

CHILDREN & FAMILIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Meeting: 27 November 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, Gary Lawson, 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 16 October 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

<u>Councillor/ Co-opted Member</u>	<u>Interest</u>
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Dr Chris Gordon	Agenda Item 6 – ‘Sufficiency Strategy for Children in Care’ as Chair of the Stockport Disability Forum.
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3. CALL-IN

There were no call-in items to consider.

4. 2024/25 MID-YEAR (QUARTER 2) PORTFOLIO PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES REPORT: CHILDREN, FAMILIES & EDUCATION.

The Executive Director People & Integration submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing details based on the 2024/25 Portfolio Performance and Resource Agreement (PPRA), which was considered by the Committee on 12 June 2024 and approved by Cabinet on 25 June 2024 and the Mid-Year Report focuses on delivery of the portfolio priorities from April to September 2024. It includes 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:-

Priority 1 - All babies and children are given the very best start in life by their parents and carers and are ready for school at the end of reception

- Members enquired about the comparison to the national average relating to the 69.4% of two year olds screened using the Age and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ). In response, it was noted that there was no national average for the ASQ, however, in the Greater Manchester area that figure would be a little lower in comparison to other local authorities.
- It was commented that the information received through the ASQ would be used to ensure those children that did not reach those milestones would get the support needed including more intensive early help and support being put in place.
- Clarification was sought regarding how far the ASQ reached in terms of children and families across the borough. In response, it was stated that the ambition was to make sure it reached every child in the borough and the current take up rate was already quite high.
- It was noted that Stockport was doing quite well to reach its targets in the various priorities, but what happens once those targets are met. It was commented that discussions were underway to demonstrate statistically where the neighbouring local authorities were at Greater Manchester level and continuing to be ambitious for the children and young people in Stockport to set stretch targets which would continue to be better than the national average.
- Members welcomed the achievements with reaching the targets especially in the early years as it would benefit the young people to be better and achieve more later on, when it could potentially get harder for them.
- Members enquired about the disparity between the 63.3% figure for the free school meals and the target for 67%.
- It was commented that the assessment practices was really good to compliment the work being done in the early years and the Stockport Family model but it was not known why the outcomes were improving strongly for those children eligible for free school meals, but not improving in the same way in the early years.

Priority 2 - All children and young people can access and engage in education and achieve the best they can

- Members enquired about the persistent absences and the target to be achieved. In response, it was stated that the attendance numbers in Stockport are better than the national average, but there would be a review in terms of a possible stretch target.
- It was commented that new ways to learning should be explored involving online learning and a hybrid model of education for children.
- Young people who are not in school was a concern regarding what they were doing, but there was an approach that children need to be in school everyday and learning with technology and supporting their social and developmental needs.
- Clarification was sought regarding the attainment levels between girls and boys and if there was any data to support it. In response, it was stated that the data could be provided, but that girls were already outperforming boys in attainment.

Priority 3 - Children and families with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) receive the best possible support at the right time to ensure that the best possible outcomes are achieved

- Members welcomed the increased number in specialist and resourced places in Stockport from 973 to 1570.
- Concern was expressed regarding the CFE12 target being at 78% with it only being met at 20.3%. In response, it was stated that this would be looked into, but it highlighted that it referred to a small cohort of about 158 children with an Education, Health & Care Plan.
- Members requested that a discussion be held to look at the targets and gain an understanding of what the targets are trying to achieve and what maybe more practical.
- Thanks was expressed to the officers regarding the opening of the Lisbon School and the state of the art facility and that members should use it as an opportunity to learn a bit more about the facility.
- It was noted that the new delivery models for speech and language therapy has been undertaken using a full and extensive needs assessment, a formula would be applied to the specific need of the children in the area. Further information could be provided to the Committee at a future meeting.

Priority 4 – No questions

Priority 5 - All children, young people and families enjoy good physical and emotional health and wellbeing and can access coordinated robust and timely support pathways based on need

- Members enquired about being able to access the school nurse virtually and what was being done. In response, it was noted that a review of the school nurse was conducted last year to ensure a fully integrated system and the digital approach was being looked at in order that the services could be reviewed and making it more accessible digitally.
- Clarification was sought regarding the 'conception levels' identified and whether there was criminal activity involved. In response, it was stated that because of the increased numbers it would be looked at more closely including partner data, family partnership data and the support needed around sexual health and relationship advice.

Priority 6 - 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

Members enquired about the Family Group Conferencing (FGC) and the refreshed service resulting in caseloads beginning to rise. In response it was noted that the capacity had increased and the service was able to provide more support to families to enable the needs of families and children being met.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

5. RESPONDING TO OUR MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

The Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) outlining the strategic approach in responding to the medium-

term financial plan and also outlines the budget 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 enquired about the £8.33m deficit and how it related to the neighbourhood and prevention programme and where the savings would be made. In response, it was stated that the majority of the deficit was an element of the Stockport family budget that was related to external placements. It was noted that the recovery relied on being more preventative in order to promote excellent practice to get the spend down.
- It was commented that as part of the recovery programme several projects had been progressed to enhance Stockport Family model to keep children in their families and communities with a focus on:
 - the opening of children's homes to provide more internal children homes places,
 - reviewing the children with disabilities services
 - the delivery of evidence based interventions which provided focused support to children to remain with their families,
 - improving recruitment and retention,
 - the early help and prevention and
 - reviewing SEN Transport.
- Clarification was sought regarding how the efficiencies would be realised regarding the 'review of the children with disabilities services'. In response, it was stated that 'children with disability services' are reviewed regularly to ensure the most efficient and effective services for children and young people to ensure the best possible services and preventative support are in place.
- Members requested further details relating to the anticipated funding changes for this coming financial year. In response, it was noted that the reports submitted details the recovery programme and captures the pressure points being contained in children's social care and services. In addition, it was noted that there had been the announcement from Government regarding additional funding for children's social care and the children's well-being bill, but there are no guarantees.

