

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

WEDNESDAY, 25 NOVEMBER 2020

PRESENT:- Councillors Barbara Parry (Chair), Fay Howard, Nick Martin, Carol Shelley, Bazil Solomon, Nadine Watts, Alison Paul, Timothy Swinyard and Caryl Sydney-Smith

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Matthew Courtliff and Oladapo Ibitoye .

11. 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 as she worked for Ridgeway School.

Councillor Carol Shelley made a personal and non-prejudicial declaration of interest, as she was a governor of Swindon Academy.

Councillor Caryl Sydney-Smith made a personal and non-prejudicial declaration of interest, as she was a school governor of Oliver Tomkins Primary School.

Councillor Basil Solomon made a personal and non-prejudicial declaration of interest in his capacity as a part time teacher.

12. Public Question Time

No public questions were received during the meeting.

13. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 16th September 2020, be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

14. Children Services Covid-19 Response and Recovery

The Corporate Director, Children Services submitted a report setting out an overview of the priorities identified in response to Covid-19, the actions taken and impact of the work to minimise the overall impact on children, young people and families in Swindon and summarising the key challenges and resulting actions. This report linked directly to the Council's vision to 2030

Priority Two: - "To offer educational opportunities that lead to the right skills and the right jobs in the right places" and Priority Four: - Help people to help themselves while always protecting our most vulnerable children and adults".

The Corporate Director, Children Services introduced the report and responded to Members scrutiny in respect of:

- The move towards a “One Children’s Service”.
- The reported schools with attendance of pupils overall across all schools has been good and is currently at 96% and how this figure was validated. It was noted that schools had not be penalised for pupils unable to attend due to Covid-19 and that these figures included the X-Code which was used for Covid-19. There were currently around 5.8% (up from 2.2% in October 2020) of schools pupils in Swindon who were self-isolating.
- Accumulatively since the start of term two, there have been over 2,000 young people who have been self-isolating. Most of these were at secondary level and was broadly in line with national figures.
- The provision of free school meals during the holiday period. In respect of the October half-term period the scheme was put in place very quickly and over 1,100 families had been able to access support. This provision had been extended to cover families not supported by other schemes.
- The winter grant would cover free school meals for the Christmas 2020 period and February 2021 school break and would be a more robust system. A number of options were being investigated, including the provision of a voucher and how communities were supporting young people, as it was a wider group than those pupils entitled to a free schools meal.
- A requirement of the winter grant funding was for the Council to be able to demonstrate that funding was being targeted at the right families. It was anticipated the options appraisal would be completed by the end of the week with information being circulated the following week.
- Guidance received in respect of the Holiday Activity Fund, which would cover the Easter, the summer holidays and Christmas in 2021, and co-ordination being undertaken with partners regarding its operation and sustainability ensuring all families entitled to help would be included.
- Information and advice sent to parents by schools when a pupils needs to self-isolate.
- How examinations would be undertaken and assessed; currently these details were not yet available and the Committee and officers were mindful of the concerns regarding completing the curriculum and whether pupils would be able to sit exams.
- That 789 laptops and 100 wireless routers were distributed to disadvantaged children in Swindon in July 2020 to ensure they were able to access learning. The school summer holidays had delayed the delivery of around 40 laptops to disadvantaged children and it was anticipated that all laptops would be delivered by the end of the week. An additional offer of laptops from the Government was currently being directly co-ordinated through schools.
- That 206 young people who are classified as NEET were being supported by the Council’s Youth Engagement Service. All young people who were classified as NEET had been allocated a youth worker to support them.
- An update on kick-start which was part of the Government’s suite of measures to support young people through salary and other employer support for six month work placements for young people on universal credit. The first tranche of applications had been made to Government, and this included those from the Council.
- The production of the ‘Learn Live’ event which was planned and delivered in collaboration with the Local Enterprise Partnership to provide information, advice and support on career progression, employment and training

opportunities for 16-24-year olds. The live broadcast had 588 views with 4,189 'On Demand' views and 2,344 page visits. These event provided positive feedback and was well attended and future events were currently being considered.

- The wide take-up of the Swindon Achieving Permanency Framework training.
- The implementation of the 'Social Workers in Schools' pilot scheme, involving eight social workers, which would be the subject of an update to the Committee in February 2021.
- Work to reduce average time until the final court hearing which was currently 31 weeks which was the result of a variety of combinations including Covid-19 related issues, the need for specialist assessments or late changes to either family or Council representation at court. It was noted that although 31 weeks was too long this was better than many other authorities.

