

Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee

9 March 2022 – 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 Cornell	Mrs Hill
Cllr Baldwin	Cllr Mercer	Mr Lozzi
Cllr Burgess	Cllr Smith	Mrs Ryan
Cllr Cherry	Cllr Sparkes	Cllr Evans

Apologies were received from Cllr Bennett, Cllr Charles, Cllr Hall and Mr Cristin

Also in attendance: Cllr N Jupp and Cllr Russell

46. Declarations of Interests

46.1 In accordance with the County Council's code of conduct, Cllr Mercer declared a personal interest as the Chair of the Orchard Hill College Academy Trust.

47. Urgent Matters

47.1 No urgent matters were raised.

48. Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee

48.1 Cllr Cornell asked that under minute 41.6, first bullet point it be noted that the view reflected the views of the officers and the majority of Committee members but not the views of some headteachers visited by Committee members.

48.2 Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 12 January 2022 be approved as a correct record, subject to the amendment as reflected in 48.1, and signed by the Chairman.

49. Responses to Recommendations

49.1 The Committee noted the responses to the recommendations made at the meeting on 12 January 2022.

50. Performance and Resources Report - Quarter 3

50.1 The Committee considered the report by the Director of Law and Assurance (copy appended to the signed minutes), which set out the Council's corporate performance, finance savings delivery and business performance for the services within the remit of this Committee from September to end of December 2021.

Learning and Skills

50.2 The Cabinet Member for Learning and Skills, Cllr Nigel Jupp, introduced the item welcoming the return of full graded Ofsted inspections for schools which had resumed in September 2021 and reported that there had been some examples where schools had made considerable gains despite the impact of Covid over the last few years. He also reported that he was pleased that the proportion of young people not in education, employment and training (NEET) was provisionally at its lowest level for a number of years and on target to meet the Council Plan targets and that the level of Personal Education Plans (PEPs) was at an all-time high.

50.3 The Cabinet Member referred to the Red, Amber, Green classifications (RAG) on the performance measures and reported that most cases were moving upwards. The risks arising were continuations of what had been seen in the past year including home to school transport and dedicated school grants.

50.4 Under the Capital Programme the Cabinet Member highlighted the some of the red RAGs had been caused due to the national issues around contractor availability and prices as a result of the pandemic.

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

- It was expected that Ofsted would be tougher on their scoring of **key stage 4 examinations**. However, this year would be a transition year back to full examination arrangements in 2023. It was advised that the target in measure 21 would be reviewed, hopefully upward, and recalibrated as schools phased back to normal exams.
- Students supported by **PEPs** were reviewed termly in discussion with the pupil and school. The PEPs were linked with Pupil Premium Grant to enable additional support. For those approaching 16 years of age, work took place on pathways to the next steps, and work with those under 5 years old helped with transition and readiness for school.
- Welcomed the direction of travel in performance measure 30 (Percentage of those that are NEET). It was confirmed that support was available to the **NEETs** through a post-16 team funded by the Council and European Social Improvement Grant. They worked closely with students who have left the system without pathways offering individual support.
- There was no indication of when the **Government White Paper on Education** might become available, but it was expected would pick up a number of major issues, including relationships between local authorities, academies and a free school and funding for special education needs (SEND), particularly following the increased age to 25 years of age in 2015 with no additional funding. The Director of Children, Young People and Learning reported she would be attending a meeting with the

Chief Executive and Director of Finance with the Department for Education later in March to look at further ways for them to help with funding and would report back to the Committee.

- The underspend caused primarily by vacancies in the **school crossing patrol** team had been a problem for many years. Work continued to fill crossing patrol posts and any support Members could give when liaising with communities, governors and teachers would be most welcomed.
- The predicted overspend on **Dedicated Schools Grant: High Needs Block** would be partly relieved by working on reducing places in the independent sector and increasing specialist places in the county including support centres and bidding for a SEND free school. A significant increase in numbers of children with EHCPs has been seen across the country and a 7.5-8% annual increase was predicted. Actions to reduce the pressure on the DSG had resulted in the creation of 486 additional placements through extra classrooms in mainstream schools, and further capital investment had been allocated in the Capital Programme to further increase SEND placements and reduce the reliance on independent placements.
- Projects in the **Capital Programme** were being delayed because contractors were withdrawing bids due to the price increases caused by the Covid pandemic. This meant the procurement process had to be repeated causing a delay in projects.

