

# **CHILDREN'S HEALTH, SOCIAL CARE AND EDUCATION OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**WEDNESDAY, 25 SEPTEMBER 2019**

PRESENT:- Councillors Alan Bishop, Matthew Courtliff (Vice-Chair), Fay Howard, Oladapo Ibitoye, Nick Martin, Barbara Parry (Chair), Alison Paul, Carol Shelley, Bazil Solomon and Nadine Watts and Alison Paul (Association of Swindon Special Schools Headteachers).

Apologies for absence were received from Spencer Allen (Swindon Association of Primary Head teachers), Gill May (Swindon Clinical Commissioning Group), Jacqui Watt (Swindon SEND Families Voice).

## **12. Brief overview on the outcome of the OFSTED Inspection**

At the Chair's invitation, the Corporate Director for Children's Services provided the Committee a brief overview on the outcome of the OFSTED Inspection.

The Corporate Director drew Members' attention to the Cabinet Report attached as an appendix to Agenda Item 7: Children's Summary of Performance 19/20 Quarter 1 outturn data position, which contained more detail. He was pleased that OFSTED judged the Council's services for children relating to early intervention and prevention along with protection to be good. The inspection did report that the services to support children in care and care leavers require improvement. Overall, the positive news is that OFSTED saw good quality work, which means that children and families in Swindon can have confidence in the support and services the Borough provides.

In response to OFSTED's recommendations, Officers have nearly completed updating and revising the improvement plan so that it can be implemented. While the plan will address the whole service, it will focus more intently on addressing the needs of children in care and care leavers.

The Council is still working closely with colleagues at Essex County Council to strengthen its SMART plans and targets that will have to be implemented across the whole safeguarding partnership to be effective. On the advice of inspectors, Officers have commenced working with the London Borough of Bromley to support improvements in the Care Leavers Team. OFSTED recommended this Council as an example of best practice for supporting care leavers from which we will learn from to improve our support to care leavers in Swindon.

The Chair congratulated the Corporate Director Children's Services and his Department for progress made and the positive OFSTED findings.

## **13. Declarations of Interest**

The Chair reminded Members of the need to declare any known interests in any matters to be considered at the meeting.

Councillor Barbara Parry made a personal and non-prejudicial declaration of interest

in respect of agenda items 5 (Committee Sub-Groups), 6 (Schools Performance Update) and 7 (Children's Summary of Performance 19/20 Quarter) as she worked for Ridgeway School.

Councillor Basil Solomon made a personal and non-prejudicial declaration of interest in respect of agenda items 5 (Committee Sub-Groups), 6 (Schools Performance Update) and 7 (Children's Summary of Performance 19/20 Quarter) in his capacity as a part time teacher.

#### **14. Public Question Time**

No public questions were received before or during the meeting.

#### **15. Minutes**

Resolved: – That the minutes of the meeting held 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2019 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

#### **16. Committee Sub-Groups**

The Head of Skills, Employment & Lifelong Learning and the Service Manager - quality assurance and review, participation Officer submitted a joint reporting setting out proposals to address the Committee's previous recommendations. 1) To establish a cross-party Overview and Scrutiny working group to help more young people access education, employment and training and 2) to enhance the Overview Scrutiny committee's engagement with children and young people.

The Head of Skills, Employment & Lifelong Learning invited Members to review Terms of Reference for the proposed post 16 Education, Employment and Training outcomes sub-group, attached as an appendix to the main report, to consider the suggested time over which the sub-group will function, and to agree its membership. The officer set how Swindon Borough Council was focused on improving all education and training outcomes, an ambition that is set out in its supported employment strategy. The purpose of the sub-group would be to enlist the key stakeholders to provide specific support. Once established, the sub-group would define the desired outcomes, develop plans and bring forward new recommendations. The sub-group would meet every two months until March 2020.

It was made clear at the meeting that in order for the Council to achieve its targets Members would have key roles in both offering robust challenge as well as support. As a consequence of this scrutiny, Members would have greater confidence in the work being undertaken. With regard to possible membership, the Chair of the Growing the Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee has informed officers that Councillor Jim Robbins had volunteered to represent that Committee on this sub-group.

Councillors Bishop, Courtliff, Ibitoye, Martin, Shelley and Solomon asked a range of questions to which the Head of Skills, Employment & Lifelong Learning and the Corporate Director, Children's Services responded:

- 1) Was this subgroup also covering those who fell out of mainstream education?

Response: This element focuses on those young people either who are 16 to 18

and have a statutory requirement to engage with learning, or who are care leavers or SEND up to the age of 25, for whom the Council has a specific duty. The purpose of the subgroup is to generate more capacity to assist young people through building more relationships with the business and community sectors. It is anticipated that the members of the sub-group can help with access to work experience and opportunities for young people.

2) Is this about guiding people to apprenticeships?