Resolved – (1) That the priorities, activity and challenges outlined in the report and the learning and impact to date be noted.

(2) That an update on the implementation of the 'Social Workers in Schools' pilot scheme be submitted to this Committee in February 2021.

(3) That officers forward additional information to Members of the Committee in respect of (i) figures on self-isolation figures in Swindon schools, including at Key Stage 4, (ii) information on information sent to parents by schools in relation of pupils self-isolating, (iii) the completion of the roll-out of the provision of lap-tops to vulnerable children in the Borough, and (iv) an update on the Kick-start programme (including traineeships).

15. Education and Learning Strategies Update

The Director – Inclusion and Achievement submitted a report updating the Committee on progress on the Council's Education Strategy, the work of the sub-group including schools and colleges, business and voluntary sectors to look at challenges, opportunities, desired outcomes and priorities and future plans to progress this work. These strategies supported Priority two: Offer education opportunities that lead to the right skills and right jobs in the right places and Priority four: Help people to help themselves while always protecting our most vulnerable children and adults.

The Director – Inclusion and Achievement introduced the report and responded to Members questions and comments in respect of:

- Engagement with stakeholders on this work and the school effectiveness process working with schools to ensure accurate self-assessments of their current position and to allow effective oversight.
- Ongoing work with schools and colleges and Multi Academy Trust CEOs to explore the options and best approach to build on partnership working to date, and to establish a sector led approach to working in partnership to improve achievement moving forward. The initial priorities for this work and the immediate challenges in education have been agreed and will form the basis of joint working to establish an individual approach to effectively work with individual schools.
- An update on work related to the dedicated schools grant to address the overspend and recovery of monies.
- The priorities and outcomes of the Education and Learning Strategies with a

view to having the overall strategy and draft plan in place by the end of January 2021. Strategy work had been slowed down due to the need to prioritise Covid-19 recovery work.

- An update on the workshop held in February 2020 to engage a wide range of stakeholders in the development of the strategy and to develop the vision and priorities which had been positive with good engagement.
- Work to analysis the key themes arising from the workshop, including inclusion, meeting the needs of SEND young people and linking outcomes to work, colleges and universities.
- A brief summary of the priorities and outcomes proposed following work and meeting with individual sectors.
- The outcomes of the peer review on intervention which showed the need to better link work on the 0-5 age group through health visitor's teams and parenting programmes which had seen some services being joined together to achieve an improved 0-5 approach and outcomes at an earlier stage.
- On-going work to turn data into intelligence in order to map need in Swindon's communities and support effective service delivery, this included joining up different data storage systems.
- The establishment of a Strategic Inclusion Forum to oversee inclusive practice in schools and support ongoing improvements in the graduated approach to meeting the needs of children without a statutory assessment and the allocation of financial resources to 'Team around the school'. This would work with the Schools Forum bring decisions involving children closer to schools and would provide inclusion training.
- The Council's support for the continued development of the Learning Town Strategy.

Resolved (1) - That the updates of the Inclusion and Achievement strategies currently in development be noted.

(2) That an update on the strategy and implementation plan and consultation with stakeholders be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

16. Children's Social Care and Early Help Summary of Performance Position at the end of Quarter 2 2020/21

The Interim Director of Children's Social Work submitted a report setting out key performance information and provides additional service context and interpretation of data for Quarter 2 of the current Municipal Year.

The Interim Director of Children's Social Work and responded to Members' questions and comments in respect of:

- Areas requiring improvement challenges currently being experienced and the plan to address these.
- The continued and increasing demand for help from the Children's and Families team including help through early support services with the early help hub being very busy.
- The recent increase in work requiring a social worker assessment or intervention including social worker interventions much of which was the result of family pressures arising from the pandemic restrictions. The number of children on child protections plans was rising and approaching pre-pandemic levels.

