

Minutes

of the Virtual Meeting of the

Children & Young People Services Policy & Scrutiny Panel

Thursday 29 October 2020

held via Microsoft Teams

Meeting Commenced: 10.00 am Meeting Concluded: 11:20 am

Councillors:

P Wendy Griggs (Chairman)
A Steve Hogg (Vice Chairman)

Marc Aplin
P Ciarán Cronnelly
Hugh Gregor
P Nicola Holland
P Huw James
A Lisa Pilgrim
Tim Snaden

P Caroline Cherry
A Mark Crosby
Ann Harley
Ruth Jacobs
A Stuart McQuillan
P Geoff Richardson
A Richard Westwood

P: Present

A: Apologies for absence submitted

Other Councillors in attendance: Catherine Gibbons

Officers in attendance: Carolann James, Dawn Newton, Sheila Smith, Sally Varley (People and Communities) Michèle Chesterman, Mike Riggall, Katherine Sokol (Corporate Services)

Other persons in attendance: None

CAY Chairman's Welcome 09

The Chairman welcomed everyone to this virtual Children and Young People's Policy and Scrutiny Panel meeting.

She explained the procedures to be followed at the meeting and confirmed that proceedings would have the same standing and validity as if they had taken place at a physical meeting of the Community and Corporate Organisation Policy and Scrutiny Panel meeting in the Town Hall.

The Chairman reminded everyone that the meeting was being livestreamed on the internet and that a recorded version would be available to view within 48 hours on the North Somerset Council website.

The Chairman thanked everybody who had been working with children and young people over these terrible times - officers and councillors and everyone in the community. It was noted that there had been a huge step up to support everyone in the community including North Somerset's children and young people.

At the invitation of the Chairman a roll call was taken of the Panel members by Democratic Services for the benefit of those in attendance and members of the public watching the meeting online.

CAY 10 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interest (Agenda item 3)

None.

CAY 11 Minutes of the Meeting held on 18 June 2020 (Agenda item 4)

Resolved: that the minutes of the last meeting held on 18 June 2020 be approved as a correct record.

CAY 12 Children's Improvement Plan: Scrutiny of the Children's Improvement Plan (Agenda Item 6 (1))

The Chairman presented the report. Following the publication of the Ofsted report in June 2020 and its presentation to the Children and Young People Services Policy and Scrutiny Panel on 18 June 2020, it was agreed that a sub group would be set up to scrutinise the Action Plan that the Authority was required to submit to Ofsted by 17 September 2020. The task and finish group had sight of the report and met to provide their comments/views to officers. There was a subsequent discussion between the Chairman and the Director in which it was agreed that the sub group should continue beyond the submission of the Action Plan because the Department for Education (DfE) had advised that it was concerned as to why North Somerset continued to 'require improvement to be good.'

It was reported that following the discussion with representatives from the Department for Education (DfE) it was agreed that the current Quality and Performance Board (chaired by the Chief Executive and attended by the Leader, the Lead Member for Children's Services and officers) should be broadened to include representatives from partner agencies, DfE colleagues, North Tyneside (North Somerset's Partner in Practice) and the Authority's newly appointed DfE adviser.

Members were informed that officers worked on the necessary governance arrangements and also held discussions with the Chair of CYPS Scrutiny and colleagues from the Local Government Association (LGA). Two key points had emerged: firstly that the sub group needed to progress from being a Task and Finish group to becoming a longer-term group focused at a strategic level on scrutinising the delivery of the Children's Improvement Plan and as such it was suggested that the group be renamed the Children's Improvement Focus Group. The second point was a recognition that in order to fulfil such a role Members needed some peer support, via the LGA, from colleagues who had been on a similar journey.

The Chairman thanked officers for the work being undertaken on the Improvement Plan which included liaising with the Local Government Authority (LGA) and the Department of Education (DfE). Members were informed that the task and finish group had looked at the past improvement plan and the current one and it was hoped that an LGA advisor would be joining the task and finish group and also attend the CYPS Panel in the near future to assist with scrutiny.

Concluded:

(1) that the Panel receive and comment on the report in relation to the Scrutiny of the Children's Improvement Plan;

(2) that the Panel agree that the sub group progressed from being task and finish to become a longer-term group focused at a strategic level on scrutinising the delivery of the Children's Improvement Plan and renamed the Children's Improvement Group;

(3) that the Panel agree the input of the Local Government Association in supporting the work of the Children's Improvement Focus Group.

