

SCRUTINY ADVISORY BOARD - CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Minutes of a Meeting of the Scrutiny Advisory Board - Children and Young People held on Tuesday, 7 February 2023 at 10.30 am at Council Chamber, County Hall, Kendal

PRESENT:

Mr P Dew (Chair)

Mrs C Bowditch
Mrs S Evans
Mrs EA Mallinson
Mr W McEwan
Mr AW Wonnacott

Ms C McCarron-Holmes
Mr K Hitchen (Vice-Chair)
Mr GD Cook
Mr GRPM Roberts

Also in attendance:-

Mr D Barton - Assistant Director - Education and Skills
Ms L Berryman - Assistant Director - Children & Young People (Deputy DCS)
Mrs J Currie - Professional Lead - Democratic Services
Mr J Readman - Executive Director (People)
Ms S Rees - SEND Improvement Strategic Lead
Mr J Rasbash - Strategic Policy and Scrutiny Advisor

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

23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs M Rae and Mr P Turner.

24 MEMBERSHIP

There were no changes in membership on this occasion.

25 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

Mrs C Bowditch declared a non pecuniary interest in Agenda Item No 6 – Joint Area SEND Revisit in Cumbria as she is the Chair of Carlisle Mencap.

26 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED, that the press and public be not excluded from any items on the agenda today.

27 MINUTES

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 21 October 2022 be agreed as a true and accurate record.

28 JOINT AREA SEND REVISIT IN CUMBRIA

Scrutiny members had before them a report from the Executive Director – People which provided an opportunity to consider the Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission Letter to Cumbria following the joint inspection of December 2022.

Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission had now written to the Council to share their findings from the inspection revisit of the local area SEND services, which took place in December 2022.

The purpose of the inspection revisit was to determine whether sufficient progress had been made to improve the nine areas of significant concern identified during the full inspection in 2019.

The Executive Director was pleased to report that having considered each area in detail, the inspectors' judgement was that sufficient progress had been made in seven of the nine areas.

Whilst progress had been made in the remaining two areas inspectors felt there was more work for the partnership to do. These two areas were the trust and faith parents had in our services and the support for emotional health and wellbeing.

The letter described in detail the inspection findings, which were fair and accurately reflected the position. The Council was now working with partners and the Department for Education and NHS England to agree a plan for improvement for these two areas.

The SEND Partnership would continue to have oversight of these plans, with representatives from Cumberland Council and Westmorland and Furness Council replacing the County Council in April 2023 to work alongside both Integrated Care Boards operating across Cumbria, SENDAC (Cumbria's parent carer forum) and our NHS and Education providers.

The huge amount of work by partners and parents, services and teams, since the 2019 inspection had resulted in positive change for children and their families.

Members then received a presentation from Ms S Rees – SEND Improvement Strategic Lead and Mr D Barton – Assistant Director – Education and Skills, which covered the following:-

- The Inspection
- Reflections
- Findings
- Accelerated Progress Plan
- Continuous Improvement Plan
- Priorities for Improvement

Members raised concerns about the possible weakness of transition especially for services for families with members on the autism spectrum and respite care for people with learning difficulties. The issue of transition between children's services and adult social care had been raised many years ago as part of a Scrutiny Review but it appeared the recommendations were not progressed as the issue still existed. Barn Close in Carlisle was an excellent facility for respite care but was badly in need of modernisation. Members felt it could also be used for step down care from hospital.

The Assistant Director responded to say that the issue with transition was complex and difficult, there were much greater expectations from parents and carers today, and a great deal of work was needed to decide what success looked like from all perspectives.

The Assistant Director agreed to work with the Strategic Policy and Scrutiny Advisor Officer to align this work with the previous Scrutiny Review.

In relation to Barn Close this would be a strategic decision for Cumberland Council to take when considering how respite care would be delivered in the future.

One of the members asked if the intention was to dispose of Barn Close. She wondered if rather than sell it, it might be possible to adapt this for discharge from hospital care, especially given the Government funding that was currently available.

The Assistant Director replied to say although there was currently funding available for this it was likely this would be time limited.

Members raised concerns about the Policy for Action Plan which they felt would be extremely difficult to achieve with two very different authorities, new members and a lack of handover.

The Assistant Director said the current proposal was for a Joint Improvement Board to be established for a 12 month period to allow for transition arrangements to be agreed.

A member referred to the inspection report and the finding that there was a lack of understanding of the needs of the SEND population in local areas. Parents and carers in Carlisle often had to travel to Whitehaven to access these services but

there was a facility in Barn Close in Carlisle which was under used. She felt this was unacceptable.

The Assistant Director understood the concerns, and whilst Barn Close was under used it would require upgrading it would be challenging to bring it up to the quality that the parents/carers required. The ask from parents and carers was for a facility to be homely, whereas Barn Close was currently institutionalised.

Members asked how much information had been communicated to the two new unitary authorities about this issue, and the Executive Director responded to say that the Cabinet Members from both unitary authorities had good portfolio support and would be receiving updates on SEND on a regular basis.

One of the members asked about the number of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and whether the County Council would be making suggestions on how these should be done in future.

