

## **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**19 MARCH 2019**

### **PRESENT**

Councillor D. Western (in the Chair).

Councillors Miss L. Blackburn (Vice-Chair), T. Carey, J. Coupe, J. Dillon, J. Holden, D. Jerrome, A. New, G. Whitham, A.M. Whyte, D. Acton (ex-Officio) and R. Chilton (ex-Officio)

### In attendance

Cathy Rooney	Acting Corporate Director of Children's Services, Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council (TMBC)
Glynis Williams	Acting Director of Safeguarding, TMBC
Karen Samples	Interim Director Education standards and Quality Performance, TMBC
Sue Westwood	Head of Service, Adoption Counts
Mark Bailey	Advocacy and Engagement Officer, TMBC
Atlanta Montague	Trafford Youth Cabinet
Alexander Murray	Democratic and Scrutiny Officer, TMBC
Fabiola Fuschi	Democratic and Scrutiny Officer, TMBC

### **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J.R. Reilly and Khan

### **8. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC**

There were no public questions received.

### **9. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The following declarations of personal interest were made at the meeting;

- Councillor New in relation to her employment as a childminder.
- Councillor Carey in relation to his employment as a teacher.

### **10. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 15 January 2019 be approved as a correct record and Signed by the Chair.

## **11. SCHOOL READINESS**

The Committee received a presentation of the Director of Education Standards, Quality and Performance which sought to inform them of the latest developments in Early Years and School Readiness.

It was reported that the current position of Early Years performance in Trafford was good with 75% of children achieving a good level of development and 100% take up of free early education offer for 2 year old children. A high percentage of school settings and child minders were judged as good or outstanding by Ofsted. However, it was highlighted that this position was not consistent across the borough as there were areas where many children were not achieving a good level of development.

A multi-agency Early Years Strategic Board had been established in Trafford with the aim to increase the proportion of children who were ready for school at the end of Early Years Foundation Stage and to narrow the gap between the highest achievers and the most disadvantaged children. Improving school readiness was also a key priority for the Greater Manchester Combined Authority.

The seven Early Years Strategic Priorities for Trafford were outlined. Early intervention, Early Help, targeted integrated reviews, transition process, targeted support through early detection of speech and language difficulties were some of the enablers utilised to achieve the seven priorities.

Members were also informed that School Readiness Plans had been created for two hotspot areas in Trafford where there were significant inequalities in outcomes: North Locality and Partington. Representatives from a range of agencies across health, education and social care met regularly to monitor progress against action plans. It had been noted that all disadvantaged groups consistently performed less well than other pupils in Trafford and nationally. Furthermore, 44% of children who were not school ready in the North Locality had English as an additional language.

Members sought and received clarification / commented on the following points:

- Take up of free offer for two and three year olds – It was explained that although the take up was already at 100%, there were issues concerning maintaining the attendance after the offer had been accepted.
- Settings closing in Trafford – It was explained that Ofsted visited Trafford annually to inspect Early Years provision. The Executive would look at issues on funding.
- How would it be possible to fill the gap between the attainments of children residing in different part of the Borough and work with vulnerable families?
  - It was explained that an in depth mapping exercise to identify what was accessible to families and where the gaps were would help to devise strategies to reach these groups. Also all settings and schools were challenged to provide significant data to help with the mapping process. Education and social care and health professionals could signpost families and ensure that services were accessible but families could not be forced to take up the offer.

- Speech and language pathway and its duration – It was explained that, a referral for intervention would follow the screening. Initially, a six week intervention would be put in place. If necessary, this would be followed by a formalised language pathway.
- How would Autism be identified and dealt with in Early Years? - It was explained that an Education Psychologist would be present in Early Years settings.

Members acknowledged the importance of the free Early Years Offer for two and three year olds disadvantage children who otherwise would not have the opportunity to experience the benefit of attending education settings from a very early age.

