

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

WEDNESDAY, 27 NOVEMBER 2019

PRESENT:- Councillors Barbara Parry (Chair), Matthew Courtliff (Vice-Chair), Alan Bishop, Fay Howard, Oladapo Ibitoye, Nick Martin, Carol Shelley, Bazil Solomon. Alison Paul (Swindon Association of Special School Headteachers) and Jacquie Watt (Swindon SEND Families Voice).

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Nadine Watts.

24. 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 (School Exclusion and Attendance), 6 (Elective Home Education, Children Missing Education, Schools Leavers process update and School Attendance reporting update) and 7 (Children's Summary of Performance 2019/20) as she worked for Ridgeway School.

Councillor Bazil Solomon made a personal and non-prejudicial declaration of interest in respect of agenda items 5 (School Exclusion and Attendance), 6 (Elective Home Education, Children Missing Education, Schools Leavers process update and School Attendance reporting update) and 7 (Children's Summary of Performance 2019/20) in his capacity as a part time teacher.

25. Public Question Time

No public questions were received during the meeting.

26. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meetings held on 25th September and 17th October 2019, be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

27. School Exclusion and Attendance

The Secondary Commissioner and Additional Provision and Reintegration Manager submitted a joint report setting out information in relation to fixed term and permanent exclusions from schools, the reasons for such exclusions and actions arising from those exclusions. The Secondary Commissioner and Additional Provision and Reintegration Manager drew Members' attention to the following issues during their presentation of the report:

- That there were 47 permanent exclusions in Swindon during the academic year 2018/19 which was an increase of one on the previous year.
- Of the 47 permanent exclusions 13 involved primary school pupils, which was the same figure as the previous two academic years.
- The Council's pupil referral unit had doubled in size to 16 places for the

current academic year.

- The provision for primary aged pupils who had been excluded from school was being supported through additional education provision.
- Swindon had followed a national trend seeing pupils being excluded from school at an earlier age with 7 pupils being excluded from key stage one.
- An outline of activities being undertaken to support schools in preventing/reducing secondary schools exclusions, including staff training in association with the Department for Education which had supported and funded four days of training for secondary school staff on their behavioural strategy which had been well received by participants.
- That the Swindon Challenge aimed to bring national best practice to Swindon schools.
- The positive feedback received from schools to training opportunities provided by the Virtual School.
- A recent inclusion conference for behavioural attendance leads and secondary head teachers held in June 2019 focusing on pupils with Special Educational Needs and those having an Education, Health and Care Plan. This was in accordance with the Written Statement of Action Priority 7 and highlighted good practice and joint working practices between schools and the local authority.
- Work to reduce in-year school transfers and keep children in school, particularly where they hadn't been a change of home address.
- The development of the Council's Fair Access Panel for primary schools to facilitate early intervention to support pupils at risk of exclusion, which mirrored arrangements in place for secondary schools.
- The implementation of a new Education Other than at School process and structure to offer a support package for children at risk from exclusion through a partnership panel supported by two secondary head teachers.
- The recently negotiated agreement with all secondary head teachers of a flat rate maximum charge for any permanent exclusion.
- The revised Fair Access Protocol which was been drawn up in liaison with head teachers of secondary schools.
- Work to keep schools updated in respect of potential implications arising from the Timpson Report and the Child in Need Report.
- The benchmarking of exclusion data against other local authorities and the sharing of best practice between local authorities.
- The monitoring of part-time timetables which allowed more timely overview and challenge by the local authority.
- The increase of fixed term exclusions for primary schools and reduction in secondary school and special school fixed term exclusions.
- The work of the Exclusion and Reintegration team which supported the work of the Fair Access Panel.
- Alternative Education Provision provided within Swindon which included positive activities outside of the formal classroom environment.

Following their presentation officers responded to Members' scrutiny in respect of the following issues:

- Reasons that might lead to a child being excluded from school and whether mitigating factors, such as family issues, are considered by schools and reported to the local authority.

