

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

24 JANUARY 2023

PRESENT

Councillor D. Western (in the Chair).

Councillors Miss L. Blackburn (Vice-Chair), F. Hornby, S. Maitland, S. Procter, M.J. Welton, A.M. Whyte, S. Zhi and D. Acton (ex-Officio)

In attendance

Jill McGregor	Corporate Director of Children's Services
Pamela Wharton	Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care
Karen Samples	Director Education Standards, Quality and Performance
Glen Perryman	Head of Service for Provider Services
Laura Barton	Specialist Commissioner
Alexander Murray	Governance Officer

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J. Bennett, R. Duncan, G. Whitham and M.P. Whetton

10. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations were made.

11. MINUTES

The Chair noted that she had been recorded as absent in the minutes and asked that this be amended.

RSOLVED: That, following the above amendment, the minutes of the meeting held 27 September 2023 be agreed as an accurate record.

12. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

No questions were received.

13. FAMILY HELP OFFER

The Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care and the Director Education Standards, Quality and Performance went over the highlights of the presentation circulated within the agenda pack. The presentation covered what family help was, what the Greater Manchester (GM) early help principles were, and the main elements of the Family Hubs including a brief description of what they were, the principles they were based upon, and Trafford's ambitions for Family Hubs.

[Note Councillor Zhi joined the meeting at 18:45.]

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The Committee's attention was then drawn to implementation timeline for the Trafford Team Together (TTT) programme which included a pilot scheme, a design phase, leading to a full scale roll out. The Committee were then provided with an overview of the TTT programme and the role it would play within Trafford's approach to family support. The overview covered the intended outcomes of the TTT, feedback received from the pilot schemes, and details of how the work had already impacted service delivery. The Committee were informed that the family hubs and TTT would be key elements of the Council's future family support offer.

Following the presentation Councillor Acton asked how the family hubs would develop going forward. The Director Education Standards, Quality and Performance responded that Trafford had two family hubs so far and that an appointment would be made for an officer to drive the work forward, especially with regards to the digital offer.

Councillor Acton noted that family hubs were similar to children's centres but with a greater amount of collaboration and expressed his interest in seeing how the hubs developed. In response to Councillor Acton the Corporate Director of Children's Services spoke of the unique approach Trafford was taking to delivering the work. The support received from schools and third sector providers had helped the service to move forward with family hubs in the area, but the complexity of delivering the work collaboratively presented a large challenge.

Councillor Procter noted the presentation did not include information about formal evaluation for the family hubs or TTT. The Councillor raised concerns that if the programme did not have evaluation data from the start as well as the end of the programme the service would not be able to measure the impact of the work they had done. Councillor Procter welcomed the positive feedback the programme had received but stated that it needed to be backed up by formal evaluation. The Corporate Director of Children's Services assured Councillor Procter that there were evaluation tools being used as part of the TTT and work was underway to appoint a Department for Education (DfE) evaluator to review the programme. As part of the continued evaluation of the programme the Council were co-creating assessment tools with partners to ensure they were suitable. The Committee were asked to note that the Council did have a range of measures for early years and school readiness of young people in place including the Ages and Stages Questionnaires (ASQs). Some of the data sat with health services and the Council were working with those partners to ensure there would be a good level of information available for comparison in later evaluations.

Councillor Hornby asked how the programme would be funded. The Corporate Director of Children's Services explained that the programmes would transform and re-invest existing resources to deliver services in a new way. However, the Council would continue to look for opportunities to bid for additional funding. The Director Education Standards, Quality and Performance added that due to the overall level of affluence within the borough Trafford were unlikely to receive additional funding without applying for it and assured the Committee that the team would be looking for opportunities.

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Councillor Blackburn asked how the staff within each hub would be managed. The Corporate Director of Children's Services responded it was difficult to say how the staff would be managed as each of the hubs was designed to meet the needs of the communities and so it would be different in each area. The Corporate Director of Children's Services added that the feedback from internal review of the TTT had been very positive with the adaptability of the model and the involvement of a wide range of partners.

