



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
(CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND SAFEGUARDING)

MEETING HELD AT THE TOWN HALL, BOOTLE
ON TUESDAY 6TH JULY, 2021

PRESENT: Councillor Burns (in the Chair)
Councillor Spencer (Vice-Chair)
Councillors Carlin, Dowd, Evans, Murphy,
Prendergast, Yvonne Sayers, Webster and Wilson.

ALSO PRESENT: Mrs. S. Cain, Independent Advisory Member
Ms. K. Christie, Healthwatch Representative
Ms. M. McDermott, Parent Governor Representative
Councillor Doyle, Cabinet Member – Children's
Social Care
Councillor Roscoe, Cabinet Member - Education

1. INTRODUCTIONS

Introductions took place.

The Chair paid tribute to the former Chair, Councillor Murphy, for her services to the Committee; thanks were extended to front-line social workers, the Local Authority Children's workforce and school staff for keeping schools open during the pandemic; and reference was made to the award of the George Cross to the NHS, for recognition of all NHS staff, past and present, across all disciplines and all four nations.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Mr. M. Byrne, Healthwatch Sefton; Father D. Seddon, Archdiocese; and Ms. C. McDonough, Parent Governor Representative.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of any disclosable pecuniary interests or personal interests were received.

4. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 16 March 2021 be confirmed as a correct record.

5. GENERAL UPDATE ON COVID-19 IN SCHOOLS

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Tricia Davies, the Interim Head of Education provided a verbal update report on the current position of schools with regard to Covid 19, including the following:

- Remote learning.
- Use of face masks in schools.
- Social distanced bubbles in schools.
- Teacher Assessed Grades completed for GCSEs and A levels.
- Summer schools for year 6 pupils transitioning to year 7.
- Cancellation of sports days and other events.

Members of the Committee asked questions/raised issues on the following:

- The impact on schools following the announcement of the end to lockdown rules on 19 July.
- Concerns for the health and wellbeing of families, children and young people.
- The plan for the recovery of educational attainment levels, following missed schooling.
- The approach to be taken by specialist schools and colleges in providing additional support.
- Whether support to vulnerable families was offered physically, with face to face visits, or remotely.

RESOLVED:

That the verbal report on Covid-19 in Schools be noted.

6. SEND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT PLAN UPDATE

Further to Minute No. 25 of 26 January 2021, the Committee considered the report of the Executive Director of Children's Social Care and Education updating Committee Members on the progress made against the actions taken and progress made with regard to the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Continuous Improvement Plan.

The report indicated that the Health and Wellbeing Board provided system leadership, kept the Council's Cabinet informed of progress and, if necessary, would escalate concerns to this Committee to provide additional scrutiny.

The report set out the background to the matter, together with an update against actions required in delivering the Improvement Plan.

Members of the Committee asked questions/raised issues on the following:

- Personal Health Budgets (PHBs) and the process involved to access them. Additional information could be provided.

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- The process for Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plans, together with the process to convey information on them, particularly since the pandemic.
- A breakdown of the number of people accessing PHBs by age category; opportunities for families to provide feedback on the process for EHC Plans; and areas of priority for outcomes of joint commissioning. A more in-depth summary of integrated care could be submitted to the next meeting, to include a glossary of terms used.
- The possibility of a further Care Quality Commission (CQC)/Ofsted re-visit of the service.
- The promotion of the Kooth facility in schools, as some teachers were not aware of the facility.
- CAMHS waiting times and the anticipated increase in demand for mental health services, including how demand would be met. Detail could be submitted to the Committee.
- Promotional material used to publicise services, including where and how it is publicly available. This could be brought to the Committee.
- Numbers of young people awaiting EHC Plans and who are in transition. Exact numbers could be provided.
- Year 11 reviews for young people awaiting EHC Plans.
- Data on Kooth, to include the number of referrals, length of time for responses, calls missed, waiting lists, etc. Information could be provided.
- How training delivered to relevant health professionals with responsibility for EHC Plans could be measured in terms of improvements.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the progress made and the fact that activity has continued to be prioritised during the pandemic, be noted;
- (2) the progress made to date be noted;
- (3) the Interim Executive Director of Children's Social Care and Education be requested to obtain information on the following:
 - Additional information on Personal Health Budgets and the process involved to access them, including a breakdown of the number of people accessing PHBs by age category;
 - CAMHS waiting times and the anticipated increase in demand for mental health services; to include how demand would be met;
 - Data on Kooth, to include the number of referrals, length of time for responses, calls missed, waiting lists, etc.; together with assurances that schools are aware of the resources available;

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- Numbers of young people who are in transition requiring Education, Health and Care Plans;
 - Promotional material used to publicise services, including where and how it is publicly available; and
- (4) the Interim Executive Director of Children's Social Care and Education be requested to submit a report on future priority joint commissioning plans for Children's Services, together with an update on the development of the Integrated Care Programme, to the next meeting of the Committee scheduled for 28 September 2021.

7. CHILDREN'S IMPROVEMENT JOURNEY

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Children's Social Care that provided an overview of the improvement journey and areas of change that would be required for Children's Social Care in Sefton.

