

## **SCRUTINY ADVISORY BOARD - CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

Minutes of a Meeting of the Scrutiny Advisory Board - Children and Young People held on Friday, 4 December 2020 at 10.30 am via Microsoft Teams

### **PRESENT:**

Mrs V Tarbitt (Chair)

Mrs C Bowditch	Mr W Clark
Mrs S Evans	Mr GD Cook
Mrs EA Mallinson	Dr K Lockney
Mr W McEwan	Mr GRPM Roberts
Mr CP Turner	Mrs A Burns
Mr P Dew (Vice-Chair)	Mrs S Sanderson
Mr AW Wonnacott	

Also in Attendance:-

Mr J Readman	- Executive Director – People (Deputy Chief Executive)
Mr D Hamilton	- Democratic Services Officer
Mr D Barton	- Assistant Director - Education and Skills
Ms S Hodkin	- Improvement Programme Officer
Ms A Holliman	- Business Planning and Improvement Manager
Ms H Murphy	- Business Planning & Improvement Assistant
Mrs F Musgrave	- Assistant Director - Integration and Partnerships
Mr J Rasbash	- Strategic Policy and Scrutiny Advisor
Ms L Sanczuk	- Senior Manager – Children and Families

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

#### **42 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Mrs E Williamson.

#### **43 MEMBERSHIP**

There were no changes to membership on this occasion.

#### **44 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST**

There were no disclosures of interest made on this occasion.

#### **45 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.

#### **46 MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** that, the minutes of the meeting held on the 11 September 2020 be confirmed as an accurate and complete record.

#### **47 CUMBRIA EARLY HELP STRATEGY**

The Executive Director – People (Deputy Chief Executive) provided an introductory overview of the reports to be considered and used the opportunity to praise the efforts of all officers, partners, and the staff at the county's schools.

Members considered a report presented to the Board by the Senior Manager – Children and Families which provided an overview of the development of the Early Help Strategy and the Children's Trust Board locality partnership groups.

In 2019 Cumbria Safeguarding Children Partnership held a series of consultation events around the County entitled 'Developing Excellent Early Help' to inform the development of the strategy. Members heard that the consultation events were well attended with a total of 276 professionals taking part. The completed strategy would create a system in which vulnerable children and families were identified and engaged with at the earliest point, so that their needs need not be escalated to requiring a statutory intervention. It was **AGREED** that the strategy document be circulated to members ahead after the next meeting of the Board.

The Senior Manager – Children and Families explained that safeguarding governance sat with The Children's Trust Board (CTB) and Cumbria Safeguarding Children Partnership. Delivery of the strategy would be through the six CTB Locality Children's Partnership Groups. Membership of each of the Boards was broad and involved statutory, voluntary and community sector partners.

The locality groups would aim to build a commitment to early intervention which would reduce the barriers to effective multi-agency working and to improve the identifying of opportunities to improve outcomes for children, young people and families by working together better. Each of the groups had a Chair and Vice Chair and was working with the County Council's Local Committees to ensure alignment in the local area.

The Senior Manager – Children and Families explained the Think Family agenda and how it would recognise and promote the importance of a whole-family approach built on the principles of 'Reaching out: think family', to move from a transactional to a relational approach.

Members asked for assurance that work was ongoing to ensure the input of the local police on each of the six CTB Locality Children's Partnership Groups. The Senior Manager – Children and Families explained that the police had developed a child centred policing team in each locality and the inspectors within those teams would sit on the CTB Locality Children's Partnership Groups. Members also heard that the Think Family support panels which incorporated adult focused domestic abuse issues had been developed with the police and had met for the first time in November.

**RESOLVED** that, members note the report.

## **48 REGULATORY OVERVIEW REPORT**

Members considered a report from the Executive Director – People (Deputy Chief Executive) which provided an outline of the existing regulatory regimes that related to children's services and highlighted where there had been impact on these regimes during the current Covid-19 pandemic.

The Senior Manager - Partnerships and People Improvement began by discussing Children's social care which was subject to the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) framework. The last full inspection under the previous Single Inspection Framework (SIF) in November 2017 returned a 'Requires Improvement' judgement.

Under the ILACS framework local authorities would receive a full inspection approximately every three years with a minimum of two short focused visits (usually thematic) undertaken between inspections, one of which could be a Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) which is a thematic multi-agency inspection which Ofsted and other regulators undertake with a small number of authorities each year against a selected topic, such as child exploitation, or mental health.

The first short focused visit under the ILACS framework took place in August 2019. There were no priority areas for improvement resulting from the visit and many areas of positive practice highlighted. The second short focused visit was scheduled for March 2020 and postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

During Covid-19, the formal inspection schedule had been postponed, however Ofsted recently initiated support/assurance visits to local authorities but had since paused ILACS support/assurance visits during the national lockdown effective from 5 November. Ofsted have since stated that due to the 10-day notice period which likely meant there would be no further focused visits until the New Year.

The Senior Manager - Partnerships and People Improvement then moved on to discuss the regulatory regime regarding SEND. The Council received the first SEND inspection in 2019. The inspection identified 9 areas for priority action which formed

the basis of a Written Statement of Action which was the joint responsibility of the local authority and the two Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) in Cumbria.

The improvement activity had been led by the SEND Improvement Board, with an independent chair and strong partnership representation including parents/carers and elected members. The monitoring/progress evaluation visits took place quarterly led by the Department of Education (DfE) and NHS England. The last such visit took place on 16 November 2020. The timeframe for re-inspection was unknown and was likely to have been impacted by the pause in inspections during Covid.

School inspections are carried out under the Education Inspection Framework which covered Ofsted inspections of maintained schools, academies, non-association independent schools, further education and skills provision and registered early years settings in England. The frequency of inspection was dependent on the most recent judgement afforded to a setting.

The Covid pandemic resulted in a pause of Ofsted inspections on 17 March 2020. Ofsted commenced an interim visit programme on 28 September 2020. These interim visits were introduced to reassure and inform parents, government, and the public about how schools were managing the return to full education for all pupils. The lead Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI) wrote a short letter after each interim visit. This is to provide parents with information about what leaders are doing to help pupils back into full-time education. Letters do not provide any evaluation or graded judgement. There have been 15 of these section 8 visits to Cumbrian schools as at 19 November 2020. Ofsted had stated that they planned to restart inspection from Spring term 2021.

Ofsted recently released their plans to re-introduce inspections from January 2021 but these remained under constant review. When full routine early years inspections resume under the Education Inspection Framework (EIF), Ofsted would schedule these based on risk assessment and inspection grades, prioritizing nurseries, pre-schools and childminders that are not yet good and those there are significant concerns about. Under the new arrangements, all early-years providers would be inspected in a six-year window from the date of their last inspection, rather than the current four-year cycle.

Members were reminded that Ofsted inspect residential homes once per year, known as a 'key inspection' over two days, whereby a judgement of, outstanding, good, requires improvement or inadequate would be made.

Due to the Covid-19 Pandemic Ofsted had changed the way they were carrying out inspections and were undertaking 'assurance visits' over two days, the first day by telephone and the second day in person at the home. It was confirmed that these assurance visits would not be graded. County residential provision was currently rated good or outstanding, except the new provision in Kendal which was still awaiting interim inspection and currently had no grading.

The Senior Manager - Partnerships and People Improvement then discussed Youth Offending Services which had been subject to a full inspection in 2009 and subject

to a Short Quality Screening Inspection in 2016. In July 2020 Cumbria YOS were one of 7 services selected to be part of the HMIP thematic review into how Youth Offending Services had operated during Covid-19.

Members sought clarification on the differences between a DfE inspection and an ILACS inspection and the criteria that each looks for. It was confirmed that they were very much interlinked, the ILACS framework was set by the DfE and then Ofsted were the body charged with carrying out the inspection using the ILACS framework.

Members shared concerns regarding the pressure on schools caused by the pandemic and sought assurances that the Council was aware that further inspections would add to this pressure. The Assistant Director – Education and Skills confirmed that what was needed was a balanced approach to inspection and highlighted that at this stage school visits needed to play a supportive role.

A discussion took place regarding the support in place for school staff and head teachers in which it was confirmed by the Executive Director – People (Deputy Chief Executive) that Ofsted had been actively seeking feedback and had explained the circumstances in which deferred inspections could be negotiated.

The Vice-Chair asked whether any results had been received from the SEND monitoring evaluation visit and whether they could be shared. It was **AGREED** that feedback received would be shared alongside an overall update on SEND Improvement.

The Executive Director – People (Deputy Chief Executive) stated that though the Council had improved in all areas of Children's Social Care, officers were determined to keep improving and to return a positive Ofsted result at the next inspection.

**RESOLVED** that, members note the report.

## **49 COVID-19 UPDATE**

Members considered a report which provided the Board with an update on impact of COVID-19 on the children's system as well as providing a look ahead to recovery and the priorities for children and families going forward. The report outlined the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Priorities across the Children's System, which covered, Early Years and Schools, SEND, Social Care and Safeguarding, Think Family and Early Help and Children's Commissioning.

The Assistant Director – Education and Skills provided a verbal update regarding the situation with schools and education providers. The whole system was continuing to manage the situation logistically but also with regard to managing concerns over physical and emotional health for both staff and students. An update was then provided regarding the additional funding being made available to Head teachers which members heard would be inclusive of staffing costs. Members were given assurance about the provision of free school meals through a voucher system

which would be provided over school holidays and regarding support of newly vulnerable families through provision of IT equipment.