The SEND Improvement Strategic Lead said EHCPs involved lots of different specialist services, not just one service, and she gave examples of these. She assured members that work as ongoing to improve these going forward.

One of the members asked how the voice of the child would be heard in the future and how engagement would be done.

The Assistant Director said every school operated with a School Council and the unitary councils would engage with these going forward. Many of these had representation from SEND pupils and the aim would be to involve young people with SEND through mainstream activity as much as possible.

Members asked about the number of boards that would be involved in this going forward. The Assistant Director responded to say there would be one Joint SEND Partnership Board for one year, with separate Integrated Care Boards for Cumberland Council and Westmorland and Furness Council.

Upon conclusion of the debate it was

RESOLVED, that

- (1) the report be received and noted;
- (2) the actions to address the two areas identified for further improvement be noted.

The Chair thanked the officers for the report and presentation.

29 POST INSPECTION IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Members had before them a report from the Executive Director – People which provided them with an overview of the post inspection improvement plan responding to the Ofsted areas of improvement.

Cumbria Children's Services were inspected by Ofsted under the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) framework from 12-30 September 2022. The inspection report was published on 15 November 2022.

The inspection identified six areas for improvements:-

- The response to children who go missing and children who are at risk of exploitation
- The response to children experiencing neglect
- The impact of leaders, managers and independent reviewing officers' oversight and challenge
- The quality of assessments and plans for children in need of help and protection, including safety plans and contingency plans
- The response to children aged 16 and 17 who present as homeless
- The robustness of checks completed in relation to private fostering arrangements

Following publication of the inspection report, local authorities were asked to submit a post-inspection action plan, setting out the work that would be undertaken to address any areas for improvement. Cumbria must submit this action plan to Ofsted by 23 February 2023.

In light of the Ofsted learning work had been undertaken via the children & young people senior leadership team to review the current quality and development plan. The draft post inspection improvement plan sets out the actions to be taken over the next 12 months.

The delivery of this plan would need to be carried forward into the two new local authorities for Cumbria via their children's services, service plans. This work was currently underway via the LGR Children's workstream.

The Chair felt this was a positive and worthwhile process and said members appreciated the opportunity to comment on the action plan.

Members asked about the issue of children going missing and at risk of exploitation and whether the demise of the school attendance truancy officer has exacerbated this.

The Assistant Director agreed this was a good point and there may well be a link especially in relation to vulnerable young people. She agreed to look at the possibility of referencing this in the action plan.

One of the members asked for reassurance that the County Council was robust when checking on private foster carers.

The Assistant Director clarified that the mention of 'private' foster carers in relation to this plan was those whereby the young person was being fostered by a family member or friend. It was not referring to the private sector foster carers as these were regulated by Ofsted and not the County Council.

A question was raised about diversity and whether there was anything in the plan to address this. The Assistant Director confirmed that exploitation and diversity were covered in the plan but would look at this again.

A members asked how the audits were carried out for children that are classed as missing and the Assistant Director clarified how this was done.

The Chair commented that neglect appeared to be one of the most common forms of abuse, and he asked what tools would be used to measure this.

The Assistant Director said the current tool being used was one called 'signs to safety' however, other tools were currently being considered.

Members asked whether staff had enough time to complete all the plans and assessments needed to improve the quality of plans for children in need of help and protection.

The Assistant Director said this would be explored with social workers and other officers to ensure they all understood what a good plan and assessment looked like.

The Assistant Director said leaders, managers and independent reviewing officers would also be reviewing their responsibilities for the impact of oversight and challenge.

The Executive Director commented that he felt there needed to be consistency of standards across the whole county and officers would be considering this.

RESOLVED, that members

- (1) note the update provided;
- (2) note the assurances around the actions proposed in the plan;
- (3) note the requirement for both Cumberland and Westmorland and Furness Councils to implement the learning from the Ofsted inspection.

30 LGR UPDATE

The Scrutiny Board received a presentation from the Executive Director – People and the SEND Improvement Strategic Lead, which covered the following:-

- LGR Requirements
- Services that support children
- Current position
- Service delivery models – Day 1

- Service delivery
- Recruitment and staffing
- ICT systems
- Budgets and grants
- Delivering every day

Members asked whether it would be possible to have an electronic copy of the slides and the Democratic Services Officer agreed to send these out.

The Executive Director ended by thanking all the members of the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Advisory Board for their effort, support and challenge over the years.

RESOLVED, that the update presentation be noted.

31 PORTFOLIO HOLDER UPDATE

The update from the Cabinet Member - Schools and Learning was tabled and noted.

The Cabinet Member – Children's Services then gave members a verbal update.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Members for this informative update.

Members of the Advisory Board thanked the Cabinet Members for all the work they had undertaken on behalf of children and young people during their many years in office.

Mrs Mallinson and Ms McCarron-Holmes left the meeting at this point.

32 BOARD BRIEFING

The Board received a report which provided an update on the activity of the Board and relevant items in the Cabinet Forward Plan.

The Chair thanked the Strategic Policy and Scrutiny Advisor for the diligent way he had gone about his work during his time supporting the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Board, and wished him well for the future.

RESOLVED, that the briefing be noted.

The meeting ended at 12.40 pm