

CHILDREN & FAMILIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Meeting: 4 September 2024
At: 6.00 pm

PRESENT

Councillor Colin Foster (Chair) in the chair; Councillor Rosemary Barratt (Vice-Chair); Councillors Angie Clark, Graham Greenhalgh, Dallas Jones, Gary Lawson, Leah Taylor, Dr Chris Gordon (Church of England Diocesan Education Committee Representative), Sue Thorpe and Wendy Wild.

1. MINUTES

The Minutes (copies of which had been circulated) of the meeting held on 12 June 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair subject to Minute No. 3 - Children, Families & Education Portfolio Performance and Resources Report: 2023/24 Annual Report - "Priority 3: Special Educational Needs and Disabilities", second bullet point, '600 requests' being amended to correctly read '60 requests'

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 6 – SEND Strategy 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 AND YOUNG PEOPLE PLAN 2024-27

The Executive Director People and Integration and the Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) setting out the vision, ambition, and overarching priorities for the next three years and the partnership strategy with a shared borough-wide vision and shared ambitions which could only be achieved through harnessing the skills, knowledge, and shared resources across services in public, private, and third sector to meet the needs of our communities.

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 work done with young people and listening to their voices including the quotes from the conversations.
- Clarification was sought regarding what was being done to reduce the 13.5% of children and young people living in poverty in Stockport. In response, it was noted that there was an 'early help offer' for all families and also the focus of the family hubs was holistic to understand family pressures and experiences, with advice being provided through the family hub networks for housing, foodbanks and benefits.
- It was commented that there has been positive outcomes for children in both primary and secondary schools this year including strong improvements.
- Members enquired about "waiting well" and what it meant. It was stated that it meant parents who were waiting for a diagnosis or appointment from health partners with involvement from the local authority to offer additional support to those children waiting.
- It was stated that regarding Ambition 3 – "all children and young people "can" assess and engage in education and achieve the best they can", the use of the word "can" was a bit weak and should be stronger by using either "should" or "must". In response, it was noted that it would be considered.
- It was noted that in Ambition 6, there was no mention of 'drug taking' or how that would be tackled for children and young people with good physical and emotional health and wellbeing concerns. It was commented that Mosaic was a comprehensive offer which was really established and provided a holistic approach for young people with experts in the field of drugs and alcohol interventions which was ongoing, despite it not being mentioned in Ambition 6.
- It was commented that in Ambition 7, regarding children in care and care leavers having a safe, stable and loving home and being equipped with the skills need to live a fulfilling, successful and rewarding life, there were no elements following the McCallister report. It was noted that additional data relating to end of care proceedings, kinship care and special guardianship orders can be included as an outcome measure to monitor the performance in these areas.
- Clarification was sought regarding what was being done to manage/reduce the EHCP backlog. In response, it was stated that it was being managed through increased capacity and investment in education for the psychology service and the assessment teams and also some improved processes with schools. This resulted in a reduction from 638 children waiting in March 2024 to the current number of 464 in September 2024.
- It was commented that the report was a good read and focused on outcomes rather process which was important.
- It was noted that the 'Plan' would be considered by the Stockport Family Partnership Board and would be monitored by a team of key stakeholders including the ambitions and how the success would be measured. It would also be shared with the Stockport Locality Board which is Chaired by the Leader of the Council and Cabinet.

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

5. YOUTH JUSTICE PLAN

The Executive Director People & Integration and Director of Children's Services submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing details relating to the Youth Justice Plan's achievements against last year's plan and outlines the priorities, opportunities, and challenges for the coming year.