CAY 13 Children's Improvement Plan: Key Priorities in our Children's Improvement Plan (Agenda Item 6 (2))

The Interim Assistant Director Children's Services and Safeguarding presented the report. The key priorities within the Children's Improvement Plan were highlighted to Members. They were listed as the Front Door to Children's Services; Early Help; Performance and Quality Assurance; Corporate Parenting Panel. The Plan had been developed and agreed through the Partnership Children's Improvement Board and subsequently submitted to Ofsted in September 2020 following the required improvement grading from Ofsted in March 2020.

Members were informed that the Front Door to Children's Services referred to anyone who had a worry or concern about a child, in whatever level of need, presenting to one front door. It included designing and implementing the effective front door to Children's Services, working alongside police and education partners and Partner in Practice, North Tyneside; ensuring clear pathways to effective support for children, young people and their families; ensuring clear understanding across all partners of the Continuum of Needs/Thresholds; ensuring improved quality of referrals from partner agencies into the front door; ensuring that children and their families received the right help at the right time and that help to children and their families was provided at the earliest opportunity. It was anticipated that a 'first version' of an effective front door would be designed and implemented by the end of January 2021.

Early help referred to how children and young people were supported and helped as problems emerged and escalated. Engagement took place with partners across the statutory and voluntary sectors with the aim of helping those families and children of families where there were needs, at the earliest opportunity, and to stop any escalation where it was safe to do so. Members were informed that work was being undertaken to further develop and implement the North Somerset Partnership Early Help Offer which was currently stronger in the 0-5 age range. Efforts were in place to ensure that the focus was on the needs of those in North Somerset (which would be in line with the national picture in some areas and more specific to North Somerset in other areas). It was anticipated that by the end of January 2021 a stronger early help offer would be identified. The report described some of the tasks to achieve that.

Members noted that the performance and quality assurance framework within Children's Services would be refreshed and an effective quality assurance system would be updated and introduced by December 2020. The report compared North Somerset to the national picture and statistical neighbours in terms of size and population. As part of this process there would be regular reporting to the Panel on the performance and quality assurance framework.

Members were informed that as corporate parents for children in care and care leavers it was vital to ensure that a strong and vibrant Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP) was in place to meet the needs of those children and young people. Therefore, a priority in the Improvement Plan was to refresh and review the membership, structure and format of North Somerset's CPP to enable the Authority's children and young people to be active members of the Panel and ensure that the Panel held the Children's agenda as a priority within the Council and its partners. The process had already started with a commitment for the CPP to meet more frequently and to ensure children and young people were actively involved by making the children's agenda was forefront. More changes would be introduced prior to the next meeting of the CPP in December 2020.

Members' attention was drawn to the fact that the Health and Overview Scrutiny Panel (HOSP) would be hosting a meeting on 17 November 2020 at 9.00 am with Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Trust in relation to children's mental health. All CYPS Panel members were invited to attend.

The Interim Assistant Director, Children's Services and Safeguarding responded to a question in relation to the Needs Assessment and children's mental health. Members noted that the emotional wellbeing of children and families was of concern nationally in addition to locally in North Somerset and that these concerns had increased. North Somerset was working closely with health partners to identify the concerns and via the needs analysis identify the steps necessary to address them. As part of the Early Help Offer and in conjunction with voluntary and other partners a directory was being published which would contain contact information and details of services currently available. It would cover areas such as emotional wellbeing, mental health, substance misuse, parenting support etc.

Members were informed that services were available nationally and locally for children and families in North Somerset to access but knowledge of these services was not widely held or easily accessible. Work of the work being carried out with colleagues in health was around making sure the pathways were accessible, effective and well understood. In Early Help and in the Children's Social Care area work was being carried out with children and families to ensure wrap around support was available. The Interim Director, Children's Services and Safeguarding offer to provide any other information as required by the Panel.

Efforts were being made to build emotional wellbeing support into schools as an Early Help offer through working with health services. Strength and difficulty (emotional wellbeing) questionnaires were undertaken with children in care and care leavers. This work took place with children and young people on a regular basis and was an element of the needs analysis.

Concluded: that the Panel receive the report and note the priorities outlined

CAY 14 Expansion of Ravenswood Special, Nailsea (Agenda Item 7)

The Service Leader, Strategic Planning and Governance, presented the report on the Expansion of Ravenswood Special School Nailsea. The report sought the Panel's support to a consultation with the public and key stakeholders to expand Ravenswood Special School. Formal approval to progress a consultation would be sought from the Executive Member of Children's Services and Lifelong Learning with a final decision made by the Executive in April 2021.

Members were informed there was a projected increase in demand for all special school places across North Somerset and this included pupils with Moderate Learning Difficulties. This was due to demographic growth and an increase in the numbers of pupils with these learning characteristics.

