

Minutes

of the Meeting of the

Children & Young People Services Policy & Scrutiny Panel

Thursday 24 October 2019

held at the Town Hall, Weston-super-Mare, North Somerset

Meeting Commenced: 10.00am Meeting Concluded: 12:30 pm

Councillors:

P Wendy Griggs (Chairman)

P Steve Hogg (Vice Chairman)

Marc Aplin

P Ciarán Cronnelly

P Hugh Gregor

P Nicola Holland

P Huw James

P Lisa Pilgrim

P Tim Snaden

P Caroline Cherry

Mark Crosby

P Ann Harley

Ruth Jacobs

A Stuart McQuillan

P Geoff Richardson

P Richard Westwood

P: Present

A: Apologies for absence submitted

Other Councillors in attendance: None

Officers in attendance: Sheila Smith, Wendy Packer, Eifion Price, Jenie Eastman, Linda Bunting (People and Communities), Philippa Penney, Katherine Sokol, Michèle Chesterman, John Wilkinson (Corporate Services)

Other persons in attendance: None

CAY Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interest (Agenda item 3)

11

None

CAY Minutes of the Meeting held on 20 June 2019 (Agenda item 4.1)

12

Resolved: that the minutes of the last meeting held on 20 June 2019 be approved as a correct record.

CAY 13 Matters referred by Council, the Executive, other Committees and Panels (Agenda Item 5)

COU 71 – National Residential Contract for the Placement of Children in Children’s Homes

The Director of People and Communities presented the report which detailed the services currently being purchased under the South West Framework for the National Residential Contract for the Placement of Children in Children’s Homes, ending on 31 March 2020. North Somerset Council (NSC) was part of the South West Commissioners Group (SWCG), which was made up of 6 Local Authorities (LAs) for the recommissioning and the group oversaw the contract management arrangements of the providers on the framework utilising a collaborative and joint approach. The procurement of the new framework would be led by South Gloucestershire Council with the 5 other LAs in the SWCG supporting with the procurement process and evaluation of applications from providers to go on the framework.

At Council on 24 September 2019 the following was resolved:

- (1) that the commissioning plan be approved;
- (2) that approval of the Inter Authority Partnership Agreement (IAA) and associated costs be delegated to the Executive Member, as it had not yet been drafted by the lead authority;
- (3) that approval of the Contract Award be delegated to the Executive Member, as the Executive meetings scheduled for next year did not tie in with the proposed timeline for recommissioning; and
- (4) **that the report be referred to the Children and Young People’s Policy and Scrutiny Panel.**

In discussing the report Panel Members sought and received clarification on the numbers of children in North Somerset in residential homes, the amount North Somerset contributed compared to other Authorities and the Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS)

Concluded: that the Panel received and commented on the report on the National Residential Contract for the Placement of Children in Children’s Homes.

CAY 14 Independent Safeguarding and Reviewing Officer’s (ISRO’s) Report (Agenda Item 6)

The Independent Safeguarding and Review Officer (ISRO) Team Manager provided an overview of the ISRO’s Annual Report, which contained a summary of work carried out during the period 01 April 2018 – 31 March 2019.

The report focussed on the ISRO’s role and function - in particular the key trends with Children Looked After in North Somerset over the past year, and recent developments and challenges. It reflected the compliance, progress and contribution the ISRO team had made to the outcomes for Children Looked After in North Somerset and against the required statutory legislation.

The ISRO explained that a joint document was being compiled by the ISROs from the South West of England in relation to what children looked after wanted and needed to know. Activities had been organised for young people 'getting to know your ISROs'.

Members sought and received clarification on the figures quoted in the ISRO's Annual Report Summary for Children Looked After in relation to the number of children and young people being looked after in North Somerset, the number of children looked after out of county and the definition of children living outside the local authority.

Members asked how robust Police Protection and Emergency Protection Orders were. The ISRO responded that assessments were completed by the Police and Social Care. Informed decisions were taken on how safe it was to return a child or take other measures. Members were informed that children were seen very quickly. The Authority would try to place a child in the family but the feasibility of this was based on an assessment of risks.

Members also asked for information in relation to asylum seekers. The ISRO informed Members that individuals arrived in various states of trauma. They were supported through social care, police involvement and appointments with the Home Office. The Council used interpreters and language line and assessed the immediate needs for safety now and in the future. Religious needs were also assessed.

The ISRO informed members that asylum seekers were received through national agreements and some from other local authorities. The demographical mix of asylum seekers was relatively stable. In recent years the government had introduced schemes for local authorities to take a proportion of unaccompanied asylum seekers (0.73% of the general population under 18). North Somerset had taken 15 asylum seekers out of a maximum of 30. The vast majority had significant mental health issues. Where they originated from changed over time.