- The categories for exclusion set out within the DfE Guidance on exclusions.
- The role of independent School Exclusion Panels within the exclusion appeals process.
- Support for pupils within the classroom environment and in particular those with Special Educational Needs and how schools can access additional support.
- The way in which a typical graduated response might operate and how the local authority was supporting best practice and consistency across all schools in Swindon in respect of this work.
- How moves between schools were monitored and the types of reason a move might take place; it being noted that parents had the legal right to transfer their children between schools and that in many cases the local authority would not be involved.
- Work on ensuring exclusion policies were kept up-to-date and were in line with best practice.
- That Members would find the additional information referred to in paragraph 3.2 of the report useful in considering specifics of the report before them.
- The need to carefully monitor any pupils suffering multiple exclusions and to ensure not only that their education wasn't suffering but also that they were not being exposed to county line issues.
- The challenge to elected members, the Council as a corporate parent, officers and schools arising from potential changes arising from the Timpson Report.
- Issues raised by the Child in Need Review and how partner organisations would ensure that every child's needs are met and in particular how the role of Councillors might evolve to meet any additional responsibilities.
- What else can be done to reduce the number of exclusions, and in particular, permanent exclusions.

Resolved – (1) That the key performance messages in relation to exclusions from schools and school attendance at the end of September 2019 be noted.

(2) That improvements in preventing exclusions be recognised and acknowledged.

(3) That, further to paragraph 3.2 of the report, the Annual Report on Fixed Term Exclusions be circulated to members of the Committee.

28. Elective Home Education, Children Missing Education, School Leavers process update, and School Attendance reporting update

The Early Help Operational Manager and Senior Education Welfare Officer submitted a joint report setting out information in relation to (a) Elective Home Education, (b) Children Missing Education, (c) the School Leavers Process, and (d) School Attendance Reporting. The Early Help Operational Manager and Senior Education Welfare Officer drew Members' attention to the following issues during their presentation of the report:

- The current position of Elective Home Education in Swindon and challenges faced when implementing guidance on Elective Home Education.
- That as at the end of September 2019 there were 225 children being electively home educated in Swindon although these numbers were fluid for a variety of reasons.
- That a recent audit of electively home educated children had been

undertaken and that officers were confident of the numbers of children being home educated. Home visits were being undertaken to ensure an appropriate level of education was being provided.

- A number of Children receiving elective home education had been RAG rated and the reasons for these ratings which were set out within the report.
- That engagement by parents with the local authority when electively home educating their children was a parental choice but that the local authority had a duty to ensure the home education was appropriate.
- That there were four school attendance orders being progressed by the local authority where the standard of education was not deemed suitable.
- Priority would be given to those children who had a red RAG rating.
- Work with Swindon Family Voice to engage families who were electively home educating their children acknowledging the right of parents to home educate their children and to ensure agreed actions were followed through.
- That Swindon was in the lower percentile for home educated children with 0.5% being educated in this way.
- The number of children missing education tended to peak in September as children may not return to school for a number of reasons, for example moving address, extended holidays or attending a school that they had not been allocated.
- That Swindon Borough Council tracked every child missing from education and held them on the Missing Education Register until the local authority was satisfied with their status and that they were receiving appropriate education. There were currently 21 children on the tracker whose whereabouts had not been confirmed and this was kept under regular review.
- The implementation of the JADU system which allowed schools to electronically inform the local education authority of any child who has left the school. Work was being undertaken to rectify some teething issues with the system (this was a national issue). This would allow cross referencing of census data more speedily and would facilitate any issues highlighted being followed up quickly.
- The Education Welfare Service would be reporting on attendance data and work was being undertaken to allow schools to update this data on a daily basis which would allow intervention before non-attendance became a major problem.

Following their presentation officers responded to challenges and questions in respect of:

- Members satisfaction that the electively home education in Swindon followed strong practice and in particular to the detail of monitoring and challenge in respect of all children in home education.
- The use of school attendance orders to ensure home education standards met the needs of children involved.
- The grounds on which home visits for the electively home educated children might be undertaken by local authorities.
- The types of reason for parents wishing to home educate their children.
- A break-down of the ages of children being electively home educated within the Borough.
- The strength of monitoring in respect of Children Missing Education.
- The consistency and accuracy of attendance register marking across the

Borough and how issues could be speedily addressed.