Ravenswood Special School supported girls and boys aged 3 – 19 from across North Somerset with Autistic Spectrum Disorder; Speech, Language and Communication; Moderate Learning Difficulties, Severe Learning Difficulties, Visual Impairment needs and Social, Emotional and Mental Health.

Members were aware there were a range of consultations and changes in place to meet the needs of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). There was a live consultation with Baytree School but there had also been some good successes, for example an ASD hub opened at Nailsea School in September 2020 for 10 children with high functioning with autism. A consultation was also currently live in connection with Mendip Green Primary School for a hub for high functioning children with autism. In addition, infant and sixth form provision had now opened at Westhaven Special School.

It was reported that this was a continuation of the need to provide more special educational needs places. An opportunity had arisen because some facilities had become available in Nailsea, adjacent to the Ravenswood School Site, to enable the school to have some extra accommodation to increase capacity. It was hoped to extend the school's capacity from between 112 and 119 places, depending on the needs of the children in the school, to 140 or 150 places.

It was enquired as to how many more spaces were needed to meet the needs of children with SEND. The overall demand was considerable. This was a small part of the journey to a much wider programme to meet the needs of children with SEND in North Somerset. One of the issues was that the Authority was not supplied with any capital funding for SEND which had been raised with the DfE. The concern was that there were over 200 children accessing education outside North Somerset and the numbers were increasing. The aim was to try to bring those children back into North Somerset and provide provision locally of a high standard that meets the needs of the district's children and young people.

The Service Leader, Strategic Planning and Governance responded to a question from a member in relation to a public footpath in the area and whether it would be remaining or if it was possible to divert it. It had not been possible to date but if there were further wider reviews of the site this would be investigated.

Whilst discussing the report a Member referred to Section 8.2 on page 9:

In expanding current schools, the Council must be mindful not to compromise the educational opportunities available to pupils prior to the expansion. The school will need to manage increases in pupils and staff numbers. Having new staff can bring benefits of wider experience and expertise that can be available to all the pupils.

The member was aware that the library had closed at closed Ravenswood to accommodate more pupils and asked how this had affected the experience of the young people at the school.

The Service Leader Strategic Planning and Governance informed Members that prior to the pandemic surveys had been undertaken at Westhaven and Ravenswood to ascertain the number of children that could be satisfactorily educated in those schools without compromising the education of other children. The Authority did not want to allocate places if it resulted in the existing children at the school not having the experience and education they needed. The reason why the report gave a range of pupils (140–150) was that the Authority was working with the Headteacher and consultant to ascertain how many children could be satisfactorily educated at Ravenswood Special School. It was hoped that this work could be carried out during the consultation period prior to the Executive meeting in April 2021.

The Authority was using a basis known as BB104 (a building bulletin provided by the government) that gave the range of physical capacity that should be available to enable children to be able to reach their potential within the school buildings that they were in. Work was also being undertaken to ensure the actual capacity and the facilities at Ravenswood were fit for purpose for the numbers of children. That was the reason why there was a request for a small amount of money to be able to undertake some internal modifications to ensure the right facilities were in place for all the children that would be there for part of the increase in capacity.

The Chairman thanked the Service Leader, Strategic Planning and Governance for the report and Members agreed it was excellent that the Authority was expanding its capacity to take on special school places and confirmed their support.

Concluded: that the Panel supported the expansion consultation for Ravenswood Special School.

Month 5 Children's Services Budget Monitor (Agenda Item 8)

The Finance Business Partner presented the report outlining the spend against budget for children's services. The report summarised and discussed the 2020/21 forecast spend against budget for children's services, highlighting key variances, movements and contextual information. It provided further details on the month 5 report presented to the Executive on 21 October 2020. The report also made reference to the principles and outcomes associated with the setting of the 2021/22 budget. It was acknowledged that the pandemic had had a very significant impact across all directorates of the Council but particularly Children's Services. Overall projected overspend was just over £1.5 m. Nearly 80% of that was related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Much of that related to income losses and some additional social care costs and some MTFP savings that might not be delivered partly because of capacity.

Members' attention was drawn to the table on page 2 of the report which highlighted the main areas where a forecast overspend was being reported. With regards Placements for Looked after Children despite showing an overspend the forecast spend was only around £117k more which was not a bad position in light of placement numbers, inflation and cost pressures.

