

Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee

9 January 2020

Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee Business Planning Group

Report by the Chairman of the Business Planning Group

Executive Summary

Each Scrutiny Committee has a Business Planning Group (BPG) to oversee the Committee's work programme and prioritise issues for consideration by the Committee. This report provides an update of the last meeting of the BPG held on 25 November 2019, setting out the key issues discussed.

The Focus for Scrutiny

1. The Committee is asked to consider the contents of the report.

1. Declarations of Interest

- 1.1 None.

2. Background/Context

- 2.1 The BPG met on 25 November 2019. All members were present.

3. The role of witnesses and co-optees on CYPSSC

- 3.1 Members discussed the role of witnesses and the best way to hear a meaningful voice through wider engagement. The BPG heard that there had been increased requests for involvement on CYPSSC.
- 3.2 The BPG felt existing co-optees as a resource could be enhanced by making use of their backgrounds to further inform the Committee's work. Members felt that the Committee would benefit from a degree of flexibility, therefore agreed not to increase the size of the committee but to establish a pool of experts from which the committee could draw on.
- 3.4 The BPG felt that establishing a pool of witnesses was a good idea however considered that the four current co-optees represented education only and there was no external input from social care which seemed unbalanced. The BPG were keen to hear the voice of children, social workers and other frontline staff. Members felt that the Committee would benefit from a much broader range of subject matter experts who can be called to give evidence, to assist small working groups or to contribute to debates on specific subjects.

- 3.5 The BPG agreed a one-off Task and Finish Group (TFG) be established to consider further how best to incorporate the voice of witnesses, giving the Committee the flexibility to involve the relevant experience at the right stage. Officers would create a paper for the TFG on how service users might be heard appropriately and effectively through work with the participation and engagement team.

3. Education and Skills Update

- 3.1 The HR service provided by Capita to schools was perceived to be of poor quality based on feedback. There were mainly concerns about IT support.
- 3.2 Members received a briefing on Elective Home Education and heard there was no automatic right of the local authority to visit a home educated child unless there were safeguarding concerns, or if the child had an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). Members requested this item return to the March BPG agenda.
- 3.3 A briefing was received on Alternative Provision (AP) which detailed WSCC's responsibility for arranging suitable education for permanently excluded pupils and for other pupils who, for varying reasons, would not receive suitable education in a typical school setting. There were 292 places commissioned at the West Sussex Alternative Provision College (WSAPC). As part of the SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2019-2024 a commitment had been made to remove Primary AP through provision via outreach schemes. The service was working to tackle issues before they led to exclusion and manage children back into mainstream education.
- 3.4 A brief update on Home to School Transport was provided as part of the Total Performance Monitor item, and the BPG agreed this should return as a substantive item at the March BPG.

4. Children and Family Services Update

- 4.1 Members received a report on performance monitoring in response to the 12 Ofsted recommendations.
- 4.2 Members of the BPG would receive an electronic update on the impact of the whole council design on Children's Services.
- 4.3 The BPG considered a report on the commissioning of high cost residential placements for children. Members agreed this item should return to the March meeting of the BPG to allow greater time to consider the content of the report.

5. Total Performance Monitor

- 5.1 The BPG considered the latest TPM data. The following key points were noted from the Children and Young People portfolio:
- The portfolio was projecting an £11m overspend, which was in line with what was expected and planned.

- The improvement plan and purchasing external placements for Children Looked After (CLA) were the key contributors to this overspend.

5.2 The following key points were noted from the Education and Skills portfolio:

- Home to school transport costs continued to be a pressure for the service with a projected overspend of £2m.
- Savings had been made by reducing the number of solo taxis, and through some staffing vacancies being held.
- The BPG considered the ongoing issue of home to school transport and asked how the service were planning to reduce the pressure. The Director of Education and Skills advised a scheme to pay parents to take their child to school was active however take up had been low so far. The Strategic Finance Business Partner advised it was hoped the additional Special Support Centres (SSCs) would help to mitigate the overspend in the longer term. The BPG heard WSCC was not an outlier with home to school transport challenges when looking at other local authorities.

6. Work Programme Planning

6.1 Forward Plan

6.1.1 No proposed decisions were identified for scrutiny.

6.2 Agree the work programme for the coming year and plan the January and March meetings

6.2.1 The BPG agreed the Committee's work programme as at appendix A and suggested that items yet to be timetabled, specifically 1001 Critical Days Principal and Domestic Violence, be added to the agenda for the next BPG in March to consider. Other items on the March BPG agenda would include home to school transport, EHE, high cost residential placements and the TPM.

7. Implications

7.1 There are no resource, risk management, Crime and Disorder Act or Human Rights Act implications arising directly from this report. However, many of the substantive reports to the Committee will have some implications and an Equality Impact Report will be included in appropriate substantive reports to the Committee.

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Chairman

Children and Young People's Services Select Committee Business Planning Group

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Background Papers: None

Appendix A – Work Programme for Children and Young People's Services Select Committee (to follow)