Resolved – (1) That the current overview of Elective Home Education in Swindon and the challenges when implementing the DfE guidance into practice for Elective Home Education be noted.

(2) That the number of Children being tracked over the past few months in relation to Children Missing Education be noted.

(3) That the actions taken to improve the school leavers notification process and how this will help to inform the EWS of trends, and illegal 'off rolling' which can then be challenged resulting in fewer pupils being removed from school roll when it is not in their best interest be recognised and acknowledged.

(4) That the identification of the Education Welfare Service as the lead for reporting on school attendance be noted.

(5) That the actions being taken to ensure accurate attendance data at pupil and school level in a timely manner to support the Local Authority in improving improved school attendance across Swindon be noted.

(6) That Members be circulated details of the Key Stage Exclusions together with details of multiple exclusions for individual pupils.

(7) That officers be requested to check whether codes for reporting attendance absence were being used correctly and consistently across the Borough.

(8) That the Committee recognise the strong work and practice being undertaken in respect of (i) electively home education in Swindon and in particular the detail of monitoring and challenge in respect of all children in home education, and (ii) the strength of monitoring in respect of Children Missing Education.

29. Children's Summary of Performance 2019/20

The Director of Children's Social Work submitted a report setting out a summary of performance in children's services for the period April to September 2019. The Director of Children's Social Work drew Members' attention to the following issues:

- The high volume of work being reported through the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub with an average of 1172 referrals on average per although it was noted not all would progress far into the system.
- Around ¼ of cases were referred at the moment and work to embed confidence levels with partner organisations to ensure a more streamlined approach.
- The on-going challenge of the recruitment and retention of social workers and measures being undertaken to attract new social workers to Swindon and to retain existing staff.
- The current mix of permanent and agency social worker staff and how this impacted on the budgetary pressures facing the service.
- The current level of 234 children subject to a Child Protection Plan at the end of September 2019.
- The outcome of Serious Case Review Q which had been reported earlier in the day.
- The monitoring and actioning of service improvement through pillar 4 in relation to the Quality of Practice.
- The reduction of the number of Children Looked After to a figure of 335 with approximately eight new cases per month.

- That 64.3% of Care Leavers were in Education, Employment of Training and whilst work was on-going to improve this figure this was a relatively positive position when compare to other local authorities.

Following her presentation the Director of Children's Social Work responded to Members' scrutiny in respect of:

- The increased complexity of many of the cases of children entering care and work to support children to stay with the families where this was an appropriate option. However children being brought into care were requiring more intensive support.
- The reasons for the complexity of cases of children entering into care including children moving to Swindon from outside the Borough, and the complexity family situations in cases being referred.
- The re-referral rate for cases to social services in comparison to national averages and work being undertaken with partners to better manage the underlying causes of these referrals.
- Quality Assurance in respect of the work of partner organisations and how Councillors could assess information to satisfy themselves as to the quality of work undertaken, especially where work was being undertaken on behalf of the Council.
- Thresholds for safeguarding work undertaken through the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub and the work of the Local Safeguarding Board in overseeing this work.
- The role of the Cabinet Member for Children's Services in overseeing exceptional safeguarding cases.
- That the positive performance in respect of infant's breastfeeding at 6-8 weeks.
- Concerns raised by primary school head teachers in respect of the number of children arriving at school with significant needs and failing to work close to their expected level of attainment and the drain this had on school resources.
- The change in the skill mix of assessment team's and the forthcoming focus on early visits by Council staff.

Resolved – (1) That the key performance messages in relation to 2019/20 mid-year data position (April- September 2019) for Children's Early Help and Social Care services be noted.

(2) That Members be provided additional information in respect of (i) the percentage of Children Looked After with Special Educational Need Statements, and (ii) actions being undertaken/planned to bring the prioritise contacts for new birth visits up to the national average.

30.

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 an update from the Youth Participation and Education, Employment and Training Sub-Groups be submitted to the January meeting of this Committee.

(3) That the update on paediatric services be deferred until the March meeting of

the Committee.