RESOLVED – (1) That the report be noted.

(2) That the Director of Education provides further details relating to the anticipated funding changes for the forthcoming financial year in order that the Committee can get a better understanding of how the budget pressures and settlement was being dealt with.

6. SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY FOR CHILDREN IN CARE

The Director for People and Neighbourhoods submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing details relating to a refresh of the Children's Sufficiency Strategy 2020-2023 setting out the refreshed sufficiency needs and approach to ensuring that there were sufficient homes for the children and young people in care for the period 2024 until 2027.

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 enquired about the funding support that was available. In response, it was noted that there were three routes for children to come to Stockport including the national transfer scheme, children arriving as adults into the borough and be resident and then their ages being challenged and finally spontaneous arrival which can be funded through the home office which can be claimed through the home office and also there are incentive markers to move children which was dealt with through the placements team.
- Clarification was sought regarding the children in care data and the year on year increase. In response, it was noted that as children get older there were more complexities with their behaviour and relating to their needs.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

7. SAFEGUARDING PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT

The Safeguarding Partnership Manager and the Independent Chair of the Safeguarding Board submitted a joint report (copies of which had been circulated) setting out what safeguarding partners have done between April 2023 and March 2024.

The Independent Chair of the Safeguarding Board (Gail Hopper) attended the meeting to respond to questions from the Scrutiny Committee.

The following comments were made/issues raised:-

- Members welcomed the report and the partnership work with the Safeguarding Board.
- There was an enquiry relating to safeguarding in schools and children. In response, it was noted that the report was responding to the Department of Education requirements, however, there were Headteacher representatives on the Safeguarding Partnership with really good engagement from the school colleagues in terms of training and support.
- Members welcomed priority four – working with men and seeking the voices of men and the ongoing partnership work with fathers and men. It was noted that there was a three-year business plan in place.
- It was commented that the Safeguarding Board was a critical friend and would be learning from horrendous incidents that take place and taking things on board.

The Committee thanked the departing Chair for all of her hard work and commitment to the Safeguarding Board and each of the Annual Reports that were submitted.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

8. VIRTUAL SCHOOL ANNUAL REPORT

The Director of Education, Works & Skills submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing details relating to the annual report of the Stockport Virtual School

and includes the priorities of both the Stockport Virtual School and the Virtual School Headteacher which had been informed by a variety of statutory and non-statutory guidance.

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 persistent absences data and the detail that sat behind it. In response, it was stated that the figures were still too high and the challenges and issues faced by the young people were understood and it was being addressed through the relevant team.
- It was noted that the early years pupil premium goes directly to the provisions where the children were and the council did not have oversight of it.
- Clarification was sought regarding 'over-learning'. It was noted that if children were performing well then there would be an opportunity to bank some work relating to periods of absence or trauma and or a family crisis. So it is almost maximising the opportunity to bank 'good periods of work' for periods when things don't go too well and was an 'over-learning' technique.
- PEPS was described as a 'Personal Education Plan' that was a legal document for children in care highlighting the provisions received in school.
- Members welcomed the period and complimented the team on the layout of the report and the executive summary.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

9. EARLY HELP STRATEGY

The Director for People and Neighbourhoods submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing a refreshed version of the previous strategy launched in 2021 and contributes to the delivery of the Children and Young People Plan 2024 -2027 which identifies seven Big 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 enquired about the 'One named linked Stockport Family officer to early years setting and schools' and how would that person work with settings and schools. In response, it was stated that might be through health visitors, school nurses, social workers or early years workers who all form part of the team around the approach for children and families.
- It was commented that the workers work really well and easily accessible and attend meetings of the team around the child and family meetings and are a really good addition to schools.
- Clarification was sought about the 'Solihull' connection. In response, it was stated that it was not the place but actually a parenting programme originally developed in Solihull

and have specific programmes for early years, children in their early years to build upon brain development and child development accordingly.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

10. FAMILY HUBS

The Director for People and Neighbourhoods submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) highlighting the progress and impact of Family Hubs in Stockport during their first 12 months and identifies key achievements and areas for development to support their growth.

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 remaining hubs to be developed. It was noted that there was a goal to develop seven family hub networks, but was not about developing seven sites. So there are currently three main sites with another to be developed in the new year of 2025. There are also opportunities to use the Marple Hub as a designated site in 2026. Partnership working, outreach and development of the family hub bridge concept was also being used to develop the common purpose and common approach.
- Clarification was sought regarding the data collection from the sites regarding accessing of services etc. In response, it was noted that data was not collected to measure footfall, however, the emphasis was about the response, the outcomes, the proactiveness and enhancing the service being delivered following the issues being raised.
- Members enquired about how parents and nursery providers could be made aware of the family hubs and the service on offer. It was noted that early years settings and childminders would receive regular updates and would be connected to the team around the early years approach through named individuals as a point of contact. Raising awareness was also a key area of development to reach out to families through digital development and a social media presence.
- It was commented that due to the number of housing associations there were in Stockport it would be a good idea to approach those organisations to develop and share information for parents and families.
- It was noted that the submission of reports to the Committee were overlapping with themes and processes and sometimes could be quite complex with information e.g. family hubs and neighbourhood preventions and for those viewing the committees would seem confusing. It was requested that the approach be reviewed and officers be asked to provide summaries with reports to make it easier to understand and read.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

11. SCRUTINY 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.

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Members requested that the following items be included in the work programme for future meetings: -

- Target Setting
- Speech and Language system

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:-

- Target Setting
- Speech and Language system

The meeting closed at 8.45pm.