

Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee

1 December 2021 – At a meeting of the Committee held at County Hall, Chichester, PO19 1RQ.

Present: Cllr Hillier (Chairman)

Cllr Linehan
Cllr Baldwin
Cllr Bennett
Cllr Charles

Cllr Cherry
Cllr Cornell
Cllr Mercer
Cllr Smith

Cllr Sparkes
Mr Lozzi
Mrs Ryan

Apologies were received from Cllr Burgess, Cllr Hall, Mrs Hill and Mr Cristin

Also in attendance: Cllr N Jupp and Cllr Russell, Mr Collins and Mr Ryder from the Youth Cabinet.

28. Declarations of Interests

28.1 In accordance with the County Council's code of conduct, the following declarations of interest were made:

- 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).
- Cllr Mercer declared a personal interest as the Chair of the Orchard Hill College and Academy Trust.

29. Urgent Matters

29.1 No urgent matters were raised.

30. Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee

30.1 Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 29 September 2021 be approved as a correct record.

30.2 Committee members asked what progress had been made on children's mental health and emotional wellbeing as there was concern that it fell between two scrutiny committees. The Chairman reported that a written briefing would come to all Members and there was hope for Member Development session. The Chairman asked that any specific points to be included be raised with himself. The briefing was welcomed, and Members suggested that information broken down across areas and details on who to contact when a situation arises would be useful.

31. Responses to Recommendations

31.1 The Committee welcomed the response to the recommendations made by the Committee at the meeting on 29 September 2021 and the information they contained.

31.2 A Committee Member highlighted that midwifery services were leaving The Gattons in Burgess Hill and asked if that was an indicator of what was happening across other Children and Family Centres that were closing. Cllr Russell responded that the County Council were not obliged to provide space for midwifery services but agreed to take the matter back to the Assets team to see if assistance could be given in signposting them to accommodation nearby.

31.3 Committee Members recognised the importance of the procurement of a new IT system across Early Help, Social Care and Education. Officers reported that the Contract would be awarded in January 2022 with work starting March/April time and taking about twelve months. **Action:** The Children First Transformation Director agreed to provide a short written briefing to members on the procurement process and to update them regularly during the life of the project.

32. Children First Improvement Update - Quality Assurance

32.1 The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Cllr Russell, introduced the item reporting that the paper outlined the quality assurance path the service had taken on the journey of improvement thus far.

32.2 The Executive Director Children, Young People and Learning, Mrs Butler, reported that when she joined the County Council in 2020 audit had not been in the lifeblood of the service. She was pleased with the progress made to date, recognising the service was on a continued journey of improvement.

32.3 The Assistant Director – Safeguarding Quality and Assurance, Ms Steele, reported that the quality assurance team had worked with operational services to introduce several changes to ensure audits were undertaken and the pace of that work had been significant. The Quality Assurance Framework had been outgrown and work was in progress to produce another version for the future.

32.4 The improvements shown in the report reflected a high return rate of completed audits. The quality of the audits had been improved which in turn had improved quality of practices. It was important to have a timely response to actions resulting from audits and a relaunched practice standards document had been issued to social workers.

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

- How does the quality assurance framework **recognise increased pressures on managers** undertaking audits?
Ms Steele reported that due to the reduction in the number of audits, in order to focus on quality and the number of managers involved, the audit rate was quite low, around one audit per manager per month. Audit was now considered as business as usual rather than an additional pressure.

- The **Power BI dashboard** would enable the service to track actions, identify patterns and trends for further research. It would also highlight good practice.
- The service was working with the Complaints Team to address better responses at Stage One of the **complaints** process. It was hoped this work and that as the quality of practice improved a reduction would be seen in the number of complaints. The service was also being encouraged to promote compliments received.
- **Voice of the Child** – Quarter two showed a drop in the number of children contributing to their review and this was of concern. Ms Steele reported that a drive was in progress to improve this. The recent restructure of the Independent Reviewing Officers and Child Protection Advisor teams included training to ensure the voice of child was captured at reviews and child protection cases. The voice of the child and families would form part of the audit process from January 2022 to seek and use their views.
- The Assistant Director – Corporate Parenting told the group about work with the **Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP)** which now involved young people. The Children in Care Council (CiCC) now has a Chair, Vice-Chair and six ambassadors. The CiCC Chair co-chairs the CPP with Cllr Russell. Young people are involved in the setting the agenda for CPP meetings. There are sub-groups which involve the ambassadors, officers and elected members.
- **Mind of My Own app (MOMO)** – This is an interactive smart app which allowed young people to express their views, wishes and feelings at any point. **Action:** Assistant Director – Corporate Parenting agreed to provide a short briefing for committee members on the MOMO app and how it is being used.
- Whilst it was good for the Committee to hear the good news stories, were they really getting an opportunity to **focus on problem areas**? The Committee were reminded that the service was also routinely monitored by Ofsted, the Commissioner as well as regular self-evaluations. The self-evaluations prior to Ofsted visits usually mirrored the Ofsted findings, giving the service confidence they were not showing things better than they actually were. The Committee were reminded that the County Council had never had a Children Social Care service rated as good so it would be a long journey and it was preferred that journey was slower, deeper and more sustaining. It was hoped the monitoring visits in 2022 would show significant changes now that good foundations had been laid.
- **Governance** - A Committee member raised that the scrutiny committee should be listed in the quality assurance framework as part of the governance role to support and challenge.

