

CHILDREN & FAMILIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Meeting: 22 November 2023

At: 6.00 pm

PRESENT

Councillor Colin Foster (Chair) in the chair; Councillor Janet Mobbs (Vice-Chair); Councillors Shan Alexander, Jake Austin, Becky Senior, David Wilson, Wendy Wild and Dr Chris Gordon (Church of England Diocesan Education Committee Representative).

1. MINUTES

The Minutes (copies of which had been circulated) of the meeting held on 11 October 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors and officers were invited to declare any interest which they had in any of the items on the agenda for the meeting.

The following interest was declared:-

Personal Interests

Co-Opted Member

Interests

Dr Chris Gordon

Agenda Item 8 – ‘Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report’ as the Chair of the Stockport Disability Forum.

3. CALL-IN

There were no call-in items to consider.

4. RESPONDING TO OUR MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

The Cabinet Member for Children, Families & Education submitted a report (copies of which were circulated) providing further detail on the budget change proposals, taking into consideration the feedback received to date and outlining the change proposals being considered by the Cabinet to address financial and demand challenges, enable longer term transformation, and ensure the delivery of shared strategic partnership ambitions.

The Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education (Councillor Wendy Meikle) attended the meeting to respond to questions from the Scrutiny Committee.

The following comments were made/issues raised:-

- Members queried the independent travel arrangements, the SEN transport provisions and the delivery of the service. In response, it was stated the delivery service had already been commissioned, but more was needed, however, it was a challenge to the

service to get around the borough easily but training was being provided. It was stated that parents were also being encouraged to use their personal budgets for travel and the travel training, but it should be noted that if parents chose out of borough schools, then they would be responsible for their own travel arrangements.

- It was noted that independent travel training was a priority and a key outcome for any young person to bring benefits into their adulthood. Travel independence was also a sustainable route to reducing reliance of travel assistance and associated costs.
- Clarification was sought regarding the health funding contribution and its current packages. In response, it was stated that the contributions were being maximised and funding for all the care packages were being looked at to be increased. It was also noted that the funding processes were being looked at and it was about being transparent and monitoring other processes and practices across the Greater Manchester area.
- Members enquired about the Education & Health Care Plan numbers and current care package numbers for the last two years. It was noted that the information was not available at the meeting but would be shared with the Committee following the meeting.

RESOLVED – (1) That the report be noted.

(2) That the Director of Education be asked to provide the current Education & Health Care Plan numbers and current care package (single & joint) numbers to the Committee consisting of the last two years.

5. 2023/24 MID-YEAR (QUARTER 2) PORTFOLIO PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES REPORT: CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION

The Corporate Director of People & Integration and the Director of Education submitted a joint report (copies of which had been circulated) which were based on the 2023/24 Portfolio Performance & Resource Agreements (PPRA) agreed in June 2023. The Mid-Year Report focussed on delivery of the portfolio priorities from April to September 2023 and included forecast performance and financial data (where this is available) for the Portfolio, along with an update on the portfolio savings programme.

The Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education (Councillor Wendy Meikle) attended the meeting to respond to questions from the Scrutiny Committee.

The following comments were made/issues raised:-

- It was noted that the figure of £42.91m recorded on page 31 of the report was incorrect and should correctly read £52.941m.

Priority One – All babies and children are given the very best start in life by their parents and carers and start school ready to learn

- Clarification was sought regarding the Early Years provision attainment figures at CFE 9(i). In response, it was noted that Stockport Council was still above the national average, but there were improvements still to be made.

Priority Two - All children and young people are well prepared for adulthood and engage in education, employment, and training

- Members enquired about the progress being made post covid and its impact of moving from teacher assessments back to examinations. In response, it was stated that the

impact of covid is long term and take a long time for things to return to where they were, but also to improve. It was noted that there were considerable variations between the schools particularly in respect of the outcomes for the vulnerable learners, but schools continue to remain focussed on the provision for these children and are continually being challenged to change and improve their practices.

Priority Three – Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

- Members questioned whether the ‘neurodevelopmental pathway’ had any links back to Scrutiny. Members were assured that the Scrutiny Committee would receive updates.

Priority Five - Children and young people live safely and happily within their families, and where this is not possible, they are supported to have stable loving homes and achieve positive outcomes wherever they live

- It was reported that there were currently 497 Looked After Children and 35 Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers.

The Chair enquired about the Capital Programme and Reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (Raac).

