

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

THURSDAY, 25 FEBRUARY 2021

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

Bethan (Young Person Representative) Paul Dobson (Project Manager STEP), Jo Osorio (Healthwatch Swindon), Alison Paul (Swindon Association of Special School Headteachers) Jacqui Watt (Swindon SEND families Voice)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Matthew Courtliff and Oladapo Ibitoye and Vanessa Scott (Healthwatch Swindon).

21. 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 Kingsdown School.

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.

22. Public Question Time

No public questions were received during the meeting.

23. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 25th November 2020, be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

24. Children's Health, Social Care and Early Help Quarter 3 Performance report

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 3 of the current Municipal Year.

The Interim Director of Children's Social Work introduced the report and responded to Members' challenge, questions and comments in respect of:

- Areas of strength and areas for further improvement and the areas of performance where Swindon is compared with other Local Authorities and how that information is used by the Council and external bodies such as the Department for Education and Ofsted.

- Key headlines relating to the Children's Services Early Help and Social Care Service which continued to provide help to families throughout the pandemic period at a higher rate than previously through the Early Help Hub and that a parenting hub had been established in Swindon for pre-birth to 16 years parenting support.
- Support also included the introduction of evidence based parenting programmes in Swindon.
- There had been an increase in the number of new mothers experiencing anxiety issues during the pandemic who were being helped by Health Visitors.
- The MASH continued to experience a higher level of demand between October and December 2020 with 4199 contacts received between October and December 2021 compared with 3595 in the same quarter in the previous year which is a 16.8% increase. Many of these families were supported through the Early Help Hub, although there had been an increase in Social Work Assessment referrals and completed assessments but a reduction in repeat referrals to the service.
- There had been a slight increase in the number of Child Protection Plans and management and performance of this team had remained strong.
- The recruitment and retention of Social Workers remained a challenge and work continued to reduce the Council's dependence on locum Social Workers.
- The percentage of children in care in Swindon had reduced which was slightly below national average and statistical neighbours.
- There were currently 16 unaccompanied asylum seeking young people in the Council's care.
- Key performance indicators in respect of Children in Care and Care Leavers continued to improve, apart from long-term placement stability (short-term placements were improving).
- Dental checks were a challenge in the context of COVID-19. The Children looked after health team is persistent in arranging dental checks for children and young people, but performance has been impacted in relation to 12 month check-ups due to the availability of dentists.
- Support for Care Leavers was also strong with 60% of Care Leavers were in Education, Employment, or Training at the end of December 2020 and 88% of Swindon's Care Leavers were in suitable accommodation at the end of December 2020 which were both above the national average.
- The introduction of the Independent Living Programme and embedding of the Care Leavers Panel has led to the cohort being tracked to support improvements in timely and assisting in effective planning.
- The Welfare Education Service was supporting more children who were receiving elective home education which was reflective of the national trend.
- There had been a reduction in the number of children tracked as missing education. This reduction was due to a review of all long-term cases. A dedicated officer and a new automated reporting system has been embedded. Cases were reviewed weekly and appropriate actions taken.
- Progress on the Written Statement Action Plan was progressing with an increase in the number of children requiring an Education Health and Care Plan.
- The lack of availability of dentists for Children Looked After was a significant issue; as was it to the wider public although there were tentative signs of

more dentists reopening.

- Reasons, including the challenging nature of the work, for the local and national shortage of Social Workers which made it harder to recruit and retain them and work to improve this situation.
- Benefits for Social Workers employed by the Council as opposed to undertaking agency work.
- Healthy Child Programme visits had been through telephone contact, virtual meetings and physical visits (the number of which were increasing).
- That over 80% of Social Workers with direct contact with families had received their first round of vaccinations for Covid-19 and there had also been a good take up of vaccinations by carers and foster carers in Swindon.
- There had been a constant supply of PPE equipment for Council employees and this was allocated where it was needed following a risk assessment.
- Support for families in order to get their children with SEND back into school education from home education.

That the key performance messages in relation to the performance data position at the end of December 2020 and activity during quarter 3 for Children's Early Help and Social Care services be noted.

