Action:** The Children First Transformation Director agreed to share a more detailed report with Committee members on this subject outside of the meeting.
- **Child Protection Performance** was an area of focus for improvement, recognising that the number of **statutory visits** being completed on time was only 81.7%. A lot of activity was in train including establishing a quality assurance framework and monitoring by the Commissioner and partners in practice.
- Work was under way at simplifying **IT systems** across the children's service. Work is being done to integrate the early help system and to look to the market to find a provider to help. Work was underway with IT Services to develop electronic workbooks, which it is hoped would reduce bureaucracy for social workers and allow more time working directly with families.
- To **Embed Quality Standards** underperforming staff were supported and mentored to help improvement. The new job descriptions in the Social Worker offer had helped to clarify what was expected of those staff including continuing professional development and re-registration every three years. The Improvement Board oversees all aspects of performance. This an ongoing iterative process of supporting staff and also challenging them appropriately.

23.3 Resolved – That the Committee:

1. Welcomes the excellent work of the service in workforce development and would welcome a further report in Summer 2022 to provide an update on the progress and impact of the management and workforce development changes as they become

further embedded. The Committee would like this to include the outcomes of any further Staff Surveys, workforce data such as staff turnover, caseloads, agency staffing and the impact the changes are having on the social worker practice for children and young people.

2. Recognise that further work is being progressed on Child Protection as part of the improvement journey, and would like to continue to be updated on child protection performance as part of the Children First Improvement Updates to provide assurance that improvements are being made.
3. Would welcome an update on the work on the simplification of the IT systems for children and young people directorate to support the workforce and enhance offers to children and young people as part of a future Children First Improvement Update report.
4. Asks the Cabinet Member to keep the Committee updated on the progress of work with partners and services who currently work from buildings where early help are withdrawing, to provide some assurance that the impact on the level of services available to children and families is minimal.

Cllr Russell and Mr Lozzi left the meeting at 12.15pm

24. Performance and Resources Report - Quarter 1

24.1 The Committee examined the performance and resources report (PRR) prepared by the Director of Finance and Support Services, which set out the Council's corporate performance, finance, savings delivery and business performance for the services within the remit of this comment from April to end of June 2021.

24.2 Members of the Committee asked questions and a summary of those questions and answers follows:

- **Free School Meals** – All children up to the age of seven receive universal free school meals, however unless parents or carers, who are eligible for non-universal free school meals, register, the schools do not gain the associated Pupil Premium. The guidance for applying is being revised. **Action:** The Committee requested that further detail on trends for Free School and neighbouring comparative detail be included in future PRR reports.
- **Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)** – The Committee welcomed the improving picture for the number of young people classed as NEET. **Action:** The Director of Education and Skills agreed to provide more comparative figures for the quarter 2 report to set more context for future reports.
- **Care Leavers in employment, education or training** – Covid 19 had had significant an impact on the availability of opportunities for care leavers. A core activity for the County Council is the Civil Service internship for young people 18-30 years of age and apprenticeship opportunities both within the County Council and within district and borough councils. The Care Leavers Apprenticeship Engagement Forum has received funding from the Department for Education to run a training

partnership with the University of Chichester. A module is being worked up for care leaving young people to enable them to take up higher level apprenticeships.

- The Committee noted that seven of the priorities in **Keeping Vulnerable People Safe** were rated red and hoped to see an improving picture in the next quarter report. The Committee agreed that Graph 1 (Performance by Priority) should be updated to identify which portfolio the performance measures fell into.
- The Committee were told that discussions were in progress on the **unallocated Covid-19 funding** and the Committee would be updated once allocations had been made so that it could be made aware of any funding that would be used in the Children, Young People and Learning Portfolio.
- The project to **lease vacant properties** to reduce intentionally homeless costs was a focus of activity for the property estate workstream.
- **Catch Up Funding** is supplied by the Government direct to schools who are responsible for using and monitoring the benefit. A reduction in Ofsted inspections over the pandemic had reduced the information available on performance by schools.
- The Committee suggested that the tone of the reporting could be adjusted to reflect that high increases in demand within the service were being met for minimal increases in cost. **Action:** The Children First Transformation Director agreed to speak to corporate colleagues to reflect this.
- The increase in the cost of **home to school transport for children** with EHCPs had risen greatly over the last few years due to the increase in the number of children with EHCPs, with a projected 8% increase per year. Some 17,000 miles of transport was provided each day at a cost of £56,000. The Highways Transport Commissioning Team worked hard at meeting the increasing demand by seeking competitive rates and working creatively to help reduce the need for solo taxi journeys where possible.
- The Director of Education and Skills agreed that increasing numbers of children with an EHCP were a challenge for the County Council. The service was working on plans to deal with the pressures in addition to the key strands of work being delivered through the SEND and Inclusion Strategy. Special schools were at capacity in the county and the service were therefore exploring how to generate circa 700 more places to reduce reliance on independent placements, which were also at capacity. This could involve repurposing existing assets, expansions, relocations, phase three of the Special Support

Centres and exploring the Government's free school programme for special schools.

- The Director of Education and Skills explained that the **Pseudo Dynamic Purchasing System** was a method for purchasing and supply organisations to register to help identify appropriate provision for pupils. **Action:** The Director of Education and Skills agreed to collate some information on the rationale and functionality of the system for the Committee members.
- The Committee recognised the importance of the **Special Support Centres** in providing further mainstream provision for children and asked the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills to see if the work on Special Support Centres could be accelerated in the Capital Programme so that these centres could be delivered earlier.

24.3 Resolved – That the Committee welcomed the revised Performance and Resources Report, and that it provides a welcome overview of the performance and financial position within the Children, Young people and learning portfolio, taking into account the comments and further details requested above.

25. Work Programme Planning and Possible items for Future Scrutiny

25.1 The Committee discussed the items on the Work Programme 2021/2022 and made the following amendments:

- Add **Children and Young People's Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing** – A briefing to be provided to the Committee on the current provision to identify any potential areas for scrutiny with the Health and Adults Social Care Scrutiny Committee.
- **Attainment Gap** – Report to include the position on data from academies and faith schools in the county.
- **Needs Assessments and EHCPs** – Process, Practice and Delivery – The Committee agreed to the establishment of a Task Force Group (TFG). The Business Planning Group were asked to scope up the work and produce a timeline and terms of reference. The following members volunteered to be part of the TFG: Cllr Baldwin, Cllr Charles, Cllr Linehan, Cllr Mercer, Cllr Smith and Cllr Sparkes.

26. Requests for Call-In

26.1 The report on the call in was noted.

27. Date of Next Meeting

27.1 The next meeting will be held on 1 December 2021 at 10.30am.

The meeting ended at 1.27 pm

Chairman