**RESOLVED:** That the content of the presentation on School Readiness be noted.

## **12. REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY**

Consideration was given to a report of the Acting Director of Safeguarding which sought to inform the Committee of Adoption Performance in Trafford and the role of Adoption Counts, the Regional Adoption Agency.

The author of the report was accompanied by the Head of Service of Adoption Counts who delivered a presentation on the work that the agency had undertaken so far.

It was reported that in May 2015, the Government had launched a new policy for Adoption Services. By 2020, all Adoption Services would need to be delivered by a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA). Trafford together with Salford, Manchester, Cheshire East and Stockport formed Adoption Counts. The new structure for Adoption Services aimed to increase the number of children adopted, reduce the length of time to Children waited for to be adopted, and improve post adoption services.

The hub went live in 2017 which provided; a centralised marketing function, a centralised team who received recruitment enquiries, a central register of children and carers, and a strategic plan for the delivery of Adoption Support across the region. It was explained to the Committee that the RAA was working with Trafford to embed partnership and accountability at all levels. This was being done through a strategic partnership board with members from all the local authorities who formed the RAA. Bi-annual meetings took place with authorities to share good practice, learning and challenges. Six-weekly operations groups were held to track the progress of every child both in the RAA and in the individual authority.

An Adoption Scorecard was used to measure the agencies performance in two areas; the time elapsed between the child entering care and moving with an adopting family, and the time elapsed between a local authority receiving a Court order to place a child and the child being matched with an adoptive family. Although Trafford was slightly over the thresholds, it was performing well compared to England average. It was reported that in 2018/19 to date, there had

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been 15 decisions to place a child for adoption, six placement orders had been granted, seven children had been matched with prospective adopters and four adoption orders had been granted.

Members sought and received clarification / commented on the following points:

- Support services for adopters – It was explained that there was a system of universal support which included; coffee mornings, play groups, family fun days, informative evening seminars, and information concerning transition from nursery to primary school. Families who had greater difficulties could access targeted support via a referral/assessment system. The Adoption Support Fund was used for therapeutic intervention on children.
- Issues affecting Hard to Place Children – It was explained that Hard to Place Children were children over four years of age, groups of siblings, children from black or minority ethnic communities and children with disabilities. Different strategies had been put in place to find families for these children. The strategies focused upon ensuring that potential adopters could meet the children in informal settings such as a picnic to present their real profile. It was also reported that very few adoptions broke down in Trafford.
- Recruitment and assessment of prospective adopters and involvement of Elected Members in the performance management of this process – It was explained that an Elected Member was part of the Panel of experts who decided on the suitability of a family to adopt. Furthermore, reporting mechanisms were in place for the performance of the adoption services.
- Adoptive families' recruitment figures and targets – It was explained that although there was a predicted target of 100 adoptive families for 2018/19 only 69 had been approved to date. The Committee were informed that some families took longer to go through the process and there were a number of cases that had begun in 2018/19 that may not conclude until the following financial year.
- Ensuring that children eligible for adoption benefitted from Pupil Premium – It was explained that the Virtual School Head had a statutory responsibility for managing Pupil Premium funding for the children they looked after and for allocating it to schools or alternative provisions.
- Introduction of Regional Adoption Agency and experience of adoptive families – It was explained that a survey was undertaken every year to identify any concerns adoptive families had in relation to the process.

**RESOLVED:** That the content of the report be noted.

### **13. TRAFFORD YOUTH PARLIAMENT**

The Committee received a presentation on the five priority issues that had been identified by young people in Trafford between August and October 2018. The presentation was delivered by the representative of Trafford Youth Cabinet who was also the new candidate for Trafford's Youth Parliament. The Advocacy and Engaging Officer was also in attendance to address the enquiries of the Committee.

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The five priority areas were outlined. These were:

- End knife crime;
- Homelessness, every person should have a place to live and the opportunity to live comfortably;
- Equal pay – equal work, promote the value of young workers and recognise their entitlement to a fair wage;
- Mental health, services should be improved with young people's help and should be available in schools;
- Transport, make public transport less expensive and safer.