The early years Private, Voluntary, and Independent sector had showed incredible resilience and support to families throughout the pandemic. The Council was not currently aware of any early years settings closing as a direct result of COVID-19, however the future of the sector was potentially fragile as a result of a combination of reduced demand from families for fee paying places, and the end of the flexible furlough scheme in March 2021.

The COVID-19 pandemic had also presented an exceptional challenge on our SEND services but members were pleased to hear that the Council had maintained continuity of support and provision for our SEND children and young people, and despite this disruption and adaptation to new ways of working business had continued as usual in the midst of a service redesign. The redesign was redesigned to improve how services would work to support the children and young people with SEND.

With regard to Social Care and Safeguarding, members heard that key partnerships had been maintained and strengthened during this period, fortnightly Cumbria Safeguarding Children Partnership (CSCP) business continuity meetings ensured a joined-up partnership response.

During the response phase there was a significant drop in calls to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub, which was in line with the national trend. Whilst figures increased later, the figure for October 2020 was 19% lower than the 2019 average.

In terms of social care, the overall numbers of open cases had fallen by 7% since the start of the pandemic. The picture differed across the districts with Carlisle seeing a substantial decrease in case numbers, whilst numbers in Barrow had increased by 8%. Other districts had either remained stable or seen a small decline in numbers. The impact of Covid on Emotional Health and Wellbeing was being seen across the system. In terms of calculating demand, the latest national survey results from NHS Digital showed a significant increase in the incidence of children and young people experiencing poor mental wellbeing to the extent of being diagnosed with a mental health disorder. From 1 in 9 in 2017 to 1 in 6 in 2020. Members heard that it was assumed that the increase was due in a large part to the impact of Covid on the CYP population.

Members asked about the Social Workers in school project. The Senior Manager – Children and Families provided an update on the project stating that a Team Manager had been in post for 4 weeks. One social worker had started in their role this week and though recruitment of social workers was still in progress it was expected that 6 social workers would be in place for the next school term. It was explained that the Local Authority did not get to select the schools who would take part they were instead selected by the research body at Cardiff University. It was **AGREED** that the Committee be kept up to date on the progress of this research project.

The Assistant Director - Integration and Partnerships explained the importance of the Children's Trust Board to building the understanding of system demand and the impact of Covid in each locality. An update was then provided on the Recovery Strategy developed by the Strategic Recovery Coordination Group (SRCG) and it was explained that the approach to recovery for Cumbria was built around existing partnership and programme structures rather than establishing a new set of subgroups. It was explained that the opportunities to comment on the Recovery Strategy priorities and measures of progress would begin early in 2021.

**RESOLVED** that, members note the report.

## **50 PORTFOLIO HOLDER UPDATE**

The Cabinet member for Children's Services provided an update on the Corporate Parenting Board and the progress of the Looked After Children Strategy action plan that had been developed with partners. There were three young people from the CICC who had been taken on by the Council to champion Looked After Children and Care Leavers on the CICC's in localities and would be invited to join the Corporate Parenting Board. The Cabinet member for Children's Services praised the CICC and the Children's Rights Officers for the organisation of the CICC Awards event which took place virtually.

The Cabinet Member for Schools and Learning provided an overview of the work taking place within her portfolio which included an update on the progress of the Alternative Provision hubs and the recent decision on the extension of Sandgate School. She then discussed the support that was in place for the wellbeing of head teachers.

## **51 BOARD BRIEFING**

Members considered the report from the Executive Director – Corporate, Customer and Community Services. The Strategic Policy and Scrutiny Advisor introduced the report and provided an overview of the Board's business and the items on the Cabinet Forward Plan which had children and young people as their focus.

Members raised concerns regarding the timescale for the Board to consider items on the Forward Plan. It was stated by Councillor Turner that the window of opportunity was too brief to be able to provide sufficient scrutiny of the decision he then went on to ask specifically that the Scrutiny Board write a letter to Cabinet asking that the School Admission Arrangements decision be removed from the agenda. A discussion took place regarding this item whereby it was seconded and **AGREED** that a letter be drafted from the Chair to Leader of the Council asking that the School Admission Arrangements item be withdrawn from the Cabinet agenda to allow time for consideration by the Scrutiny Board.

**RESOLVED** that,

- 1) members note the report,

- 2) a letter be drafted from the Chair to the Leader of the Council recommending the withdrawal of the School Admission Arrangements item from the Cabinet agenda to allow time for consideration by the Scrutiny Board.

## **52 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Scrutiny Advisory Board – Children and Young People will take place on 9 February 2021 via Microsoft Teams.

The meeting ended at 13.00 pm