Members enquired regarding data collection and if there were any challenges/concerns in respect of inaccuracy of data. The ISRO explained that data collection and analysis had grown and changed considerably since April 2019 when data collection reverted to in house with dashboard information and monthly updates on progress. A higher proportion of children were attending reviews and the trend was upwards.

Members referred to page 5 'your review meeting should be in a comfortable place like your foster carers' should be amended to read 'your review should be in a comfortable place like your foster carer's home'. The ISRO agreed to amend any typographical errors.

Members suggested the inclusion of a management summary indicating what went well, what went not so well etc.

Members felt a key to the meaning of the colour coding in the report would be useful.

Concluded:

- (1) that the Panel commented on and suggested amendments to the Independent Safeguarding and Review Officers (ISRO) Annual Report 2018-2019;
- (2) that the Panel agreed to further develop understanding of the role of the ISROs;
- (3) that the Panel noted the developments, achievements, challenges and areas for improvement in this critical area of work;
- (4) that the Panel noted the 'Next Steps' of the ISRO Team.
- (5) that the Panel agreed to promote the importance of services for Children Looked After.

CAY 15 Draft Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (Agenda Item 7)

The Early Years and Children's Centre Lead presented the report on the Draft Childcare Sufficiency Assessment. The Childcare Act 2006 required local authorities to assess the local childcare market and to secure sufficient childcare for working parents. Childcare would only be deemed sufficient if it met the needs of the community in general and in particular those families on lower income and those with disabled children. Childcare included provision for under 5s and out of school care for 5-11 year olds. North Somerset currently had sufficient childcare for working families.

The Childcare Sufficiency Assessment was undertaken on an annual basis highlighting any potential gaps and issue. It was noted that no funding was available for under 2s, 40% of 2-3 year olds and 15 hours per week of funded childcare for 3 and 4 year olds with some receiving 30 hours per week. Every pre-school and nursery had to submit figures on a monthly basis.

The report flagged a risk in that an increasing number of childcare providers were receiving 'Inadequate' Ofsted inspection judgements. This put the supply of childcare at risk as DfE guidance encouraged local authorities to withdraw funding from inadequate settings. Nationally and locally more settings were becoming inadequate. Concerns were expressed by members that in 2017/18 there were no inadequate providers whereas in 2019 there were three.

To mitigate the risks of increasing numbers of increasing numbers of settings receiving inadequate outcomes the Early Years Team was reshaping to include a stronger focus on safeguarding and welfare, support for SEND and data requirements and re-engagement with providers. The proposal was to develop a termly business intelligence dashboard to capture the number of children, childcare places, funded children by the four children's centre localities, plus a systematic capture of Ofsted inspection outcomes.

It was noted that the report was currently in draft and comments from Members of the Panel were welcomed prior to the final report being produced.

Concluded:

(1) that the Panel considered and commented on the final report.

(2) that the Panel be provided with further updates on the progress of the Action Plan to mitigate the risk of increasing numbers of settings receiving inadequate inspection outcomes.

CAY 16 Turning the Tide Edge of Care Service (Agenda Item 8)

The Assistant Director, Children's Support and Safeguarding, presented the report on Turning the Tide 'Edge of Care' Service. The purpose of the Turning the Tide Service was to enable more children to remain with, or return to their families, achieving both better outcomes for the children and reducing the need for costly placements – resulting in cost avoidance savings for the Council. This was very much in line with the priorities in the Council's Corporate Plan and in particular to support families to give their children the best start in life. The service had been commissioned and funded in an innovative way, as a social impact bond, which was a type of payment by results contract and had been running for two and a half years.

The service was aimed at reducing the numbers of older children, becoming looked after under voluntary agreements with their parents. It was not aimed at children at significant risk of abuse or neglect for whom the Council initiated Care proceedings to protect them from harm.

The number of children aged 10 and over coming into care under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 in 2018/19 had reduced by around 55% when compared with 2016/17. The numbers of children under 10 had risen but the reasons for this were different to those aged over 10. Whilst the younger ages had risen if Turning the Tide was not in place the total number of children looked after would have been higher.

Members commented that the data in the report was very encouraging and sought clarification on the link with High Impact Families. The Assistant Director, Children's Support and Safeguarding explained that the High Impact Families/Troubled Families programme was based on identifying families with a number of issues (crime and anti-social behaviour, school attendance, child in need, worklessness and financial exclusion, domestic abuse, health problems). The Council received payment by results from the government for successful interventions. There were a number of cases where families might initially be involved with High Impact Families and then move on to Turning the Tide 'Edge of Care'.

Members asked what the risk was of the 'wrong' children being referred to the service. The response from officers was that these risks were mitigated by ensuring that all referrals were processed through a single senior manager for approval and through robust monitoring and contract management. The independent evaluation provided a further check on the extent to which the service was functioning as planned.