50.6 The Chairman thanked the service for the report and the answers to questions raised on it.

50.7 Resolved – That the Committee:

1. Recognises the importance of the SEND review and Education White Paper and requests to be provided with detail on the implications for the County Council, once it has been published.
2. Requests to be kept updated on the SEND capital projects that are being explored to reduce pressure on placements, given the continued rise in EHCPs, so that any potential future scrutiny can be considered.
3. Requests to be advised on the outcome of the meeting of the Director of Children, Young People and Learning with the Department for Education in relation to SEND pressures that is taking place later in March.

Children and Young People

50.8 The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Cllr Russell, introduced the item which she felt was a positive report. Improvements that had taken place and those still underway were building the solid foundation on which to build a stable workforce. She reflected that there were still areas that presented a financial challenge, and they remained

the centre of focus, such as the high number of children with complex placements needs and the tough climate of recruitment.

50.9 The Director of Children, Young People and Learning reported there would be two Ofsted inspections coming up in March focussing on Youth Justice and Children We Care For.

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

- Members expressed concern that 30% of **Early Help plans closed with outcomes not met** (performance measure 2) and asked what could be done to ensure cases were not closed until outcomes were met. The Committee were told that there were various reasons plans were closed with outcomes unmet eg children going in to social care, families did not engage or did not wish to continue with process. The level of re-referrals was reported as being low at 6% and had been declining over the last year and escalation into social care was just 16%. On occasion Early Help plans were opened in error and staff training was taking place to address this.
- The Journey to Independence Group had met multiple times and there were now specific named contacts in Job Centres to support care leavers. The **care leavers NEET** RAG rating was 2% off attaining an amber rating and the aspiration would be to improve further (performance measure 8). The difficulty was that not all care leavers were in a position to access employment or training. The Participation and Engagement team were developing two apprenticeship roles ringfenced to care leavers and district and borough councils were well engaged and interesting opportunities were arising on vocational training and education.
- The 10% target for **stability of children looked after placements** was reported to be a national target (performance measure 7). The service were currently below the national benchmark but were driven to improve on that. A higher level of scrutiny by the Entry to Care Panel was resulting in better placements. The Committee welcomed this news and hoped to see continued improvement in this area in future reports.
- Members raised whether more investment should be considered for the Child Protection and NEET Care Leavers areas to help drive forward performance. The Director of Children, Young People and Learning confirmed that £300k would be invested into the care leavers service over the next year which would provide further support for housing, employment and caseloads. The introduction of the Family Safeguarding Model on 1 February 2022 would also impact on performance around Child Protection.
- The delay in registration by the regulator (Ofsted) for **Children's in-house homes** that resulted in a slower than anticipated increase in occupancy was due to the impact of Covid on Ofsted

being able to carry out inspections (creating a backlog). To ensure effective use of resource, the service expect residential homes to have an 85%-90% occupancy, with three of the six Children's homes already reporting at this level. Brightstar and Breakwater were expected to reach the target by the end of March and Blue Cove (3 bed home) by the end of quarter 1 2022/23. The delay in the phase 2 work at Orchard House was complex and the Assistant Director (Corporate Parenting) agreed to update the Committee outside of the meeting.

- The Committee were concerned to note the increase in the social care staffing gap and that this was a regional and national issue.
- Under risk 72 the Assistant Director (Corporate Parenting) reassured the Committee that at that point no children 16 years or under were placed in unregulated placements. The Assistant Director agreed to update the Committee on the position with unregistered placements.

50.11 The Chairman thanked the service for their good work and acknowledged that there was still much further to go. He wished the service the best for the upcoming Ofsted inspections.

50.12 Resolved – That the Committee:

1. Highlights performance measure 8 (Percentage of NEET care leavers) and performance measure 9 (Positive outcomes on Child Protection in 12 months) and the need to focus on these. The committee were pleased to hear of the extra resources for these and agreed to monitor the ongoing performance through the PRR to see if performance improves as a result of the additional resource.
2. Welcomes that on Performance Measure 7 (Stability of placements for children we care for) the service is being more ambitious on the national target and will continue to monitor progress through the PRR to see how this further improves.
3. Requests that future reports include the number of children and young people that the percentages represent for performance measures where this is appropriate.
4. Requests that in the next Children First report an update on social care staffing levels is included.
5. Asks that the financial implications of the Early Help Redesign are included in the report on the implementation of the new model when it comes to Committee for scrutiny.

51. Children First Improvement Update

51.1 The Committee received two reports from the Director of Children and Young People (copies appended to the signed minutes).

52. Children First Update

52.1 The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Cllr Russell, introduce the update report highlighting that March would be a busy month for the service with the upcoming Ofsted inspections and awaiting the feedback from the Department for Education on the report by Children's Commissioner on trust status as well as business as usual and continual progress.