In 2016 Sefton Children's Services had been graded as "Requires Improvement" under the Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services (ILACs) framework. In 2019, a Joint Targeted Area inspection took place and identified 4 areas for priority action. In March 2021 a focused visit took place with a focus on "key decision-making points" within the context of the covid-19 pandemic. This was not a graded judgement, although there were 2 areas for priority action and 3 areas for improvement. The link to the Ofsted report was included within the report.

The report set out the background to the matter, together with areas for priority action.

Appendix 1 to the report provided details of the Improvement Plan against each of the five priority areas.

Members of the Committee asked questions/raised matters on the following:

- Numbers of cases assigned to social workers. Details of the structure under review could be provided in the future.
- Supervision of social workers and staff morale. Information on recruitment and retention, together with support for staff in general, could be provided in the future.
- Funding for additional social workers.
- Workforce planning and the number of interim/temporary managers.
- Criticisms appeared to re-occur during inspections and whether the Local Authority was learning the lessons of inspections.
- Whether improvements could be made with the same managers in place.
- A progress report could be considered for the next meeting.

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- An on-going monitoring report could be considered for the Committee.
- The Committee was able to scrutinise the Service and its input should be respected.
- The longer-term strategy for the retention of social workers.
- Twice-yearly updates could be submitted to the Committee.
- Reasons behind the reluctance to escalate cases and how to address.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the contents of the report be noted;
- (2) further updates on the Children's Social Care improvement will be provided; and
- (3) the Interim Executive Director of Children's Social Care and Education be requested to submit twice-yearly updates on the improvement journey for Children's Social Care in Sefton to the Committee, to include:
 - The numbers of cases assigned to social workers; and
 - Information on the recruitment and retention of social workers, together with support for staff in general.

8. CABINET MEMBER REPORTS

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer submitting the most recent update reports from the Cabinet Member – Children's Social Care, and the Cabinet Member – Education, whose portfolios fell within the remit of the Committee.

The Cabinet Member update report – Children's Social Care, attached to the report at Appendix A, outlined information on the following:

- Notice of Improvement and Children's Social Care Improvement Plan;
- Staff engagement events;
- Corporate Parenting; and
- Recruitment and retention of staff.

The Cabinet Member update report – Education, attached to the report at Appendix B, outlined information on the following:

- Numbers of positive Covid cases in schools and impact on year groups;
- Transition days and how these would be undertaken;
- Cancellation of sports days and school trips;
- Covid testing for pupils in secondary schools and for staff;

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- Teacher Assessed Grades for GCSE and A levels and formal testing in schools;
- The work of the Virtual School;
- The outcome of the recent SEND review meeting;
- High Needs Funding; and
- The draft Education Excellence Strategy and Structure.

Councillors Doyle and Roscoe were in attendance at the meeting to present their reports and to respond to any questions or issues raised by Members of the Committee.

RESOLVED:

That the update reports from the Cabinet Member – Children's Social Care and the Cabinet Member – Education be noted.

9. WORK PROGRAMME KEY DECISION FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer seeking the views of the Committee on the draft Work Programme for 2021/22; reporting on progress of the Secondary School Performance and Attainment Working Group; reporting on progress of the Housing Support Services to Vulnerable People Working Group; identifying any items for pre-scrutiny by the Committee from the latest Key Decision Forward Plan; and receipt of an update on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The draft Work Programme for 2021/22 was set out at Appendix A to the report, to be considered along with any additional items to be included and agreed.

The report set out the progress to date made by the Secondary School Performance and Attainment Working Group and indicated that two replacement Members were required to serve on it. Progress to date made by the Housing Support Services to Vulnerable People Working Group was also outlined as a Member of the Committee had agreed to serve on the Working Group that had been established by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Skills).

There was just one item for pre-scrutiny within the current Key Decision Forward Plan that fell under the Committee's remit.

The report set out an update on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Members of the Committee asked questions/raised matters on the following:

- The Secondary School Performance and Attainment Working Group could be deferred for twelve months, until such time as data was available.

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- An education themed working group was preferred for the current Municipal Year and proposals could be considered at the next meeting.
- The impact of housing developments on education.
- A report on school placements should be submitted to the Committee in due course and the impact of housing developments on education could be considered then.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Work Programme for 2021/22, as set out at Appendix A to the report, be approved, along with any additional items to be included and agreed;
- (2) the following additional items be added to the Committee's Work Programme for 2021/22:
 - (a) the Interim Executive Director of Children's Social Care and Education be requested to submit a report on future priority joint commissioning plans for Children's Services, together with an update on the development of the Integrated Care Programme, to the next meeting of the Committee scheduled for 28 September 2021;
 - (b) the Interim Executive Director of Children's Social Care and Education be requested to submit twice-yearly updates on the improvement journey for Children's Social Care in Sefton to the Committee, to include:
 - the numbers of cases assigned to social workers; and
 - information on the recruitment and retention of social workers, together with support for staff in general;
 - (c) the Interim Executive Director of Children's Social Care and Education be requested to submit a report on school placements to the Committee in due course, to include the impact of housing developments on education;
- (3) the progress of the Secondary School Performance and Attainment Working Group be noted, and the Working Group be deferred for twelve months, until such time as data is available;
- (4) consideration be given to the establishment of an education themed working group at the next meeting of the Committee;
- (5) the progress of the Housing Support Services to Vulnerable People Working Group be noted;
- (6) the contents of the Key Decision Forward Plan for the period 1 July to 30 October 2021, be noted; and

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- (7) the update on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted.