

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a meeting of this Panel held on
20 September 2021

(Present) Councillor T Long (Chair)
Councillors Barton, McDonnell, Mussell, Osundeko and Sweeney

(Also Present) Mr D Thorpe (Church of England Representative)
Mrs P Lawson (Parent Governor – Secondary)

(Not Present) Councillors A Johnson, Greaves and Sims,
Mr Williams - Roman Catholic Church Representative,
Miss A Kirman (Parent Governor – Primary),

11 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Greaves and A Johnson, Mr Williams and Ms Kirman.

12 MINUTES

* Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 12 July 2021, be approved and signed.

13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No Declarations of interest from Members were made.

14 DECLARATIONS OF PARTY WHIP

No Declarations of party whip were made.

15 CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT JOURNEY – PROGRESS UPDATE

The Director of Children's Services presented an update on the Children's Services Improvement Journey. The presentation covered the following areas:

- Inspection of Looked After Children's Services (ILACS) Inspection November 2019;
- Inadequate Children's Services;
- 2021 Timeline;
- Current challenges;
- Current position and Progress;
- OfSTED Feedback May 2021;
- The Quality of Decision Making;
- The Quality and Effectiveness of Case Audit Activity;
- Balance of Social Workers' Workloads and the Prioritisation of Tasks; and
- Next Steps.

It was confirmed that a lot of progress had been made within the service, however challenges still remained and work was ongoing to ensure that improvements continued to be made.

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A query was made regarding staff welfare and morale during the current period of uncertainty as services came under review.

It was confirmed that there was a lot of uncertainty due to the review of services, however communication was good between managers and staff and extra support was available for those who need it. Although working from home was working well for most people, it was acknowledged that this was more challenging for some staff and that support was available for those staff who needed extra help in making adjustments.

* **Resolved that the report be noted.**

16 QUARTER 1 PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Quarter 1 Performance Report 2021/22 provided an analysis of progress and performance over the period. The report reflects the new Performance Framework and targets aligned to the priorities and outcomes of the Borough Strategy as agreed by Cabinet on the 21st of April 2021. This framework would provide the basis for quarterly performance reporting to Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny over the course of 2021/22.

Members were invited to ask questions on the Quarter 1 performance for the indicators under Priority 1 – Ensuring children and young people have a positive start in life.

Members asked what was in place to support care leavers who are 19-21 years old and not in education, employment or training (CYP-13). A specialist adviser within the Looked After Children team that covers employment, education and training and provides additional support for this cohort. The Committee was informed that before a looked after child reached the age of 18 there is a 16-18 year old offer that is provided, with the Virtual School playing an important role in this area to ensure that a child's Personal Education Plan (PEP) was up to date and reflected the child's ambitions and interests.

Questions were asked around the public health indicators which concerned the percentage of infants breast-fed at 6-8 weeks (PH-13); the smoking status at the time of delivery (PH-14); and under-18 admissions to hospital for alcohol specific reasons (PH-15). The work undertaken during the Covid pandemic, and ongoing efforts, was provided to the Committee.

The rate of children looked after (CYP-08) was raised by Members. The Committee heard that the rate in St Helens remained high compared to other similar sized authorities and was a historical issue due to there previously being limited alternatives in place to avoid the use of care. However, over the last 18 months, the numbers of looked after children had reduced and was expected to continue to reduce once the court backlogs (due to the pandemic) had eased.

The PAUSE programme was raised and an update on the continued success of the programme was provided to the Committee. However, the Committee expressed concern regarding the sustainability of the funding for this programme.

* **Resolved that:**

- (1) the performance position at Quarter 1 (2021/22) for Priority 1 be noted;**
- (2) the actions planned by the Children and Young People & Integrated Health and Care Directorate and services to address specific areas for performance improvement in relation to Priority 1 be noted;**

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(3) the ongoing programme of development of the Council's new performance framework over the course of 2021/22 be noted; and

(4) that consideration of potential items for further scrutiny be given under Item 8 – Work Programme.

17 INCLUSION IN EDUCATION

A presentation was given which gave an update on the progress of Inclusion in Education. The presentation covered the following areas:

- School Opening September 2021;
- Attendance is a priority- on site face to face learning for all;
- Key Changes since Step 4;
- Testing and Vaccinations;
- Attendance;
- Thresholds for additional action; and
- Continued Support for Schools.

The Presentation also covered the Alternative provision service, including:

- Alternative Provision - what we do;
- Context;
- The bases;
- Curriculum;
- In's and Outs;
- Working Well; and
- Challenges and the Future.

A query was raised as to whether there was training in schools and colleges to give staff to enable them to have a better understanding of children's personal circumstances so that they can be directed to the most appropriate services rather than be sent directly to alternative education.

It was confirmed that there was a multi-agency team that schools present children's cases to where they decide what is the best option for each child on a case by case basis.

A 'Triage' system was also being considered to enable earlier interventions so that issues which may be developing could be dealt with earlier, potentially preventing the need for major intervention or alternative education at a later stage.

A query was also raised about safeguarding of children and how this was tackled.

It was confirmed that during lockdown safeguarding had been very successful in identifying when a child was isolating which would trigger an email to various departments ensuring the child would get any support they needed.

* **Resolved that the presentation be noted.**

18 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Work Programme was attached to the agenda for consideration by Members. As there were a number of areas for

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consideration and limited time and resources to complete the work, it was suggested that two areas be chosen to concentrate resources on and the possibility of deferring items to future meetings be considered.

* **Resolved that:**

- (1) the report be noted;**
- (2) a spotlight review of Children's Mental Wellbeing be undertaken during November 2021;**
- (3) a spotlight review of School's Use of Catch Up Funding be carried out in December to receive information about the ways schools are spending catch up funding allocated to them; and**
- (4) the spotlight review of Children's Centres item be removed from the work programme.**

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