Councillor Welton asked for a description of the pathway for families to access the service and if a diagram of the pathway was available. The Corporate Director of Children's Services responded that there were multiple ways for families to be referred into the service as Trafford were moving away from a standard linear approach to access the service, which made it difficult to represent in a diagram.

Councillor Welton asked how long cases were generally open for. The Corporate Director of Children's Services spoke about how the service was moving towards talking about children and families rather than cases. The Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care responded that when contacted the service looked at the needs of the child and their family to determine who would work with the family to deliver the most appropriate support for an initial 12-week period. Following that 12-week period a review was held to decide what, if any, further support was needed.

Councillor Maitland asked what the Council's team looked like. The Corporate Director of Children's Services responded that one of the key aspects of the model was looking at the skill mix within teams to ensure that they met the needs of users. As part of that work a skills gap had been identified around substance misuse which would be addressed with support from some of the Council's third sector partners who had expertise in that area. The Council's approach was no longer about having a set number of social workers but having a diverse range of people and skills available that were able to adapt to the needs of service users.

Councillor Maitland asked what the new position leading programme would look like. The Director Education Standards, Quality and Performance stated that position would require a high level of skills due to the seniority of the role and a wide range of skills due to the varied approach taken within the programme.

Councillor Procter sent a link to the Department of Health Questionnaire to all in attendance and noted a study which showed that intervening at a very early stage saved society hundreds of thousands overtime. The Corporate Director of Children's Services agreed with the points raised by Councillor Procter and confirmed that the service was working to capture the types of savings mentioned within the study.

RESOLVED: That the presentation be noted.

14. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

The Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care introduced the Presentation, went over the request from Scrutiny which was around placement stability and sufficiency.

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The Specialist Commissioner then went over what sufficiency meant within the Children's and young people's environment. The Committee were asked to note that a summary of the Sufficiency strategy was available on the website and the Specialist Commissioner went over a few of the areas the strategy covered.

The Committee were informed of the national context which included that an increased complexity of need being seen across the country and the regional context mirrored the national picture. The difficulties the region faced were exacerbated by the large number of placements by Councils from outside of the northwest in the area. The Committee were then shown comparison with other GM authorities and statistical neighbours for the local context.

The Specialist Commissioner handed over to the Head of Service for Provider Services who went over Trafford's position for cared for children. The Committee were told of the progress that had been made in reducing the number of children in care and it was hoped it would continue. The level of reduction was slowing down as the service had reached a point where the children who were in care needed that support. The services' sufficiency goal was to increase the number of children who received care within a family setting. Among the older young people in care the focus was upon ensuring that they were placed within suitable accommodation. Of all the children in care 57% were placed within Trafford and it a goal of the service to increase level as wanted children in care to be close to their family, friends, and community. 87% of Children in care were placed within GM and the service also hoped to increase that position further.

The Committee were asked to note the benefits of placement stability and were informed of the plans being implemented to improve placement stability within Trafford. The Head of Service for Provider Services then went through the case studies listed within the presentation. The first case study was of a young person who had had 8 different placements by the age of 10. The Committee were told of the impact the large number of placements had on the young person and the associated costs to the Council. The Committee were informed of the exit plan for the young person which involved placing them with experienced foster carers and having strong wrap around support in place. The second case study was another high-cost placement of a young person who required three members of staff to care for them at all times at a cost of £12,400 per week.

The Head of Service for Provider Services and the Specialist Commissioner then went through the next few slides which covered fostering placements. The Committee were informed of the internal fostering provision and the work the Council had been doing to reduce the number of connected person placements. The Specialist Commissioner spoke about Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) and explained the similarities and differences between IFAs and the internal provision, which included the differences in cost to the Council.