- The recruitment and retention of social workers, that despite improvement being made in recruiting permanent staff, still remained a challenge, especially in posts undertaking child protection work. This was also an issue at a national level.
- The number of children in care which had remained fairly stable throughout the pandemic, but which was not always the case nationally.
- Care placement availability remained a challenge especially when placing children in emergency situations. The recruitment of foster carers had been positive during the pandemic period.
- There had been an improvement in securing permanency of placements for young people where this was the right plan.
- Swindon was performing well against statistical neighbours and nationally in respect of care orders.
- Despite pressures arising from the pandemic, there continued to be progress in placing young people in employment, education or training.
- There had been an increase to 318 children who were reported to be taught at home and these children were being monitored and there had been a reduction in the number of children who were potentially missing education and requiring support to restart fulltime education.
- The percentage of Elective Home Educated children who had special educational needs (six children educated at home had an Education Health Plan) and the reasons for these parents choosing to home educate their children.
- Progress in establishing a home environment for older looked after children requiring assistance and to place as many back within the Borough as was appropriate.
- The process for establishing children's homes and for determining where this was suitable for the young people.
- The level of vacancies for Health Visitors and the current recruitment of three additional Early Years Family Practitioners in place of two health visitors to improve the skill set within the team. The recruitment of health visitors and student health visitors continued, including nurses and health visitors, and school nurses would be trained and dual registered.
- The continued recruitment of social workers at the varying managerial levels and the recruitment of experienced social workers which was more problematic during the current pandemic although recruitment plans were in place.
- The placement of asylum seeking looked after children some of whom are placed out of borough due to local connections or to meet their ethnic and cultural needs better.
- The challenges in monitoring asylum seeking looked after children some of whom are placed out of borough during Covid-19 which had been met.
- That there were no current Serious Case Reviews outstanding. Officers updated Members" on a Serious Case Review highlighted in the Evening Advertiser which referred to an old case.
- The monitoring of Electively Home Educated children and the return to school following Covid-19.

Resolved – (1) That the report be noted.

(2) That progress made on meeting the Council Pillars be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

17. Update on Special Educational Needs and Disability Written Statement of Action

The Director – Inclusion and Achievement submitted a report an update of the progress of the delivery of the SEND a joint Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) a joint inspection of the local area of Swindon to judge the effectiveness of the area in implementing the special educational needs and disability (SEND) reforms as set out in the Children and Families Act 2014. The inspection raised a number of strengths but also significant concerns about the effectiveness of the local area. The local authority and CCG was required to produce and submit a Written Statement of Action to Ofsted that explained how the local area will tackle the areas of significant weakness over 18 months.

The Director – Inclusion and Achievement introduced the report and responded to Members' scrutiny and questions in respect of:

- The 7,000 children in Swindon with a SEND report and 2,300 in receipt of a statutory Education Health and Care Plan.
- Since 2015, there had been a 71% increase in the number of Education Health and Care Plans which was higher than the national average.
- The current Government Review looking at solutions and challenges of implementing the reforms centring on social working health and education of young people.
- Current plans for the introduction of a rolling programme of inspections across the country.
- Swindon was inspected in line with the Government SEND framework in November 2018 which raised a number of strengths but also concerns that required the Council to produce a written statement of action. This set out actions to improve against eight priority areas over an eighteen month period.
- The national context of 60% of local authorities being required to produce a written statement of action with nine of twenty-one authorities being visited having satisfied the inspectorate that they had met the required improvements.
- The risks associated with not satisfying the inspectorate sufficient progress against actions had been met and the impact of delivery against the eight priorities to date and timeline for planned activity.
- Regularly regional visits to the Council from the Department for Education and NHS England advisors and in November from the national SEND advisor to the Department for Education.
- Feedback from the regional advisors was the information provided was comprehensive, joined up and evidence based on areas of improvement with notable progress against five of the priorities with qualitative and quantitative data suggesting service improvement and increased levels of satisfaction.
- Progress had been affected by Covid-19 although work and delivery had continued through the pandemic period with some work incorporate within a Covid-19 catch-up plan based around accelerated progress the Council intended to make in three priority areas, which would be reported to the Governance Board.
- It was anticipated that the inspection re-visit would occur around Easter 2021 and once concluded the work undertaken would be aligned to the inclusion strategy.

- Concerns expressed by Special Schools in using the portal and liaison by officers with those schools.
- Waiting times for autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) mental health services which had improved with waiting time dropping; in April 2019 there were 1261 children on the waiting list which had reduced to 869 by the end of September 2020 a drop of 31% in eighteen months. These waiting times were continuing to drop. The Committee welcomed the sustained drop in waiting times but noted additional work was required to clear the 250 families who had been on the waiting list since 2018.
- The CCG had advised that additional clinics and capacity was being planned and that a new diagnostic for ADHD had been introduced to reduce times and improve the quality of service. In addition the Council education psychology service had been commissioned to help ensure those accepted onto the ADHD were appropriate with better information sharing on those children accepted onto the pathway and to support families with earlier intervention.

