

CHILDREN & FAMILIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Meeting: 12 June 2024

At: 6.00 pm

PRESENT

Councillor Colin Foster (Chair) in the chair; Councillor Rosemary Barratt (Vice-Chair); Councillors Shan Alexander, Angie Clark, Graham Greenhalgh, Helen Hibbert, Dallas Jones, Leah Taylor 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 28 February 2024 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 interests were declared:-

Personal Interests

Councillor/ Co-opted Member

Interest

Dr Chris Gordon

Agenda Item 4 – Children, Families & Education Portfolio Performance and Resources Report:2023/24 Annual Report as Chair of the Stockport Disability Forum and a friend who has a child who attend St Paul's with autism.

3. CALL-IN

There were no call-in items to consider.

4. CHILDREN, FAMILIES & EDUCATION PORTFOLIO PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES REPORT: 2023/24 ANNUAL REPORT

The Executive Director of People & Integration and the Director of Education, Work & Skills submitted a joint report (copies of which had been circulated) presenting the Year-End Portfolio Performance and Resource Report (PPRR) for the Children, Families and Education Portfolio. The Year-End Report focuses on delivery of the portfolio priorities from October 2023 to March 2024. It included forecast performance and financial data (where this was 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:-

Priority 1 - All babies and children are given the very best start in life by their parents and carers and start school ready to learn

- Members welcomed the detail in the report and recognised how useful the information was for the Committee.
- Clarification was sought relating to Quarter 4 and the ASQ3 results regarding the Healthy Child Programme and the national average. In response, it was noted that the national average was 81.3% with the Northwest being at 80.6% which was below the national average and it was being done well and children were being identified who needed more help so interventions were being put in place.
- It was noted that the ASQ was a screening tool which would indicate whether some more assessments were needed to be done in five domains of development e.g. finance, communication etc.
- Members enquired about the family hubs uptake. In response, it was stated that there were no figures to date, but it was being monitored closely including the outreach and what was being asked for by families.
- It was noted that the figures relating to the family hubs uptake would be circulated to the Committee following the meeting.
- It was commented that the Nesta Innovation Partnership was a non-profit organisation with early years as their primary focus for the last three years.

Priority 2: All children and young people are well prepared for adulthood and engage in education, employment, and training

- Clarification was sought relating to the persistent absences and how this impacted on the children with the most needs including the eligibility for free school meals. In response, it was noted that there was an analysis being done to help prevent children from missing school, but there was an improving picture particularly for children with special educational needs.
- Members enquired about the figures relating to fixed term exclusions and suspensions and whether schools were exchanging pupils to support this process. In response, it was stated that everything was being done to support schools and pupils through fixed term exclusions and suspensions and preventing the incidences from happening in the first place rather than sanctions.
- It was commented that regarding CFE11 the Northwest was at 74.4% which was a big difference to the national picture. It was stated that out of the 14 secondary schools only two schools were below the national position, so there was a lot of work happening with schools working together

Priority 3: Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

- Members enquired about the timelines for assessments and diagnosis and what was being done to improve these. In response, it was stated that there were still real

pressures on waiting times, but a better system was being put in place to better support children in school including changes to the autism service and reducing the timescales for assessing EHCPs. It was noted that over 70% of EHCP reviews had been completed last year and to date for 2024 the team were already up to 1500.

- It was stated that there were approximately 600 requests per month for EHCPs and that progress will be reported back to the Committee in about 6/7 months.

Priority 5: 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 noted that there were currently 508 children in care to date including 35 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. This service does receive financial support, but it does not cover the costs.
- Members were informed that parents attend child protection conferences and would meet with the safeguarding mediator regarding expectations and procedures and there was also a parent forum to support parents and changes.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

5. PORTFOLIO PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES – DRAFT PORTFOLIO AGREEMENT 2024/25

The Executive Director of People & Integration submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) presenting the draft 2024/25 Agreement for the Children, Families and Education Portfolio.

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 were informed that the report set out the key priorities, the delivery programme, the performance measures for the portfolio for 2024/25 and formed the basis for the performance.
- It was noted that the services work hard to ensure that children only come into care when it was necessary, and that all efforts had been made to support them to remain either with their parents or wider extended family.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

6. EXPANDING OUR HIGH NEEDS CAPACITY

The Director of Education, Work and Skills submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing details relating to the continued work of the team and seeking to formalise plans to create a resource base at Tithe Barn Primary School and St Paul's CE Primary School and to create fit for purpose and specialised areas within these schools that would be capable of meeting more complex need within a mainstream setting.

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 how important it was for having the right sort of need with the right capacity in local areas where residents can access easily.
- Members noted how impressive it was for money to be spent on the schools to improve the facilities and congratulated the teams involved.
- Members enquired about why the SEND and EHCP numbers were historically so high. In response it was noted that the more parents had confidence in the system the more the demand would go down and also about the availability of funding and identifying children's needs and supporting them through the process.
- It was also stated that when these type of facilities are in the local communities it reduces the cost of transport and helps integrate families, siblings and friends a lot more locally.

RESOLVED – That the report be endorsed for approval by Cabinet for the implementation of the statutory proposals and the creation of resource provisions at St Paul's CE Primary School and Tithe Barn Primary School.

7. SCHOOL HOLIDAY AND TERM DATES

The Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing details relating to the School Holiday and Term dates for Local Authority maintained and voluntary controlled schools within the borough for academic years 2025-26, 2026-27 and 2027-28.

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

RESOLVED – That the report be endorsed for submission to the Cabinet.

8. SCRUTINY REVIEW TOPIC SELECTION 2024/25

A representative of the Assistant Director for Legal & Democratic Governance submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) outlining the scrutiny review process, the framework within which the review should be undertaken and supported for the selection of scrutiny review topics for the 2024/25 municipal year.

The Committee was invited to choose a topic for their next review.

Members proposed the following the topics-

- Prevention and Early Years across Children's Services
- Falling Rolls
- Early Years Communication

It was noted that Prevention was quite broad, but would be extremely helpful to look at clear beliefs, vision, goals and the education & health services to prevent family breakdown and with children not fulfilling their potential.

RESOLVED – (1) That the Council Meeting be recommended to include ‘Prevention’ within the 2024/25 Scrutiny Work Programme.

(2) That Councillors Shan Alexander, Rosemary Barratt, Angie Clarke, Helen Hibbert and Graham Greenhalgh be nominated to sit on the proposed scrutiny review panel.

9. WORK PROGRAMME

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 Forward Plan items.

RESOLVED – (1) – That the report be noted.

(2) - That the Assistant Director for Legal & Democratic Governance be requested to make arrangements for the following items to be programmed onto the agenda for future meetings of the Scrutiny Committee:-

- Impact of antisemitism and islamophobia in local schools
- Progress on EHCPs – 27 November 2024
- School Investment Plan to include an update on pupil numbers

The meeting closed at 7.35pm.