Members sought and received clarification / commented on the following points:

- Knife crime – half of the young people consulted said that they had direct experience of knife crime and stated that this was a problem in Trafford;
- Although climate change was not on the top ten issues considered for voting, young people in Trafford were very sensitive to it;
- Opportunities to carry out joint work on some of these priorities with other Youth Councils in Greater Manchester (GM) – It was explained that Trafford Youth Council was part of a GM group made up of 40 members representing each one of the ten Local Authorities in GM and 20 members from various third sector groups. They worked together on issues such as Curricula for Life and Transport. There was also a North West Regional Group and representatives of Trafford Youth Council were taking part to a meeting in Lancaster next Sunday;
- Opportunity to liaise with the Living Wage Campaign to foster equal pay regardless of age; need for a system where employers statutorily would know what was expected from them;
- Mental Health issues and Kooth – It was explained that Kooth was a free, anonymous, on-line counselling, advice and support service for 11-18 year olds in Trafford. It operated on a self-referral basis and it was available 365 days. The service was commissioned by Trafford Council and it was also available in Manchester, Warrington and Cheshire East.
- Youth provision accessibility and resources.

The Committee commended the representatives of the Youth Council for the work undertaken to identify the five priority issues for Trafford and wished them well in their activity to influence decision makers to address these matters.

**RESOLVED:** That the information be noted.

#### **14. CHILD PROTECTION PLAN UPDATE**

The Committee was briefed by the Acting Director of Safeguarding on the latest development on the Child Protection Plan. A progress report had been presented to this Committee on 9<sup>th</sup> October 2018. The Acting Director explained that, currently, the figures were the same as those presented in October 2018. A robust action plan was in place and all the milestones in the plan were in the process of being achieved. Practitioners actively worked with vulnerable young people to ensure that they were in control of their own plans. The “restorative approach” to Child Case Conference to make them more accessible to families using less intimidating settings to hold the meetings and easy to read documentation, had

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been in place for six months. These changes had to be introduced to make the system more effective and efficient and to change the culture of referrals and escalation to rebalance the number of young people requiring social care services. A peer review had been arranged to evaluate the implementation of changes but it had to be postponed to allow an Ofsted inspection to take place. The peer review would be rescheduled.

Up to date information on the progress made in reducing the number of children in need of a Child Protection Plan and to strengthen the Children in Need offer, would be brought to a future meeting of this Committee.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1) That the update be noted;
- 2) That a comprehensive progress report be brought to the first meeting of this Committee in the new Municipal Year.

**15. SEND TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

The Committee considered a report of the Democratic and Scrutiny Officer which sought to summarise the work carried out by the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish Group review into the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) process in Trafford.

The report detailed the approach taken, the information gathered and the findings of the Councillors who took part in the review. Ten areas of concern had been identified. Communication was highlighted as one of the main issues in terms of encouraging professionals to utilise accessible language when dealing with children and their families and to establish contact between professionals and parents at an early stage. Staff training and turnover were also identified as areas of concern and the importance of ensuring that members of staff had regular access to training and mentoring, so that they could keep up to date with the legal requirements of the ECHP process, was stressed by the group. The lack of the voice of the child was another fundamental theme that emerged from the review. The group felt that the Council needed to do more to enable children to speak up, e.g. by asking for their views, and parents needed to be more involved in discussions between their children and professionals.

The Committee agreed to delegate to the Chair and the members of the Task and Finish Group the approval of the recommendations that would be brought to the attention of the Executive and relevant Portfolio Holder for their consideration. The Committee also agreed that the recommendations were to be circulated via email to the rest of the Committee before being submitted to the Executive and relevant Portfolio Holder.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1) That the Committee delegate the approval of recommendations to be submitted to the Executive to the Chair and the members of the Task and Finish Group.
- 2) That the recommendations be circulated via email to the rest of the Committee before being submitted to the Executive.

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The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and finished at 8.32 pm