It was stated that two schools had recently been closed for two days including St Thomas’s and Bramhall High School (BHS) as a result of Raac and remedial work was currently underway with the children returning to school after the Christmas holidays. However, classes were continuing to be taught in groups and online in BHS with temporary accommodation being considered to be brought on site. The Raac concerns were being looked at with the assistance of DfE officials including funding and were being resolved as quickly as possible in order for all children to return to both schools following the holidays.

Members praised the officer team for their quick response to Raac in the two Stockport Schools following the initial investigations and thanked the schools and staff for working with the officer team to ensure a continuation of educating the children efficiently and effectively in the timeframes.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

6. YOUTH JUSTICE PLAN 2023-24

The Director of Children’s Services submitted a report (copies of which were circulated) setting out the Youth Offending Partnership’s responsibilities in producing the plan and following consultation with the partner agencies to formulate and implement an annual youth justice plan.

The Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education (Councillor Wendy Meikle) attended the meeting to respond to questions from the Scrutiny Committee.

The following comments were made/issues raised:-

- Members enquired about the ‘re-offending’ numbers and the varying levels reported on pages 76 of the report. In response, it was stated that the small numbers of re-offending young people committed a large number of crimes, but it was carefully

monitored by the police and tracked over the years with snapshots being taken of re-offending young people and studied.

- Clarification was sought regarding the ages of those young people involved in the early interventions and detached youth work. In response, it was stated that youth justice involved children between the ages for 10-17 year olds, as children under 10 years of age could not be charged for a crime but may have been involved in anti-social behaviour or youth disorders. There were programmes to assist young people including 'early years pathways' and 'service to schools'. Referrals were also part of the programme and interventions relating to behaviour of children and peer influences. It was also stated that all interventions were community based and aligned with detached youth work.

RESOLVED – That the report be endorsed.

7. EXPANDED CHILDCARE POLICY

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing information on a new programme of work to support the introduction of the new expanded funding entitlements for working parents of children aged 9 months to 3 years. Also, for parents to have access to wrap around childcare for all school aged children commencing from September 2024.

The Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education (Councillor Wendy Meikle) attended the meeting to respond to questions from the Scrutiny Committee.

Members queried the 30-hour places for children in nursery care and the associated costs (food and services) to parents which still had to be paid. In response, it was stated that the associated costs were a funded provision for parents and was not free and providers would charge for additional services, but there was help for parents to assist and fund those costs.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

8. SAFEGUARDING PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing an overview of partnership activity in the children and adult safeguarding partnerships with the focus being on the business plan priorities and progress made in 2022-2023.

The Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education (Councillor Wendy Meikle) attended the meeting to respond to questions from the Scrutiny Committee.

The following comments were made/issues raised:-

- Clarification was sought regarding the 'reduction to multi-agency referrals' and the increase in the number of children subject to Child Protections Plans under the category of neglect in April 2022 to March 2023 have increased by 87%. In response, it was stated that during covid there was a significant reduction of children with child

protection orders, however, the numbers are increasing again post-covid including more referrals and front door referrals.

- It was commented that the domestic abuse themes for 2022-23 did not paint a good picture and those circumstances were detrimental to those vulnerable people.
- It was noted that a 'domestic abuse strategic group' had been developed in Stockport and was a priority for safeguarding children and despite the challenges and pressures, there was already a 7% increase in the budget to support the services.
- Members enquired about asylum seekers and refugees who didn't form part of the figures and they would be supported. In response, it was stated that discussions were underway with the police and paediatricians to acquire information and engage with those groups.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

9. SEND UPDATE - SEN PLACES & ATTENDANCE

The Director of Education, Work & Skills submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing an update on the current position and context of special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in Stockport with particular emphasis upon SEN school places and attendance.

The Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education (Councillor Wendy Meikle) attended the meeting to respond to questions from the Scrutiny Committee.

The following comments were made/issues raised:-

- Members welcomed the report and thanked officers for the details and thoroughness of the explanations.
- It was reported that the support being provided was a complex situation with growth needed post-covid with needs being identified in the report that mirrors the national picture, but these things were being communicated back to Headteachers to keep them informed.
- Concern was expressed regarding the longer children went without needs being met, the more complex the situations became with more pressures and challenges being put on the educational psychologists. It was stated that additional educational psychologists had been recruited but there was still capacity with new ones starting in September 2024 to reduce the vacancies.

RESOLVED – (1) That the report be noted.

(2) That the Scrutiny Committee agrees that a further update be submitted in February 2024 once the actions as outlined in the report have been completed.

10. AGENDA PLANNING

A representative of the Assistant Director for Legal & Democratic Governance submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) setting out the planned agenda items for the Scrutiny Committee's next meeting and any relevant Forward Plan items.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

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The meeting closed at 8.20pm.