Resolved – (1) That the report and progress against the Written Statement of Action be noted.

(2) That this Committee receive an update on progress against the outcomes of the Written Statement of Action actions.

(3) That officers liaise with the CCG regarding communication with families in respect of ADHD waiting times and report to this Committee in the event that further action is required.

18. Youth Offending – A Multi-agency Response

The Service Manager – Practice and Development-Interim Service Manager – Youth Offending Team submitted a report setting out an update in relation to the Youth Offending Team, a multi-agency response to Youth Offending. This work related to the Committee's specific responsibility for the review of Local Authority services delivered to children and young people in Swindon and linked to the Council Vision's Priorities and Pledges, Swindon Programme, Corporate Strategy, One Swindon, Strategic Objectives, Plans and Policies.

Interim Director of Children's Social Work introduced the report and responded to Members' scrutiny and comments in respect of:

- An overview of the Youth Offending Team which was a Multi-Organisation Partnership and had role and services funded by Swindon Borough Council, NHS and the Youth Justice Board as well as contributions in kind.
- The Team responded to criminal behaviour by children and young people and worked to reduce the risk of them entering the criminal justice system.
- The service was governed by a management board, currently chaired the Corporate Director, Children's Services with a police representative as Vice-Chair and met regularly to hold partners to account on the delivery of their statutory functions in relation young people involved in offending.
- The team involves a range of people with casework responsibility, Youth Offending Team officers, social workers, a probation officer and staff who supported the criminal processing service such as bail and remand, those involved in monitoring those who have offended and reparation workers.

- An overview of the team and management structure, which also supported young offenders' health and education requirements.
- In the past Swindon had a higher rate of young people entering the youth justice system when matched as comparator authorities and the national average; and work, for example through the Youth Restorative Intervention Panel (providing alternative options to prevent court appearances), had been undertaken to reduce this so it was in line with comparators.
- Work to ensure that only a small percentage of Swindon's young people serve a custodial sentence. It was noted that a small cohort had been held in custody, for violence related charges, during the pandemic period for longer than they might otherwise have done. This added a financial pressure for the Council who had to pay for their care whilst in custody.
- The reasons for Swindon's youth re-offending rate being higher than the national average due to a small cohort of re-offenders. Although the rate of offending and re-offending had fallen significantly during the pandemic.
- The results of internal and external reviews of the Youth Offending Team in Swindon over the previous eighteen months, which evaluated its performance and to identify areas for improvement with a monthly performance and quality assurance board being held. A self-assessment against national standards had also been undertaken and the findings had been incorporated into the service improvement plan.
- These reviews identified that some casework within the Youth Offending Team was of good quality, with a small number of exceptions but systems and processes supporting the team needed to be strengthened and quality management and management oversight needed some work.
- An overview of the key elements of the improvement plan included organisational delivery (reviewing policy and procedures and service level agreements), which was near completion, preparation for the next national review, business support role updating learning and development for team members and ensuring the views of children and young people are properly considered.
- An overview of out of court remedies and related protocols which were currently being reviewed to ensure full engagement with parents and to fully incorporate the views of victims in any reparative work undertaken by young people (including a meeting with the young offender if the victim wanted this).
- The review undertaken by the Youth Offending Team to ensure it could properly interact with the Court system and meet the Court's requirements.
- How the Youth Offending Team intervened with young offenders to encourage changes to their lifestyle and to undertake learning and education to prevent the risk of further offending.
- Work with BAME youth to address the slight over representation within Swindon and in any discrimination arising.
- The role of youth engagement workers within the work of the Youth Offending Team.

Resolved – (1) The progress in relation to the strategies for meeting Government and local targets for preventing and reducing first time offending, re-offending, remand and custodial sentencing be noted and approved.

(2) That an update on the outcomes on the six youth offenders currently not in education, education or training be submitted to this Committee.

(3) That the information contained in paragraph 9.2 of the report be quantified by numbers and percentage and be forwarded to members of the Committee.

Matthew Courtliff and Oladapo IbitoyeMatthew Courtliff and Oladapo Ibitoye