The presentation then moved onto residential placement with the Head of Service for Provider Services covering the Council's internal provision and the Specialist Commissioner providing details of external and unregulated placements. The Presentation concluded with an outline of the challenges the service faced and the plans to meet those challenges through utilisation of both internal and external

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placements with a goal of increasing the internal provision where possible to improve consistency and reduce costs. One innovative approach was the GM housing programme where young people were given the opportunity and support to take ownership of a property themselves.

Following the presentation Councillor Acton stated that he had seen on the news about a home where residents had been abused and asked how Trafford monitored placements to ensure the young people received the care they needed and weren't being abused. The Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care noted Councillor Acton's question and in response gave an overview of the work the Council did as part of their due diligence and the collaboration with other authorities to utilise their knowledge of providers to ensure placements were of sufficient quality. Councillor Acton asked whether the service performed any surprise visits and was told that only Ofsted had the power to perform surprise inspections. The Committee were assured that officers did meet with young people on a regular basis and that they did recognise the Committee's concerns, especially regarding those young people who had difficulties in communicating. The Corporate Director for Children's Services also assured the Committee that following the news story a review of Trafford's placements had been conducted with full assessments being carried out for any placements that were of concern.

Councillor Procter raised concerns that only 57% of Trafford's placements were provided inhouse. The corporate Director of Children's Services responded that the Head of Service for Provider Services was working on a modernisation plan for foster caring. The service recognised word of mouth and the support of foster carers were key elements to attract more foster carers. The Committee were informed of how the nature of fostering had changed in response to the needs of the young people and that the structure of the fostering service had changed to provide an improved level of support for foster carers.

Councillor Procter noted the costs of IFA placements and that the internal placements cost the Council around half the amount and asked what could be done to match their offers. In response the Corporate Director of Children's Services stated that the council were looking at the possibility of developing not-for profit fostering agencies. The Council also benchmarked what they offered foster carers and looked at what was most important to foster carers to ensure that it was in place within Trafford.

Councillor Procter asked about the new for children with complex needs and why the Council did not set up the home themselves. The Corporate Director of Children's Services responded that there were issues around having the property and staff with the required skills. The Committee were informed of the work being done at a GM level which was looking to develop 9 homes across the conurbation. The Corporate Director of Children's Services added that the main issues were around placement sufficiency and the home would offer a lot to the Council.

Councillor Procter asked what was provided that made the high-cost placements so expensive. The Corporate Director of Children's Services answered that it was a large amount of staff time, specialised therapy, and security for the young people.

Councillor Procter asked about the digital campaign, whether it was utilising existing foster cares, and how they would measure the success. The Head of Service for Provider Services responded that the campaign would be using existing foster carers and success would be recruitment being higher than the loss of foster carers. The success of the campaign would also be measured through increasing enquiries and maintaining or increasing the conversion rate of enquiries to appointment, which took around six months from the first contact.

Councillor Blackburn asked what had led to the reduction in connected person placements over the last year. The Head of Service for Provider Services responded that the reduction had been caused by young people moving into permanent arrangements.

Councillor Blackburn asked how many perspective carers drop out or are not found to be suitable. The Corporate Director of Children's Services answered that once they go to assessment stage the dropout rate was quite low, so it was the early interaction where the Council needed to focus and improve.

Councillor Maitland asked whether exit interviews were conducted for foster carers and were there any trends or reasons. The Head of Service for Provider Services responded that exit interviews were offered but there was a low level of take up. The ones that had been completed showed they were leaving due to a range of reasons including change in family circumstances, changes in employment, and change in location but no discernible pattern had been identified.

RESOLVED: That the presentation be noted.

15. IMPACT OF THE COST OF LIVING

This item was deferred to the next meeting of the Committee. The Chair asked that the report at the next meeting include information on how schools were dealing with the increased energy costs.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the item be deferred to the next meeting of the Committee.
- 2) That the report is to contain information on the impact of increased energy costs on schools.

16. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair then went through the other items and asked if Committee Members had anything else they wanted to add but no additional items were raised.

RESOLVED: That the work programme be noted.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 p.m. and finished at 8.50 p.m.