

CHILDREN & FAMILIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Meeting: 17 January 2024

At: 6.00 pm

PRESENT

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

1. MINUTES

The Minutes (copies of which had been circulated) of the meeting held on 22 November 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair subject to the following words 'and presented by the Independent Chair of the Safeguarding Board, Gail Hopper' being inserted after the words "copies of which had been circulated" in Minute No. 8 – 'Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report'.

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 6 – 'Family Drug & Alcohol Court' as the Chair of the Stockport Disability Forum

3. CALL-IN

There were no call-in items to consider.

4. CABINET RESPONSE: RESPONDING TO MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

The Cabinet Member for Children, Families & Education submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing further detail on the budget change proposals, taking into consideration the Cabinet response. This followed on from the report presented at the Cabinet meeting on 19 September 2023 and Scrutiny Committees during October and November 2023. In particular, the budget proposals being considered by Cabinet to address financial and rising demand challenges, enable longer term transformation, and ensure the delivery of shared strategic partnership ambitions.

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

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- Concern was expressed relating to the low response rate to the public consultation and how it could be improved. In response, it was stated that across the various portfolios it was only about 76 responses for the children's portfolio, however, all responses have to be taken into account. It was also noted that in response to the low rate it was proposed that changes to services needed to be co-produced which would encourage more engagement through the co-production model and charter.
- Clarification was sought relating to the Independent Travel Training (ITT) shifting from the SEN Transport team to the Education & Health Care Plans team to manage and whether there was any capacity. It was noted that there had already been an increase in capacity within the teams and that there were currently no vacancies. It was also stated that the shift in teams would enable better coordination in the process.
- Members enquired about the SEN Transport and whether parents/carers could assist with taking the children to school. In response, it was explained the 'personal budgets' was in place for that specific reason and would also be consulted upon in order to make it easier, encourage more parents to be a part of it.
- It was commented that clarification was needed regarding the insurance situation having paid drivers with multiple children in the SEN transport and whether there was any concerns. In response, it was stated that it would be looked into and the information shared with the Committee.
- Members sought clarification on the marriage and civil partnerships data and whether it was accurate. It was stated that it would be checked and reported back to the Committee.
- Further information was requested relating to how personal budgets was acquired and was there capacity to meet demand. In response, it was stated that the additional detail relating to the personal budgets would be shared with the Committee, however, there are families who would like to have personal budgets, but was the incentive there, which was currently being looked at to make it worth their while. There was an administrative burden relating to doing things differently but there was increased capacity factored into the budget proposals.
- It was commented that regarding the consultation the number of personal budgets would be useful information together with the growth in the numbers of the young people on EHCPs to better understand the process for those engaging in the consultation process.

RESOLVED – (1) That the report be noted.

(2) That the Director of Education, Works & Skills be asked to provide additional information relating to the following:-

- how personal budgets was acquired and was there capacity to meet demand;
- regarding the insurance situation having paid drivers with multiple children in the SEN transport; and
- accurate data on the marriage and civil partnerships characteristics in Step 1: Establishing and developing the baseline referred to in the report.

5. SCHOOLS FUNDING SETTLEMENT AND LOCAL FUNDING FORMULA 2024/25

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing an update on the key announcements made by the Department for Education (DfE) on the education funding settlement for 2024/25 and the local funding formula models to be used to determine the individual 2024/25 budgets for early years providers and schools in Stockport.

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

Members welcomed the report and thanked the officers for the details of the report.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

6. FAMILY DRUG & ALCOHOL COURT

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing an overview of the outcomes from the Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC) model in Stockport, progress in the development of a GM FDAC model, future vision, and timescales.

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 praised the team for their efforts to keep families together and the recorded outcomes to date.
- Clarification was sought regarding parents being tested for drug use and how often it was done. In response, it was noted that parents are tested regularly on a strict schedule with other opportunities for testing on a monthly basis with continued support on offer with managing the struggles and other challenges.
- It was commented that the inter-agency working seems to be working well across organisations especially with the long-term support for the substance misuse aspect.
- Members enquired about the funding from the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and the timescales involved. It was stated that the funding was for the 'Domestic Abuse worker' which came to an end in July 2023, but discussions are currently underway for a multi-authority approach going forward to assist with the funding.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

7. FAMILY HUBS

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing an update position in relation to Stockport's Family Hub transformation programme and next steps in the ongoing development, implementation and long-term sustainability.