Response: While that is suitable for some young people, others need different coaching and support to determine what possibilities exist or to overcome barriers that are preventing them from entering employment.

3) What number of young people is involved and why may school governors be unaware of the problems?

Response: Of the care leavers aged 19-21, 57% are in education, employment or training and the target is to raise that to 75% by 2022. This is an ambitious target and was recognised by OFSTED as such. Officers agreed to review the training offered to governors to recommend that they ask for information from Head teachers on this cohort of pupils at least annually. Schools are obliged to collate data for former students for three years.

The Corporate Director, Children's Services, agreed to take the following actions following this meeting

1) Swindon Borough Council will be explicit about the data and the cohorts to be measured in school performance review meetings with providers.

2) Through training, make it an expectation for governors to ask heads to report annually on the cohort, not accessing, or at risk of not accessing employment and training.

4) Do the young people already have ideas about what they wish to do or is the Council starting with a blank page?

Response: The aim would be to provide more focus on those who were not clear about the options or pathways open to them, or any barriers that might need to be overcome. The proposals also aimed to have the wider communality involved in both identifying and providing solutions.

5) Is it too late to be looking to the needs of young people at 16? Should the process of help begin at 12? Is there sufficient resource for those with SEND needs, especially given the current time it can take before young people have access to mental health care?

Response: This sub-group will focus on any young person at risk of not being in education, employment, or training, including care leavers and young people with SEND?

6) What will the success measures be for the sub-group? Will there be some tangible outcomes by March 2020?

Response: The sub-group will be a "task and finish" group rather than a standing sub-committee. The outcome will be to determine whether the Council has sufficient momentum to achieve its targets for which there will be specific metrics with clear action plans. If Members felt it was beneficial, there would be an option to extend the sub-group's duration.

7) Would there be opportunities to work with existing social enterprises and voluntary groups?

Response: The Council is seeking to engage with such groups and to make sure that more businesses realise the benefit of providing support to young people who might not otherwise be considered as employees by Swindon employers

The Service manager, Quality Assurance and Review and the Corporate Director, Children's Services, set out the aim of having a task and finish group for engagement with children and young people as it would help those young people to plan the challenge and scrutiny that they would find most helpful. It would also help set the scope of what the Committee want to hear from them, whether they would be asked questions, from a young person's Shadow Board, or if they would be Members of the Committee itself. Officers recommended options 1 as STEP was already commissioned by the Council and was prepared to undertake work that would cover the other two options as well, within existing contracted arrangements

Councillors Howard, Martin, and Shelley asked a range of questions to which the Service Manager - quality assurance and review officer and the Corporate Director, Children's Services responded.

- 1) How would young people know the correct quality of services they might expect on which they be invited to comment?

Response: One of the first task, if option 1 was chosen would be to help young people develop an understanding, for example within the young inspectors programme.

- 2) Given that the three options indicate three different choices rather than alternatives to reach one end, what outcomes are desired?

Response: The main outcome from the task and finish group would be to agree terms of reference that would enable all three options in the report to be covered. As part of this, Officers would meet again with members of the Overview and Scrutiny to hear councillors' views of what would best serve the committee.

- 3) Under option 1, how flexible is the contract with STEP?

Response: Officers confirmed that the contact would permit the work. The Corporate Director, Children's Services also set out how this task group would hear from and report to the mainstream of children and young people to complement existing channels for those with specific needs.

Resolved: –

- 1) That contents of the Draft Terms of Reference of the proposed Education, Training and Employment sub group and recommend required changes be approved.
- 2) That the following members of the Children's Health, Social Care and Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee be appointed part of the sub group: Councillors. Courtliff, Solomon, Ibitoye and Parry plus Cllr Robbins from the Growing the Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 3) That for Engagement with Children and Young People, option 1 be approved, that STEP be commissioned to engage with young people.
- 4) That the budgetary requirements of the project for engagement with children and young people; staffing, recruitment of young people, training, resources, travel and project costs be covered within the existing contract with STEP.
- 5) That a 'Task and Finish Group' be established to set the scope for the engagement project, to look at the process required to set up this project; creative thinking is required. In addition, that this group be authorised to confirm the terms of reference for the engagement of children and young people.
- 6) That a small and dedicated team of Youth Workers be authorised to identify a group of young people, train them and link them with voluntary agencies to undertake the project.

- 7) That Members and Officers consider how to work with Parish Councils to identify young people in their areas with whom they are already engaged and that Councillors coordinate the plan and rotate the use of Parish Councils to 'bring young people into their world'.

## **17. Schools Performance Update**

The Chair informed the meeting that a full report would be brought to the Committee when the validated data are available as some schools are still in the process of challenges and validating data. The Chair requested that officers add an item to the Committee's work programme so that the Committee Officer can include it on a future agenda.

