

SCRUTINY ADVISORY BOARD - CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Minutes of a Meeting of the Scrutiny Advisory Board - Children and Young People held on Friday, 11 September 2020 at 10.30 am via Microsoft Teams

PRESENT:

Mrs V Tarbitt (Chair)

Mrs C Bowditch	Mr P Dew (Vice-Chair)
Mrs S Evans	Mr W Clark
Mrs EA Mallinson	Dr K Lockney
Mr CP Turner	Mr GRPM Roberts
Mrs EL Williamson	Mrs A Burns

Also in Attendance:-

Mr D Hamilton	- Democratic Services Officer
Mr D Barton	- Assistant Director - Education and Skills
Ms L Berryman	- Assistant Director - Children and Young People
Mrs F Musgrave	- Assistant Director - Integration and Partnerships
Ms S Starmer	- Interim Service Manager - Youth Offending Service
Mr J Rasbash	- Strategic Policy and Scrutiny Advisor

PART 1 – ITEMS CONSIDERED IN THE PRESENCE OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

32 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Ms Michelle Davis, Mr Peter Healey, Mrs Sue Sanderson and Mr Andrew Wonnacott.

33 MEMBERSHIP

Members were informed that Mr Graham Roberts had become a new permanent member of the Scrutiny Advisory Board – Children and Young People for the Conservative Group, replacing the late Mr Lawrence Fisher.

34 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

Mrs C Bowditch disclosed an interest in relation to agenda item 7 as she was Chair or Carlisle Mencap.

35 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED that, the press and public be not excluded from the meeting during consideration of any items of business on the agenda.

36 MINUTES

RESOLVED that, the minutes of the meeting held on the 20 December 2019 be confirmed as an accurate and complete record.

37 CHILDREN'S COVID-19 RESPONSE AND RECOVERY IN CUMBRIA

Members considered a report from the Executive Director – People (Deputy Chief Executive) which provided the Board with an update on the how the children's system had responded to COVID-19, its plans for recovery and a look ahead to priorities for children and families.

The Assistant Director - Children & Young People (Deputy DCS) introduced the report which would cover the following sections:-

- Early Years and Schools
- SEND
- Social Care and Safeguarding
- Think Family and Early Help
- Children's Commissioning

The Assistant Director - Education & Skills discussed the first two area of the report and provided an overview of the response to COVID-19 from Early Years and Schools which highlighted the major impact on schooling, and response to the issues of closing schools. This included targeted opening for specific groups, full opening for all year groups, prioritising the welfare and learning needs of disadvantaged pupils and providing of support to pupils whose public exams had been affected. The work around schools since March was split into three phases:

- Phase 1: COVID-19 response – March to June;
- Phase 2: COVID-19 initial recovery – June to September
- Phase 3: Full school opening September and beyond.

In response to the initial government guidance the Council worked with Cumbria Association of School Leaders and all parts of the education system (including the Early Years sector and post-16 education providers) to establish the Education Tactical Co-ordination Group (ETCG). This was a working group of the Local Resilience Forum that focused on supporting the education system for all year phases to manage the response to the pandemic.

It was explained that given that Cabinet and Scrutiny were not meeting during the first phase, the Executive Director - People (Deputy Chief Executive) made the

decision to set up Hub Schools and to extend year group access to the Hub Schools as was formally recorded on the Officer Decision Record.

Having established the Hub Schools, the main priority for the ETCG was to ensure children of critical workers and vulnerable learners were accessing the Hub Schools. The Assistant Director – Education and Skills explained that the Social Care and the School Improvement Team worked together to provide a definitive list of vulnerable learners and for then broke this list down by Hub School. In line with the DfE guidance, priority children with an Education and Health Care Plan were risk assessed to see if it were safe for them to attend a Hub School, and those deemed safe were supported to attend.

The Assistant Director – Education and Skills explained to members that one of the immediate impacts of the closure of schools was that disadvantaged learners could no longer access free school meals. Unlike vulnerable learners, disadvantaged learners were required to stay at home unless they were also vulnerable or a children of a critical worker, which meant that addressing this issue was an immediate priority.

In April, the Government announced the National Food Voucher Scheme, which entitled every child eligible for free school meals to access a £15 voucher each week. There was approximately a month's gap between the establishment of the scheme, and after its introduction there were a number of national problems in schools and parents accessing vouchers. In Cumbria the issue had been pre-empted as alternatives were already up and running by the end of March.

On Sunday 10 May, the Prime Minister announced the phased wider opening of schools to commence from 1 June. Further guidance from DfE confirmed these arrangements would be for:

- Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 6;
- Some contact with Year 10 and 12 who were due to take exams;
- Vulnerable children and children of critical workers who have been accessing an educational setting during the lockdown period.

In response to the announcement ETCG focused on overseeing arrangements for the Hubs Schools to wind down and be replaced by all schools being able to open for the target groups from 1 June. The DfE guidance was clear that decisions to open schools had to be taken by schools individually, based on a risk assessment.

To support schools in carrying out the necessary steps to open, the Council's Corporate Health and Safety Team developed a risk tool and provided direct support and advice to individual schools. During this process the first priority once schools were safe to open was to ensure vulnerable learners and children of key workers, who were previously attending a Hub School, could transfer to their main school, and then to sequence in the other year groups when safe.

Overall the opening process was successful. On 1 June the majority of schools had opened for vulnerable learners and children of critical workers. By Monday 15 June

all schools in Cumbria had opened, taking in over 20% of all vulnerable learners who were eligible to attend, and increasingly taking in all year groups. Attendance increased over the summer term and by the term's end around 10,000 children were attending.

On 23 June the Prime Ministerial made a statement on the further easing of lock down measures, reiterating the commitment to full school opening by September. To support the refocusing of attention to September opening for all year groups, the Cabinet Member for Schools and Learning agreed that the ECTG should stand down and be replaced by a September Opening Group that she would chair. This group developed a number of work streams that operated throughout the school holidays reporting in every week. Some of the key work streams included:

- Curriculum redesign
- Pastoral care
- Transport
- School layout and property
- Revised HR guidance

The Assistant Director – Education and Skills then provided an overview of one of the biggest challenges of COVID-19 which been around the suspension of public exams for the 2020 academic year and its replacement with a system of grades for GCSEs and A-levels based on teacher assessment and electronic moderation by an algorithm overseen by Ofqual.

The Assistant Director – Education and Skills moved on to discuss Early Years settings and stated that during the COVID response phase, the early years hub model was created alongside the school hub model – 12 PVI providers and 33 childminders remained open throughout; additionally, some early years children attended school hubs.

Members heard of the additional complexity in early years setting, where it was difficult for small children to socially distance especially as they need close physical contact as part of their support. This means there were additional demands practically and financially for early years settings in order to keep children in smaller groups and observe hygiene practices.

In Cumbria there are around 3700 pupils with an EHCP, so the main focus was upon initially risk assessing those with the highest need. This enabled the cohort as a whole to be supported safely and for those who could attend were supported to do so.

With regards to SEND children, In Cumbria there were around 3700 pupils with an EHCP, so the main focus was upon initially risk assessing those with the highest need. This enabled the cohort as a whole to be supported safely and those who could attend were supported to do so.

During the period a SEND helpline was also established for the Hub Schools and support was put in place for families around respite and short breaks in recognition of challenges they would be facing during the response phase.

A key priority during the past six months had been to ensure that work on the SEND Improvement would be insulated from any potential disruption. Meetings had continued virtually and many parent reps identified that there were pros and cons to the situation but for many not having to travel to a meeting was a definite bonus.

Since the publication of the report schools had returned and so an additional update was provided on the return to schools. Members heard that schools had reopened on a phased basis and that attendance had remained between 85-90%. The Assistant Director took the opportunity to thank the Public Health team for their clear guidance and support.

Members asked for further detail about extra support measures that would be provided over the coming year. The Assistant Director – Education and Skills informed members of the development of the recovery curriculum for schools and explained how schools would identify issues and provide support to mitigate against the impact of lockdown on mental wellbeing. The Local Authority was leading on a shared online resource platform to support schools. Discussion then took place regarding contingency planning in the event of a second lockdown and members were informed that plans for online remote learning had been made and that schools felt confident of their ability to provide classes this way in the case of a second lockdown.

The Assistant Director – Education and Skills gave assurances that support was also in place for staff including head teachers and that schools were equipped to identify newly vulnerable children for allocation of free school meals and equipment where necessary. It was **AGREED** that a response in writing be circulated to the scrutiny board to provide more detail on the current process regarding identifying newly vulnerable children who may be eligible for free school meals.

A question arose regarding support to non-state schools. The Assistant Director – Education and Skills clarified that the Independent Sector / Private Schools by virtue of their funding structure would likely not be as hard hit as state schools. Local Authority would not provide funding to these schools and they would be reliant upon their own reserves. Independent Service providers, as schools that the Council commission to provide service, we would not receive anything additional to their current fees they would also need to draw on reserves. The Assistant Director – Education and Skills made it clear that this was not to say that these schools were not being supported in other ways but highlighted that funding shortfall was more of a concern within the state sector.

A discussion took place regarding the reliability of attainment data collected and the need for schools to identify quickly which students might have fallen behind due to the interruption in their education.

The Local Member for Kells and Sandwith asked about support from the Council in the challenge from Whitehaven Academy to the current school bus transport '3 mile rule'. The Assistant Director – Education and Skills was aware of the issues at certain schools having to work directly with the provider. What the council had ensure was that transport had been supplied to all of the children to which the

council had a duty. The issue in other cases was around capacity of public transport because of Social distancing issues have caused issues with public transport. The Assistant Director – Education and Skills explained that a shadow bus route had been commissioned for 21 different routes that would pick up children who cannot travel on the first bus due to capacity.

The Assistant Director – Education and Skills was asked what was in place to support children who had parents who had chosen to keep them at home, or that had been sent home due to public health advice. He answered that it was children who had parents or carers who were at significant risk that the Council had the greatest opportunity to support and in those cases it did so with remote learning. It was added that the decision had been made at the moment to not prosecute with fines until the Council had better information regarding attainment trends.

The Vice-Chair thanked the Assistant Director and the team for the regular updates provided throughout the COVID-19 response.

The Assistant Director - Children & Young People (Deputy DCS) outlined the Safeguarding and Social Care response and first cited that 'business-as-usual' had been maintained throughout albeit virtually and that despite pressures staffing levels remained high, there was good morale and the service was highly resilient.

A RAG rating system was introduced to risk assess all looked-after children and young people to prioritise increased levels of contact during lockdown. Key meetings such as child protection conferences, and fostering and adoption panels were moved to virtual platforms very quickly and key priority activity such as fostering recruitment had continued during this period. Members were informed that there were 29 new foster care recruits over this period which was a net increase of 25.

The Assistant Director - Children & Young People (Deputy DCS) stated that the Service had worked hard to maintain contact with children and families and were aware of the increased vulnerability that not attending school would create for many children. The DfE survey completed in June highlighted that as a Council Cumbria outperformed both statistical neighbours and national rates in maintaining contact during the period.

The Service also recognised the importance of supporting care leavers during this period and initiated a quick, proactive and practical response which ensured regular contact, financial support, phones, food and support networks. The Assistant Director - Children & Young People (Deputy DCS) explained that the Service had linked in nationally with the DfE and Cumbria's response had been shared nationally as good practice. In concluding, Members were informed that Cumbria had been confirmed to be involved in a funded pilot study that would look into the benefits of placing social workers within schools. The study would be hosted by the What Works Centre, whose work was closely aligned to the Department for Education. The Service was in the process of identifying schools and would keep the Board updated as the project developed.

The Chair thanked the Social Care and Safeguarding services for their work and praised their resilience through the COVID-19 response.

The Assistant Director - Integration and Partnerships provided an overview of Early Help and the work of the Children's Trust Board. She began by explaining that due to concern about hidden harm and the potential for a surge in demand as society re-opens, the Children's Trust Board had been revitalised with a focus on developing a system-wide approach to supporting children and families in Cumbria.