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

- The Committee raised concern over the performance on **child protection statutory visits** (80%). The Assistant Director (Safeguarding, Quality and Assurance) advised that the service measured every 10 days, however the statutory timescale was 20. At 20 days the figure would be 95%. There were also some recording issues when the data was pulled two days into the beginning of a month when visits might not have been written up from meetings late in the month. If the service were not able to see children, other agencies were asked to assess and report back. The same reporting issued existed for statutory visits for children we care for.
- The quarterly **Quality Assurance report** updates on audit and quality assurance activity. The Assistant Director (Safeguarding, Quality and Assurance) agreed to share the quarterly report with Committee members.
- The **engagement and participation** of young people is being focussed on with the development of an engagement plan which would be published soon and shared with the Committee Members. A smart phone app would be produced for children we care for in West Sussex and those placed at distance to feed into discussions. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Children in Care Council (CiCC) and 6 ambassadors had been involved in developing policies for children we care for and youth participation rates were the highest they had been for many years. The Cabinet member encouraged Corporate Parenting Panel members to get involved in CiCC meetings and functions to increase communication.

52.3 The Chairman thanked the service for the report and reminded members that there would be Corporate Parenting training session for Members in April.

52.4 Resolved – That the Committee noted the report and:

1. Welcomes the ongoing progress of the Children First Programme and the continued pace of improvement.
2. Requests that the Quarterly Quality Assurance report is shared virtually with the Committee as and when it is available.

3. Highlights Child Protection and Children We Care For Statutory Visits performance as important areas of improvement, and will continue to monitor performance through these reports.
4. Is pleased to hear of the ongoing work with the Voice and Participation Team and requests to be included in the circulation of the new Voice and Participation Engagement Strategy.

53. Fostering Service Redesign Phase 2

53.1 The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Cllr Russell, introduce the proposal for Phase 2 of the Fostering Service Redesign, phase 1 having been addressed in April 2021. She reported that this phase of the redesign was designed to offer more local in-house foster placements, to different cohorts of children with a varying range of needs, a much stronger offer of remuneration, support and respite and to improve retention rates, increase the social care workforce and reduce caseloads and make West Sussex a provider of choice.

53.2 The Assistant Director (Corporate Parenting) outlined the headlines by saying that previous under-investment by the County Council had resulted in children being placed in out of county fostering placements. The status quo needed rebalancing before transformation could begin. The development of a Business Intelligence Hub would allow the service to focus on areas not done so in the past by producing analytics of patterns and trends.

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

- The Business Intelligence Hub would be able to run targeted campaigns to recruit new foster carers in areas such as BAME, younger carers and LGBT+. Currently communications were shared online and Members could support by retweeting and reposting these. Children seeking asylum needed quite specific cultural supports and any support from Members to find foster carers in a wider range of cultures would be gratefully received.
- It was hoped the ratio of in-house foster carers to external foster carers would improve dramatically to maybe a 60-40 split.

53.4 The Chairman thanked the service for the report and the ambition and quality of the work.

53.5 Resolved – That the Committee:

1. Welcomes the ambition and quality of the report and fully supports the proposals to increase the number of inhouse foster carers.
2. Highlights the importance of focussing on recruiting foster carers from a wide range of backgrounds to ensure there are suitable placements for all our children and welcome that this is part of the proposals.

3. Recognises the role of members in communicating fostering opportunities and will continue to share these on social media within their communities.
4. Will monitor the impact of the proposals through the Quarterly Performance and Resources Report.

54. Work Programme Planning and Possible items for Future Scrutiny

54.1 The Committee agreed the draft work programme and suggested the following:

- That the Children First update on 8 June 2022 include information on staffing numbers.
- Quality Assurance be at least an annual update as part of the Children First Update.
- The Early Help Service – review of new model scheduled for early 2023 should include financial data.
- That joint work with the Health and Adult Services Scrutiny Committee be the way to explore areas for scrutiny on mental health and emotional wellbeing of children and young people. However, Committee Members indicated that a more public-facing briefing note on the subject should be considered.

54.2 The Chairman thanked the Councillors who were working to gather evidence for the Task and Finish Group on Needs Assessments and EHCPs.

54.3 No items were raised from the Forward Plan dated 28 February 2022 for further scrutiny.

55. Requests for Call-In

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

56. Date of Next Meeting

56.1 The next meeting would be held on 8 June 2022 at 10.30am.

The meeting ended at 12.39 pm

Chairman