With regards disabled children's placements around 55% of the £597k overspend was estimated to be COVID related, mainly driven by young people requiring more significant social care support during the pandemic, especially those not attending school. There were two areas that related to losses of income. Members noted the Early Birds nursery relied on income from private fee-paying parents which had not been forthcoming during the early part of 2020 and to an extent for the remainder of the financial year. This also applied to the music service where the income from schools for music tuition had been foregone for much of the early part of 2020. Although the Authority had been able to recoup part of that due to the Coronavirus job retention furlough scheme.

Members were made aware of a large deficit carried forward from the last financial year in the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and an increase was forecasted largely due to placements of children out of area. The commissioning strategy in relation to SEND was vital in relation to managing the deficit in the DSG.

The Chairman thanked the Business Finance Officer for the report.

Concluded: that the Panel receive and discuss the 2020/21 forecast spend against budget for children's services and the risks and opportunities associated with the medium-term position.

CAY 16 Performance Monitoring (Agenda Item 9)

The Interim Assistant Director, Children's Services and Safeguarding presented the report. The CYPs Panel received regular performance management reports to help Members evaluate the extent to which the Council and its partners achieved key plans and objectives for children and young people's services and provided appropriate challenge and suggestions to improve performance.

This report presented the following standard items: any recent Ofsted inspections of council services; an analysis of the performance of the relevant Key Corporate Performance Indicators (KCPIs) for Quarter 1 2020/21, that fell under the remit of the Panel; an overview of the performance of various Key Service Measures for Support and Safeguarding services within the council.

A more interactive format would be available for the next report to the Panel meeting on 11 March 2021 to assist Members to understand the direction of travel, whether positive or negative, and actions being instigated.

Members were informed that there had been four inspections related to North Somerset Council services and / or North Somerset schools that were carried out since the last report to the panel and published on the Ofsted website. Services and / or schools were graded either 'Outstanding', 'Good', 'Requires Improvement' or 'Inadequate'.

Members were advised that at the end of Quarter 1 there were 227 looked after children, this equated to a rate of 52.5 children per 10,000 which was lower than the national rate but a little above the district's statistical neighbours. It was noted that of the 227 children 12 were unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

Care Leavers in suitable accommodation had ranged between 80% and 95% over the last three years seeing a sustained rate of 94% and above over the past 12 months. This compared favourably against the most recent statistical neighbour and national averages of 84% and 85%. Members were encouraged to hear that work had been undertaken and was ongoing to ensure that young people were in regulated high-quality placements which met their needs.

The council had a responsibility to continue to help and support a number of young people that were previously in their care. Key areas of support were in housing and accommodation and employment and education. At the end of Quarter 1 2020/21, 42% of the care leavers aged 17-21 years (56 out of 132) were in employment, education or training (EET). This was a noticeable decrease as the rate had been around 50% for the past three years, which was in line with statistical neighbours and national figures.

An update was provided in Members in relation to care leavers who were not in education, employment or training (NEET). A needs analysis had been carried out in conjunction with colleagues in the Virtual School, the School Inclusion Service, 16 plus support plus within Children's Services. The aim

being to examine what was being done currently and what could be done differently to improve the situation utilising best practice from other LAs.

Members noted that Child Protection numbers were low. All the children open to Children's Services had been reviewed to ensure that the right children were being worked with and that they were in the right place. North Somerset had 85 children in need who were at the level of need that required the level of statutory intervention.

Members welcomed the fact that the numbers of foster carers in the district was increasing and plans were in place to increase them further still in 2021. Members agreed that it was much better for North Somerset's children and young people to be placed closer to home. In addition, efforts were being made to enhance the skills and experience of foster carers to enable them to foster more complex children which would mean they would not have to be placed outside the area.

Members were informed that nearly two thirds (62% at the end of Quarter 1 2020/21) of North Somerset's looked after children lived in foster care. Other placement types included children's homes, supportive hostels and adoption placements. As at Quarter 1 2020/21 33.9% of looked after children were placed with North Somerset foster carers. At the end of Quarter 1 2020/21, 37% of children were placed outside of North Somerset. The Authority was working hard to ensure that there were more in-house foster carers. Unfortunately, a high proportion (63.5%) of children looked after by agency foster carers were outside North Somerset but as many are on the borders and accessible to the Authority. Wherever the child was placed they were visited, reviewed and managed by the Children's Services.

Members were provided with an update on work being carried out in relation to missing children and were advised that future reporting would be slightly different. During Quarter 1 2020/21, there had been 116 episodes of children going missing which related to 48 children. Of these, 18 were children looked after. The number of children looked after going missing had remained at 18 for the second consecutive quarter. The work involved looking at children missing from home, care and school working with partner colleagues in health and the police. There would be robust monitoring of children from outside North Somerset who were placed in the district either in family situations or care situations. Efforts were in place to ensure the Authority knew who these children were. Future reports to Panel would include information relating to the cohort and what action the Authority was taking. The Panel would be supplied with more in-depth information about each episode breaking them down into how many nights, length of time etc.