The Children's Trust reviewed its priorities and agreed to focus on:

- Development and implementation of the Early Help Strategy and ownership and championing of the "Think Family" approach;
- Strengthening early help to meet the potential increase in demand to prevent children's needs from escalating;
- Refresh of the Children and Young People's Plan to reflect Covid-19 Recovery and the language of Think Family and Early Help;
- Developing the wrap around support to schools.

Members heard that in order to support these priorities the Children's Trust agreed to establish locality partnerships and revitalise existing partnerships where they were currently operating.

The Children's Trust Board developed an Early Help Strategy for Cumbria that set out the vision of priorities for Early Help through the local partnerships. It was **AGREED** that a wider piece of work be brought to Scrutiny to provide more detail on the Early Help Strategy after being considered by the Children's Trust Board.

The Assistant Director - Integration and Partnerships explained the Think Family approach to delivering the Early Help Strategy. Members heard how the strategy would use the Signs of Wellbeing and Success approach, which had adapted from the Signs of Safety approach that had been extensively used in Children's Social Care.

The Portfolio Holder highlighted to members the benefit of the Early Help strategy and the importance of locality partnerships.

The Chair thanked the Assistant Director - Integration and Partnerships and all officers involved for their report and adjourned the meeting for a 5 minute comfort break.

38 CUMBRIA YOUTH OFFENDING SERVICE : WORKING THROUGH COVID 19 AND BEYOND

Members received a presentation from the Youth Offending And Prevention Service Manager on the impact of COVID-19 and the transition to recovery of the Cumbria Youth Offending Service. The Youth Offending And Prevention Service Manager explained to members that the requirement to provide an annual review had been lifted this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic but it was felt that to provide assurance a presentation should be given highlighting the following areas of the Services COVID-19 response:-

- What did we need to consider?
- Key issues

- What we have done?
- Achievements
- Moving Forward

Was asked whether there had been any noticeable changes to the type of offence reported. Continued rise in youth offending cases in the South of the county and in particular in Barrow. An audit in violent offence we do still have violent offending.

A discussion took place regarding the misuse of substances focusing on alcohol and whether there was an indication of how much these things factored into youth offending. The Youth Offending And Prevention Service Manager explained that substances and alcohol in particular are recognised as contributing factors to youth offending as is alcohol or substance use of parents of those who come into the service.

The Service Manager was then asked if there were any special arrangements made for those with autism or severe learning difficulties as part of the process. Members were informed that all young people who come into the service undertake a speech, language and communication screening assessment which was crucial to informing how the service tailors its interventions. It was also crucial in seeing if young people had not been in education for some time. It was explained to members that the Service also had links within the SEND team and could see whether young people had an EHCP. The Service also had links with specialist groups such as the AAA Autism group.

In response to a question regarding a recent Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons (HMIP) review, the Service Manager stated that verbal feedback had been very positive about the continuity of service and the conduct of staff as part of the response to COVID-19.

The Chair thanked the Youth Offending And Prevention Service Manager for the instructive presentation.

39 CABINET MEMBER UPDATES

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services praised all areas of the service for their hard work during the COVID-19 response and recovery and informed members of the recent confirmation of Cumbria as part of the Regional Adoption Agency alongside Sunderland and Durham. It was stated that this would open up a larger field for adopters and the Cabinet Member wanted it recognised that it was quite remarkable that this partnership had been negotiated during the COVID-19 pandemic. The agency would be titled Coast to Coast and had now been signed off by lead members of each authority.

40 BOARD BRIEFING

Members considered a report from the Executive Director – Corporate, Customer and Community Services which provided an overview of the Board's business and opportunities for further scrutiny.

Members noted the report and were invited to share their suggestions for scrutiny agenda items in the lead up to the December meeting.

41 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Scrutiny Advisory Board – Children and Young People is due to take place 4 December 2020 via Microsoft Teams.

The meeting ended at 12:45pm