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 'Foetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder' (FASD) had a disproportionate number of children who were open to the Youth Justice Service and known to have FASD and a lot of work was being done on 'neuro-divergence with CAMHS and a mental health practitioner, including raising awareness and staff training.
- Members requested that a FASD briefing paper be submitted to a future meeting and be included in the working programme going forward.
- Clarification was sought on the 'RTime (Youth) Network and how it worked and whether it would continue given that it was reliant on funding. In response, it was stated that targeted youth offers were a focus for young people who were at risk or on the periphery of being at risk and an approach was developed with third sector partners to deliver a 'youth work offer' which was then called "RTime" a name chosen by the young people themselves. Some National Lottery Funded was secured for three years with some additional funding for another three years, but there has been funding through community safety and other investment areas, but there was not a continuous fund for this.
- Members enquired about the communication between the neighbourhood police and the Greater Manchester Police Intelligence Officer. In response, it was stated that there were the Youth Disorder Panels with neighbourhood police officers and a police officer attached to the Youth Justice Team and there were also daily governance meetings to discuss young people who had come to the attention of the teams. It was also noted that over the last 12 months cross border work had really developed.
- It was noted that the 'Community Projects and Activities' were a good idea and information should be shared with the Committee about these local activities to keep members informed.
- 'Restorative Justice' was welcomed as part of the report for young offenders to return to their communities and be given a chance to reflect and put things right.
- Clarification was sought regarding the funding situation with 'Remands'. In response it was noted that there was an allocation from the Ministry of Justice for only the children going through a young offenders institution, but the funding formula was currently being reviewed.

RESOLVED – (1) That the report be noted and endorsed for submission to Cabinet.

(2) That the Executive Director People & Integration and Director of Children's Services be requested to submit a briefing paper relating to FASD to a future meeting and be included in the working programme going forward.

6. SEND STRATEGY

The Executive Director People and Integration and Director of Children's Services and the Greater Manchester Deputy Place Based Lead submitted a joint report (copies of which had been circulated) setting out the strategic priorities for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and their families in Stockport for the period 2024 until 2027 and also outlined the approach to support children and young people with SEND to achieve and their families to thrive over the next 3 years.

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 stated that in terms of the extra capacity that has been put in place that 600 more specialist places have been delivered across our specialist resource bases in the mainstream schools including in the new special school and in the pupil referral Unit since 2020, so just under 1,600 specialist places in a four year period.
- What was being done to meet the demand for places was to identify the need at the earliest possible opportunity and since 2018 identifying children's needs and identifying them accurately has been much better.
- It was commented that the 'offer' was being supported, particularly within schools, but also within the idea settings, and the idea was to make sure that they got the resources, the skills, the training and the money that was needed to meet those needs at the earliest opportunity.
- Clarification was sought regarding the resources available in the areas of deprivation for EHCP and SEND support. In response, it was noted that there was a 'balance system approach' taken, which was still quite challenging to meet the needs of the schools for the extra resources.

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

7. STOCKPORT SKILLS PLAN

The Director of Education, Works and Skills submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing the final draft of the Work and Skills Plan which was key to securing a more sustainable, inclusive and diverse economy that benefits everyone.

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 requested that 'careers advice' be featured a bit more prominently in the final draft of the report.
- Further details were requested relating to the links between industry and higher education and the workplace. In response, it was stated businesses and colleges working together and the colleges providing the right courses for the business need. It was also noted that the plan was written following consultation with businesses, local schools and the schools improvement plan.

- Partnership work with the Fire Service and the Princess Trust was encouraged as it supports the young people to be trained and to prepare them for the workplace, including interview techniques and career advice.
- It was commented that preparing young people for work was not just about education and skills, it is to do with confidence and preparing young people for the working environment e.g. transport to and from work and purchasing of uniform which can be a challenge for most young people.
- Reference to transport links and supporting young people with transport should also be included in the plan e.g. so many young people are looking at jobs at Manchester Airport and Trafford Centre, but there is a challenge for young people to get to those organisations as there are not any good transport links.

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

8. 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 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:-

- 'Assurance and Response to Complex Safeguarding and Child Exploitation' to be deferred to 2025.
- Foetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder (FASD).

The meeting closed at 8.10pm.