(2) That it be noted that the Quality Assurance, Performance and Improvement Board continues to have oversight of all key performance measures within children services and raises key lines of enquiry based on the triangulation of performance data, contextual factors including COVID 19 and routine quality assurance processes. In addition it be noted that this service uses external audits and reviews as part of its quality assurance work where there are benefits from an external view and insight to support key lines of enquiry and audit work.

25. Children's Social Care Progress on Improvement against the Pillar Plan

The Interim Director of Children's Social Work submitted a report setting out an update in relation to progress made against the priorities of the Service's Pillar Plan and the recommendations from the Ofsted ILACS inspection in July 2019 are referenced and included in the pillar plan progress updates.

The Interim Director of Children's Social Work introduced the report and responded to Members' challenge, questions and comments in respect of:

- That the Pillar Plan was developed to assist the service in its improvement journey from 2018 to 2020 and had been largely successful.
- The four key areas of the Pillar Plan, Quality of Practice of social work with children and families to achieve greater consistency, Children Looked After and Care Leavers including child placement sufficiency, Recruitment and Retention and Information Technology.
- Work to reduce dependency on agency social workers and the integration of a new children's computer system. This should help to avoid unnecessary changes in Social Workers looking after Children Looked After.
- The embedding of a quality assurance framework to raise the standard of quality and practice which had been confirmed through audits although additional work was on-going.
- Specific improvement plan in place for Children Looked After and Care Leavers and this was monitored through the Children Looked After and Care

Leavers Board.

- Improvements to the Corporate Parenting Board. The Cabinet Member, who chairs the Board increased Councillor Membership to ensure resilience and promote meaningful Corporate Parenting.
- The recruitment of Foster Carers which had shown strong interest during the pandemic which should enable more children to be placed with Swindon foster carers.

Resolved – That the progress made against the Pillar Plan improvements, including the actions identified by Ofsted during the ILACS inspection in July 2019 be noted.

26. Outcomes of the Ofsted Inspection Focused Visit December 2020

The Interim Director of Children's Social Work submitted a report setting out the Focused Visit by Ofsted in December 2020, the findings of which were published by Ofsted on 1st February 2021.

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

- Focused Visits are part of Ofsted's framework of Inspections of Local Authority Children's Services and are carried out to evaluate an aspect of a service, a theme or the experiences of a cohort of children.
- Focused Visits are undertaken in-between standard and short Inspections of Local Authority Children's Services inspections. They visits are not graded, but their findings could influence the frequency of further inspections, and a poor outcome would negatively impact on the Council's reputation.
- Interim inspection arrangements, from September 2020 were intended to evaluate and provide assurance that vulnerable children are getting the help, care and protection that they need, amid concerns that some may have fallen out of sight during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The inspection was originally intended to commence on 2nd November but was suspended due to the second national lockdown and took place from 8th to 10th December 2020 and was undertaken remotely.
- Requested information was sent to Ofsted in advance of the visit, which included child level data, performance reports, our Self-Assessment, examples of quality assurance activity undertaken and relevant policy documents.
- There were 5 Her Majesty's Inspectors who gathered evidence over the 3 days of the visit by meeting with Social Workers, Foster Carers and Councillors remotely.
- Ofsted concluded "The local authority has maintained the effectiveness of its front door services, despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, the introduction of a new electronic casework system and a rise in referrals over the recent weeks. Decision-making is timely and appropriate actions are taken to protect vulnerable children. Management oversight and the rationale for decision-making is well recorded. Thresholds for statutory action are appropriately applied, with managers and social workers demonstrating a clear understanding of risk."
- Ofsted also commented favourably on a number of areas and these were set out in paragraph 3.11 of the report and areas identified for development and improvement together with responses were set out in the report.

- That the success set out in the Ofsted letter was very positive.
- The multi-agency Child Exploitation work was expected to move forward at the start of April 2021 and would be reported to the Committee at the appropriate time.
- The removal of acronyms from letters sent to parents in order to make them easier to understand.
- Work with children and young people to mitigate any adverse issues arising from the changing of Social Workers overseeing their cases and to inform the young person of what was happening. This also included work to transfer caseloads when social workers left the employment of the Council.
- Risks to future budgetary spend should the Council not be able to reduce its use of agency social workers and work to diversify the workforce and enhance business support work of Locality Safeguarding Teams to support the work of qualified Social Workers and allow them to focus on the high quality work with children.