Members were provided with information on work being undertaken in relation to contextualised safeguarding covering county lines, PREVENT (radicalisation), child sexual exploitation, child at risk of criminal exploitation and missing children. Research in Practice was being funded by the DfE to support authorities with developing contextualised safeguarding. This would involve a trainer working with Council staff and North Somerset schools to help them work directly with young people through St Giles Trust to understand and identify risks.

Whilst discussing care leavers not in education, employment or training (NEET) a member asked if the Authority had considered the Kickstart Scheme to see if there was any support that might be available for care leavers. The Interim Director, Children's Services and Safeguarding noted that this was one of the areas that was currently being considered. A further update would be available to the Panel meeting on 11 March 2021. It was noted that a preliminary meeting with the Council's youth champions and the team who dealt with skills. The Council would be actively working to make sure that North Somerset's care leavers were provided with opportunities within the Council possibly as internships or work experience. With the wider community a consultation would be carried out and hopefully a question and answer session on Facebook where young people would be able to talk to the Youth Champions and anybody else who felt they could provide input.

In terms of mentoring for care leavers whilst there was not a mentoring scheme for care leavers per se 'Junction 21' was available and accessible for young people. There was also a mentoring/coaching scheme through the High Impact Families but that was broader and more focussed on families. The Authority was considering mentoring along with other initiatives in developing some new aspects to its services and there were discussions taking place with schools.

In response to a question in relation to older students such as sixth formers acting as peer mentors it was reported that many schools had such schemes. St Giles Trust worked with younger people who had lived experience. The Executive Member for Children's Services and Lifelong learning noted that previously via the Children's Champion Panel a number of councillors had been involved in the mentoring scheme. She added that perhaps it was a matter of raising its profile and getting more people involved. In terms of peer mentoring that was something that had been discussed at one of the meetings held with school leaders. In terms of care leavers some of the local university students could be involved as mentors.

Members were concerned that with lockdown there had been an increase in domestic violence and its impact on children and asked what steps would be taken to monitor domestic abuse, its impact on children and their education including any work with schools. There had been ongoing conversations with the police about screening domestic abuse. The needs analysis for the Children's Improvement Plan included domestic abuse as it was a key feature that affected the cohort open to social services along with mental health and substance misuse. Linked to this was the Domestic Abuse Strategy and the work that needed to be undertaken with children and young people and schools. Work was being undertaken to develop some of the perpetrators groups and to reduce parental conflict.

Members expressed thanks to the Interim Assistant Director of Children's Services and Safeguarding and were pleased with the progress made.

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

CAY 17 The Panel's Work Plan (Agenda item 10)

The Democratic and Electoral Services Officer provided an update on the Panel's work plan.

It was reported that a briefing session on 0-19 Public Health Nursing Procurement was scheduled to take place on 17 November 2020 at 1.00 pm via Teams to provide an update to the CYPS and HOSP Panels on the process of procurement. The session would provide an opportunity for both panels to contribute their views regarding the design of the service.

Members were also informed that a revised format for the work plan had been developed with the idea that it should be used by all Panels to provide a uniform approach. Health Overview and Scrutiny Panel was the only panel currently using the new format. It would provide for forward planning of agendas for the coming year and would be a useful record of panel activity.

With regards Home to School Transport (HTST) a steering group had been established including the leader and chief executive of the Council. An improvement plan was being considered to re-build confidence in HTST. An investigation was being set up to look at systems, decisions, resources, safeguarding, data management and leadership of the service. The working group was to meet regularly and provide a briefing for all members in January 2021. Members noted that currently 2600 pupils were transported across 170 routes. Parenting groups were part of the working group and there had been attempts to involve everyone who had an interest in HTST.

The Director of People and Communities drew Members' attention to the Bright Spot Survey presentation. Carried out during lockdown, the survey with all the district's young people in care recorded their experiences on what was working well and what needed to be improved. It would take place via Zoom on 10 November 2020 at 1.00 pm. Designated teachers and foster carers had been invited to attend to consider what the Authority needed to do to improve the situation for children in their care. It would be sent out to all members in their role as corporate parents.

Concluded:

- (1) that the work plan be received and updated as agreed.
- (2) that the Panel establish a Youth Services and Youth Engagement Working group including the Youth Champions and any other interested CYPS Panel members.

Chairman