## **18. Children's Summary of Performance 2019/20 - Quarter 1 Outturn Data Position**

The Director of Children's Social work introduced the report, which contained information used by Ofsted in the recent inspection. The Director drew Members' attention to a number of key points including:

- That the government has extended finance for the Troubled Families project by a year to March 2021,
- The Family Intervention Service, which was launched in September, is functioning well with none of the cases that were transferred from social care having to be referred back. This indicates that the Council has the correct selection criteria, it was noted that this will be checked and tested through monthly audit.
- More work needs to be done to train and support partner organisations as Swindon is still an outlier for the high number of contacts through the Front Door. There is a better balance so that children are protected without issues always being framed as safeguarding.
- As a consequence of Officers' work, the number of Child Protection Plans was falling and this trajectory was expected to continue. However, Members were advised that this figure was susceptible to change because of demand.
- It was noted that the Council is working closely with Essex in order to learn and implement best practice, within the Youth Offending Team.

Councillor Howard reflected on the outcome of the Serious Case Review and noted that officers and partners were learning the lessons from it. Councillors Howard and Shelley, asked a series of questions to challenge officers, to which the Director of Children's Social Work and the Corporate Director, Children's Services responded.

- 1) Could officers state the causes behind the reduction in the number of first time entrants? Is this pattern different to other councils? Could officers provide details of how many of those who went through the Youth Restorative Justice Intervention Board's processes subsequently became offenders?

Response: Officers elaborated on the Early Help work the Council undertakes, the work with families, and the multi-agency working. However, officers cautioned Members by clarifying and explaining that this downward trend may not be sustained. Officers undertook to submit a report to the Committee on the impact of the Youth Restorative Justice Intervention Board, including the details requested to permit scrutiny, and the Committee Officer

was asked to add this to the work programme.

- 2) Could officers provide details on how many young people being selectively home educated have SEND? Was there a correlation between the number and parents believing that schools were not adequately addressing their children's needs?

Response: information will be circulated for Members to read and challenge after the meeting.

- 3) Given the acknowledgement of the problems moving foster placements can cause, could officers consider the number of changes in each child or young person's social workers?

Response: Officers agreed that a change of social worker can have a detrimental impact on a child and accepted the challenge of noting this impact for future reports.

- 4) Would there be a report to this Committee on the Early Help Strategy?

Response: Officers confirmed that there would be a report.

**Resolved: -**

1) That the key performance messages in relation to 19/20 quarter 1 for Children's Early Help and Social Care services be noted.

2) That it be recognised and acknowledged where and how improvements are being made and successes achieved, the detail of which is also reflected in the OFSTED Inspection report (Appendix 1).

3) That officers would respond to the areas of concern identified by Members that require further scrutiny and investigation. The Committee noted that these actions will be owned by the Corporate Director of Children Services and the Director of Children's Social Work, with the support of appropriate Heads of Service and Corporate Senior Managers depending on the areas of performance that to which they relate.

## **19. Children's Services - Quality of Practice**

With the consent of the meeting along with officers' assurances that there were minimal changes from the report initially circulated, the Director of Children's Social Work presented the report, informing the Committee that it had largely been superseded by the OFSTED inspection.

The Director of Children's Social Work drew Members attention to the actions undertaken to improve social work practice, which OFSTED had found to be good. The report also set out how OFSTED was complimentary about the operation of the MASH and the strength of practice to help and protect children, which was a consequence of the work with partner agencies to improve compliance and on-going action to improve staffing. The report set out the Council's ambition to progress from a rating of "good" to "outstanding" and Members' were invited to review and challenge the actions that would be necessary to achieve this.

Councillors Shelley welcomed the progress to achieve good but expressed a reservation that the Committee's task group on this area had ceased. Councillor Shelly challenged officers on what steps were being taken to improve children's experiences in care and as care leavers. In particular, what was being done to ensure there were adequate local placements, especially for older children? The Director of Children's Social Work acknowledged this challenge and assured the committee that the two service commissioners were relentless is seeking to find

placements as close to Swindon as possible, providing it was in the child's best interest. Officers were requested by Councillor Shelley to provide regular reports to this Committee so that work in this area could be scrutinised and challenged.

Resolved: -

- 1) That the improvements are being made and successes achieved be recognised along with the methods being used to achieve them.
- 2) That the areas of concern identified in the meeting that require further scrutiny and investigation be brought back to the Committee as soon as practicable.

## **20. Work Programme**

The Committee considered a report by the Chief Legal Officer on the results of the work programme consultation and the suggested priorities for the work for the Municipal Year, 2019/20.

Resolved –

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That the work programme be updated to include items recommended by the Committee.
- 3) That Councillors Courtliff, Cllr Solomon, Cllr Ibitoye and Cllr Parry from this Committee along with Cllr Robbins from the Growing the Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee be appointed to the Improving post 16 Education, Employment and Training outcomes sub-group.
- 4) That Councillors Parry and Shelly be appointed to the “task and finish” Engagement with Children and Young People sub-group.