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 initiative and enquired about access to the hubs. In response, it was reported that access can be gained through the hub website, walk-ins at sites and a referral was not needed as it was a 'universal' offer, with GPs signposting families.
- Clarification was sought regarding how families would attend the centres or was it done by geography. In response, it was noted that families could access any site and it didn't matter where families lived.
- It was stated that the hubs would continue after the 9 months programme and would be sustainable including the family hub bridges, the alignment with the wider neighbourhood work and the all age strategy.
- It was stated that the 'counselling services groups' across Stockport could also input into the scoping exercises across the borough.

RESOLVED – (1) That the report be noted.

(2) That an update be submitted to the Committee in 12 months.

8. MAINTAINED NURSERY SCHOOLS WITHIN THE BOROUGH

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing an overview of the position of the four maintained Nursery Schools in Stockport. The report will provide detail of the number of children who attend these schools, the contribution these schools make to the overall sufficiency of EYFS places in Stockport, their financial position and the outcomes the schools achieve.

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 acknowledged the benefits of having the four maintained nurseries in the borough and how it has been helpful to families to support the transition to primary schools with social and independent skills to cope in a primary setting.
- It was noted how valuable the nurseries were to the borough through the qualified teachers and SENCO staff to build the foundations for these children.
- That the early years setting was so important to the children of Stockport and is a clear focus to ensure its success.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

9. VIRTUAL SCHOOL UPDATE – VIRTUAL HEADS ANNUAL REPORT

The Director of Education, Works & Skills submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) relating to the Annual Report of the Virtual School Service demonstrating the educational achievements, school settings, attendance and needs of children in our care within education.

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 congratulated the team on its ongoing success and the good work that goes into the sustainability of the programme and how much it was appreciated.
- It was noted how successful the virtual school has been with no suspensions and exclusions.
- The work being done was amazing including the 'virtual nature' of the school and its success in comparison to sitting in a classroom and in a building.
- It was stated that the Scrutiny Committee would welcome an update on an annual basis, but it was important to note that the team will never be satisfied with the outcomes as there were no boundaries for the ambitions of the children in the authority's care going forward.
- It was also noted that all of the programmes highlighted in the agenda relating to the virtual school, the hubs, the family courts and the nursery schools were all about prevention and putting preventative measures in place to help the borough's children in the long term and to avoid the problems later on, but was also a cost effective measure to the borough.

RESOLVED – (1) That the report be noted.

(2) That an update on the 'Virtual School' be provided annually to the Scrutiny Committee.

10. GROWTH IN FREE SCHOOL MEALS SCRUTINY REVIEW UPDATE

The Director of Education, Works & Skills submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing an update on the actions taken in response to the recommendations of the 'Growth in Free School Meals' Scrutiny Review conducted by this Scrutiny Committee.

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 update and appreciated the action taken to date.
- Clarification was sought on the Stockport Council school scheme and the sustainability of the programme including the reference to external funding. In response, it was stated that the 'household support fund' was unlikely to continue as it was a one-year agreement to fund the school from the reserves, but consideration needed to be given to the Council's current financial position.
- Members requested that a further update be submitted to the Committee in 12-months time.

RESOLVED – (1) That the report be noted.

(2) That an update be submitted to the Committee in 12-months time.

11. 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.

Members enquired about the 'Rochdale Report' and any assurances that could be given from Stockport Council with regards to Children Services. In response, it was stated that Stockport Council were already a part of and represented at the Greater Manchester child sexual exploitation (CSE) review process and an update on the current performance around CSE and future plans would be submitted to a future meeting.

Councillor Mobbs provided an update on the Scrutiny Review into 'Services for Young People' and thanked the officer team for the detailed reports submitted during the review process.

RESOLVED – (1) That the report be noted.

(2) That an update on the current performance of the 'Child Sexual Exploitation' review process in Greater Manchester and future plans be submitted to a future Scrutiny meeting.

The meeting closed at 7.35 pm.