Action: The Assistant Director - Safeguarding Quality and Assurance agreed to ensure this was added in.

32.6 Resolved – That the Committee:

1. Welcomes the progress, hard work and successful outcomes made on quality assurance to date and recognises the importance of audit to demonstrate the quality of practice. The Committee would like to have a further update in the future on audit outcomes to a future meeting, to include an update on the contribution of children to their reviews and how the voice of the child and families is being sought and used in the audit process. The Committee's BPG will work with the service to identify a suitable timescale.
2. Asks that the Scrutiny Committee is referenced as part of the governance structure within the Quality Assurance Framework.

33. Performance and Resources Report - Quarter 2

33.1 The Committee examined the Performance and Resources report (PRR), which set out the Council's corporate performance, finance and savings delivery and business performance for the services within the remit of this Committee from July to end of September 2021.

Children and Young People

33.2 The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Cllr Russell, introduced the item reporting that the financial position was improved from quarter one. There were still some costly external placement fees to work on and there had been an increase in interest in foster service applications.

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

- **Rereferrals** – The table on page 43 showed an increase in rereferrals to Children's Social Care within 12 months compared to the quarter one report. It was advised that this had been caused by a reporting error which had been addressed. The correct rate was slightly above average at 23%, which was in line with other local authorities and the English average.
- **Contacts** – A piece of work had been undertaken on contact enquiries which had showed re-contact rates were very low.
- **Stability of children looked after placements** – The Assistant Director – Corporate Parenting reported that this was at the forefront for the service now. The County Council has two outstanding rated homes specialising in higher complexity or need, and a third reopening shortly. The service had seen some external placements returning to in-county provision. Work was ongoing with providers and also looking into whether appropriate foster placements could be used.

- **Staffing vacancies** – There was no financial target to have less staff and it was intended that the staffing budget would be fully spent. The Covid pandemic had been a challenge in trying to achieve a full complement of permanent staff. This had meant agency staff had still been employed, however some had transferred from agencies into permanent positions. Additionally, internal training meant the County Council were growing our own professionals. **Action:** The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People agreed to give members a briefing report on “growing our own” work.

Learning and Skills

33.4 The Cabinet Member for Learning and Skills, Cllr Nigel Jupp, introduced the item for Learning and Skills and highlighted that the quarter two from July to September had very little time when the schools were fully functioning due to the school holidays.

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

- **Transport of Children with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)** – Parents of children with EHCPs are made aware of the parental mileage rate offer and encouraged to transport their children to special schools and claim the mileage. The numbers doing so have doubled since 2020. Committee members were reassured that parents were also made aware of the scheme through social care teams and the EHCP process.
- **Dedicated Schools Grant** – The County Council is planning to manage the risk in part by increasing the number of places in special support centres in mainstream schools and increasing the number of places in special schools.
- **Queen Elizabeth II Jubilee School** – The project had been delayed due to the original contractor withdrawing. The retendering process had led to higher costs due to the increase in the price of building materials due to the pandemic. This had delayed the construction project.
- **EHCP Secondary School pilot** – The project started in the summer 2021 and focussed on individual year 6 primary school pupils with EHCPs to help children to transition into a mainstream secondary school. Once settled the existing secondary school provision would support pupils. Similarly, there was a scheme for pupils aged 16 years and over helping with transition from secondary school into further provision eg colleges.
- **Staffing Vacancies** – Funding is made available to schools for school crossing patrols but often schools don't take that up. Some vacancies have not been recruited to because the Education and Skills directorate is undertaking a redesign. With the direct Government reducing grant for central block activities,

which the County Council uses to support statutory responsibilities, savings must be made.

33.6 Resolved – That the Committee:

1. Welcomes the format and information contained in the PRR and agreed it was a useful tool to carry out scrutiny of the Council's Performance and Financial Position.
2. Welcomes the services focus and ambition around Performance Measure 1 (Percentage of re-referrals to Children's Social Care within 12 months of the previous referral) recognising it is an important indicator to measure the quality of service provided to children and young people.
3. Would like to see how the option for parents to claim mileage to provide home to school transport for their children could be further promoted and agreed to explore with the service how Members can assist to promote this to parents.
4. Thanks those working together to help address the financial pressures and risks in the Learning and Skills Portfolio, which are primarily due to the increase in EHCPs, and supports the work being taken forward to increase capacity of WSCC SEND placements. The Committee welcomes that the Special Support Centres are being progressed as a priority as part of this.

34. Work Programme Planning and Possible items for Future Scrutiny

34.1 The Committee agreed the draft work programme prepared by the Business Planning Group.

34.2 The Committee were updated that the Terms of Reference for the Task and Finish Group for Needs Assessments and EHCPs – Process, Practice and Delivery, were almost finalised and that they would be shared with the Business Planning Group, who would also look at dates/timings.

34.3 A Committee Member asked if the Christmas Holiday Activity Fund providers were in place and asked if Members could be made aware of the providers and activities in their area. **Action:** The Director of Education and Skills confirmed the providers were in place agreed circulate a list to Members. He also informed the meeting that funding had also been found to offer a similar week in the February half term holiday.

35. Requests for Call-In

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

36. Date of Next Meeting

36.1 The next meeting would be held on 12 January 2022 at 10.30am.

The meeting ended at 12.58 pm

Chairman