Resolved – That the contents of the report, and the appended Ofsted letter, be noted.

27. Inclusion and Achievement Position Report: Assessments and Examinations, Response to Covid-19, meeting the needs of BAME pupils and well-being of children and young people in school

The Director of Inclusion and Achievement submitted a report setting out the update on the impact of Covid-19 on school attendance and opening including arrangements for children who meet the criteria set out by the DfE as “vulnerable”.

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

- The impact of Covid-19 on school attendance and opening arrangements with particular reference of those children with Special Education Needs or from black and minority ethnic communities.
- The current position relating to assessment and examination arrangements for 2020/2021. Also learning and catch-up arrangements and emotional and mental health support for young people.
- Work was on-going to support schools fully reopening from 8th March in line with Government guidelines which was being received on a daily basis. All schools in Swindon were preparing for reopening although there were a number of logistical arrangements for secondary schools, including testing arrangements.
- Different arrangements have been needed following each of the three lock-down periods.
- Until young people are back in school it will be difficult to properly assess the impact on their learning and emotional and social wellbeing.
- Staff were identifying risks and impacts as they come to light such as; the impact on services would affect families, a decrease in the number of funded places and representations on the financial impact of this were being made to the DfE (funding is based on the number of children in settings and retrospectively adjusted). Early years providers had been consulted on the projected budget deficit.
- There is a sense from early years that listening skills have reduced and that

speech and language problems are being identified later than if those young people had been in a setting. A survey had been completed with early years providers and 57% of the responders supported this view.

- Work was on-going to identify activities to support young people as early as possible around speech, language and communication.
- Young people with SEND post-16 and post-19 have had a disruptive year and haven't been able to undertake their work placements and a number of requests for repeat years are being made this has both an impact on the young people involved and financially.
- There had been a significant increase in the number of referrals to Early Help and help offered through the family service although the full impact on children and their families was still unknown.
- MIND had conducted national research that indicates that in 2020 1 in 9 children are experiencing difficulties with their emotional and mental health and in 2021 they are estimating it to be 1 in 6 children.
- Some of the impacts on children were not attending school, being isolated, being covid positive, stress from remote learning, missing learning or not receiving help needed, loss of routine, not seeing friends, not being able to take assessments or exams they have worked for, worrying about their future, relationships with parents, concerns with re-engaging with schools and safety. During the pandemic work had been on-going to mitigate these issues as far as possible, identifying themes and building structures.
- Four themes identified to focus on; Our children in education, Our children achieving and learning the right skills, All services inclusive and Our children, staff and families being well.
- The structures set up during the pandemic to offers help and assistance to young people and their families with a group overseeing each theme and under the inclusion theme have worked under a written statement of action.
- The work of the Children in Education and Including Children in Education Action Groups who monitored children in education, including vulnerable children, through DfE returns (this included work with schools to check for authorised absences) and also risk assessed vulnerable children (under the DfE definition).
- The monitoring of children access remote learning and whether schools felt children were benefiting from this. If schools felt remote learning wasn't being access a schools place would be offered following a risk assessment by the school and a quality check by the Council.
- The monitoring of outbreaks of Covid-19 allowed measures to be put in place to tailor and vary the size of isolation bubbles for young people.
- Actions to support learning included the distribution of over 700 laptops (all Looked After Children had a laptop), ensuring those children with Child Protection Orders had laptops, work with schools to order laptops and ensuring children were able to use their laptops (including having connectivity).
- Work with schools on the blended offer and use of virtual lessons and remote learning offer and the cording of webinars to support teachers.
- Wellbeing support for schools that would be provided into the New Year.
- All children with Special Educational Needs have been risk assessed to support outcomes and ensuring schools are making their best endeavours as part of education, health and care plan. Those children on part-time education through their education, health and care plan continue to be

monitored.

- Support for Children Looked After and Foster Carers including additional screening tools, additional support and personal education plan virtual meetings.
- Work to ensure the families of children eligible for free school meals and in need identified by schools received food vouchers.
- Further work on the effect of Covid-19 and educational responses was needed to identify the impact on BAME children.
- Pressures on the CAMHS and TAMHS services and the effect on waiting times.
- Element of new working practices that might be retained to improve the future educational offer and to support young people.
- The monitoring of authorised absences and reasons for Children Looked After who had missed schooling.