Members enquired whether providers knew the background of the families they are engaged with. The Assistant Director, Children's Support and Safeguarding responded that the families had given informed consent to take part in the programme. The team of dedicated individuals who worked on behalf of North Somerset Council would need to know the details in order to work effectively with the family. As they were contractors (working on behalf of the Council) ultimately North Somerset Council was accountable in terms of quality of care and safeguarding. All work undertaken was recorded and a record of involvement in place.

Concluded: that the Panel received and discussed the report outlining the performance of the Turning the Tide 'Edge of Care Service.

CAY 17 Month 5 Children's Services Budget Monitor (Agenda Item 9)

The Finance Business partner presented the report outlining the spend against budget for children's services. The report summarised and discussed the 2019/20 estimated spend against budget for children's services, highlighted key variances, movements and contextual information. The report provided further details on the month 5 report that was due to be presented to the Executive on 23 October 2019. The report also made reference to the principles and outcomes associated with the setting of the 2020/21 budget.

The overall year end position for Children's Services after use of earmarked reserves was net expenditure of £30.067m compared to a budgeted amount of £28.929m resulting in a projected overspend of £1.138m (3.9%) which compared well with against the overspend of £1.844m in 2018/19.

There had been some significant growth in 2019/20 but cost pressures continued in areas such as adoptions, children's centres and early years provision, legal costs, support to families with disabled children and education related services. The main areas of project overspend were highlighted in section 3.3 of the report.

Members asked and received clarification on the details surrounding adoption inter agency fees (£255k adverse) and Adoption West, the newly formed regional adoption agency. The 2019/20 forecast position was based on information from 2018/19 and was expected to improve. Members were made aware that whilst costs were increasing placing a child for adoption was more cost effective than keeping a child in foster or residential care. As a result, the increasing costs in this area were offset by reduced costs elsewhere in the budget.

Concluded: that the Panel received and discussed the 2019/20 forecast spend against budget for children's services and the risks and opportunities associated with the medium-term position.

CAY 18 Performance Monitoring (Agenda Item 10)

The Assistant Director, Children's Support and Safeguarding presented the report. In addition to the standard items, the report included an overview of trends in the number of families receiving Early Help, Children in Need, Children on a Child Protection Plan, Children Looked After (CLA), including demographic data, Foster Carers, Care Leavers, High Impact Families, Missing Children and Child Sexual Exploitation.

Concluded: that the Panel received the performance information presented in the report and comment on both areas for improvement and areas of good improvement.

CAY 19 SEND Implementation Update (Agenda Item 11)

The Education Inclusion Service Lead and Virtual School Head Teacher presented the report on progress to date of the new developments resulting from the Specialist and Alternative Provision (AP) Review. The Review, commissioned in 2017 recommended a new model of provision comprising four main pillars:-

- Outreach
- Resource Centres attached to mainstream schools for High Functioning Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) students
- The Pupil Referral Unit (Voyage Learning Campus) currently focussing on permanently excluded (PEX) individuals and tuition
- A new Social, Emotion and Mental Health Free School proposed for 2020/21.

In addition to the above, the Inclusion Panel had been working closely with schools to reduce the number of individual students who were being either fixed-term or permanently excluded.

The Education Inclusion Service Lead and Virtual School Headteacher informed Members that:-

- the number of individual students displaying complex behaviours was increasing.
- Concerns regarding the future reduction in Top up Funding and the loss of nearly all forms of centrally held intervention services meant that many schools were struggling to meet the needs of some individuals and manage their behaviours.
- There had been an increase in the number of PEX (permanently excluded) pupils.
- The number of requests for assessments for Education Health Care Plans (EHCP) was increasing putting pressure on resources.

An update was provided on the progress on secondary provision, primary provision, social emotional mental health – Wave 13 Bid progress, expansion of the age range of Westhaven Special School to include infant-aged pupils; complex physical needs – Baytree School and the local joint area review which had moved significantly forward.

Members discussed Baytree School and were reminded that the remit of the Panel was to look at the requirement for spaces in relation to Baytree and not the site which was part of the planning process and under the remit of P&R Committee. Members also sought and received clarification on the process involved if parents challenged Education Health Care Plans.

Concluded: that the Panel received the report on the progress to date of the new developments resulting from the Specialist and Alternative Provision Review.

CAY 20 The Panels' Work Plan (Agenda item 12)

The Democratic and Electoral Services Officer provided an update on the Panel's Work Plan as follows:-

- The School Organisation Scrutiny Steering Group had met on 19 September 2019 where a briefing had been provided to all members on the decision process for school expansions.
- A briefing on High Impact Families, Looked after Children and Child Sexual Exploitation had taken place on 7 October 2019 for CYPS and ASH Policy & Scrutiny Panel members.
- An upcoming session of the School Organisation Scrutiny Steering Group would be taking place on 16 December 2019.
- A briefing would be prepared on In House Foster Carers for the next Panel meeting on 5 March 2020.

Concluded: that the work plan be received and updated as agreed.

Chairman