Resolved - That the report be noted.

28.

Apprenticeships

The Head of Skills and Education Partnerships submitted a report outline the role that Apprenticeships play in the Inclusion Early Years, Education and Skills Strategy to provide an alternative pathway to skills, qualifications and career progression for Employers and our residents.

The Head of Skills and Education Partnerships introduced the report and responded to Members' challenge, questions and comments in respect of:

- The report provides an overview of the work overseen by the Growing the Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee and had been presented to Cabinet on 4th February 2021.
- The identification of the key challenges to Apprenticeship Growth Key role that Apprenticeships play to provide skills for the businesses and careers route for residents through employment.
- The five year apprenticeship target 2015 – 2020 had not been met locally or nationally. Locally 73% of the target was achieved and nationally it was 70%.
- National changes that had led to the creation of apprenticeships stalling across the country.
- The report provides an overview of the work overseen by the Growing the Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- Identification of the key challenges to Apprenticeship Growth
- Key role that Apprenticeships play to provide skills for the businesses and to take on new recruits to train and careers route for residents through employment and to gain qualifications relevant to a particular area of work.
- The creation of a Swindon Employer Ambassador Network and an Action Plan, and in engaging employers in working together to support business.
- That the Inclusion, Early Years, Education and Skills Strategy provides an alternative pathway to skills, qualifications and career progression for employers and our residents.
- The Action Plan encompassed Pledge 9 of the Council's visions and priorities to increase the number of people starting apprenticeships This was a strategic role to champion the needs of employers and residents and work

with key stakeholders to maximise opportunities to increase Apprenticeships in the area.

- The second part of the Action Plan recognised the role of the Council as an employer. The Public Sector Apprenticeships Target was introduced in 2017 with a requirement to employ an average of at least 2.3% of staff as apprentices as new recruits or as part of career development of existing staff. This year the Council had 77 apprentices (2.5%) and it was hoped this would increase and include vulnerable young people.
- Objectives of the Action Plan included; enabling all businesses, and in particular small business, to access the expertise and resources to navigate the apprenticeship landscape and its complexities; and increasing awareness of apprenticeships as a pathway to careers, new skills, upskilling and reskilling (for employers and young people/residents) through working with schools.
- The creation of apprenticeships stories on the Council's Local Offer website, and question and answer sessions for Year 11-13 students and parents as part of the National Apprenticeship Week.
- The Apprenticeship Ambassador Network now well established and six employers agreed to be mentors for small businesses clinics for small businesses.
- The Council had worked with the SWLEP and Wiltshire Council with a Marketing Campaign. This resulted in a higher profile of apprenticeships during the week.
- Four Young Apprentice Ambassadors (this was originally targeted for June 21) to work with schools and young people to set out opportunities available.
- The establishment of a working group with providers to develop easy-guides to help simplify and enable easier navigation of the apprenticeship landscape
- The Institute of Technology website was in place and offer published for September 2021 with half the courses encompassing apprenticeships and routes to higher education.
- Work to improve labour market information and an outline of current market data and areas offering employment opportunities.

Resolved – (1) That the recommendations in the report including that apprenticeships specifically and vocational and technical pathways more broadly are firmly positioned in the Inclusion, Early Years, Education and Skills Strategy as a clear alternative to academic pathways to enable young people and residents to gain the skills and qualifications to achieve their potential in education, employment and training be noted.

(2) That the continuation of work with the Growing the Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee to support and challenge the progress made to achieve the priority activity to increase the (attached at Appendix One) be supported.

(3) That it be noted that Cabinet acknowledged the progress that has been made by the work of the Growing the Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee, led by Councillors Kevin and Barbara Parry and thanked them for their significant contribution.

29.

Work Programme 2020/21

The Committee considered (a) a report by the Chief Legal Officer on the proposed work programme for the Municipal Year, 2020/21, and (b) the comments Bethan

(Young Person) and Paul Dobson (Project Manager STEP) in respect young people's representation and participation in the work of the Committee.

Resolved – (1) That Bethan (Young Person) and Paul Dobson (Project Manager STEP) be thanked for their attendance and participation in the meeting.

(2) That the Committee's work programme be approved.