

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

8 OCTOBER 2019

PRESENT

Councillor D. Western (in the Chair).

Councillors T. Carey (Vice-Chair), Miss L. Blackburn, J. Dillon, J. Holden, S. Longden, A. New, S.B. Procter and D. Acton (ex-Officio)

In attendance

Ged Rowney	Interim Director of Children's Services
Karen McCallum	Head of Education of Vulnerable Children Service and Senior Advisor
Fabiola Fuschi	Governance Officer

Also Present

Councillor Hynes, Deputy Leader and Executive Members for Children and Social Care

Councillor Carter, Lead Member for Education

29. ATTENDANCES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Dr. Barclay and Mrs. Khan.

30. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

31. URGENT BUSINESS (IF ANY)

There were no items of urgent business received.

32. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no public questions received.

33. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Committee gave consideration to the minutes of the meeting held on 9th July 2019. Item 16 – Attendances, should read Councillor Shirley Procter and not Councillor Judith Proctor.

Members objected that the resolution for Item 24 – Update on Ofsted Report May 2019, Inspection of Children's Social Care Services, requested that the update for October's meeting include the action plan to address Ofsted recommendations. However, this was not part of today's agenda.

Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee
8 October 2019

The Interim Corporate Director for Children's Services explained that Children's Services Improvement Plan was publically available on the Council's web-site. However, copies of the plan were handed over to Members at the commencement of the meeting.

RESOLVED that, subject to the amendments agreed above, the minutes of the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 9th July 2019 be approved as a correct record.

34. MINUTES OF THE START WELL BOARD

The Committee gave consideration to the minutes of the Start Well Board meeting held on 27th June 2019. Members queried whether funding had been identified to support the Maternity Voices Partnership. It was agreed that a verbal update would be provided at the next meeting.

RESOLVED -

1. That the minutes of the Start Well Board meeting held on 27th June 2019 be noted.
2. That a verbal update concerning the funding to support the Maternity Voices Partnership be provided at the next meeting of the Committee.

35. EXCLUSION FROM SCHOOL AND OTHER RELATED ASPECTS

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Education of Vulnerable Children Service and Senior Adviser which informed of the processes in place in Trafford to manage school exclusions.

The author of the report and the Interim Corporate Director for Children's Service were in attendance to present the information and address the enquiries of the Committee.

The officer reported that the Vulnerable Children service maintained good working relationships with schools in Trafford through the provision of advice, guidance and recommendations. Fixed period exclusions in Trafford were lower than the national average and fixed period exclusions of children in need and those of children under child protection were also low. Although more data was required for a breakdown of vulnerable groups, existing data indicated that there was a higher proportion of exclusion of pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) than expected. With regard to permanent exclusions, since 2013/14, the rate across Trafford had risen from 0.07% to 0.16% in 2017/18. In 2018/19 figures had shown a downturn to 0.12%. The officer added that data relating to exclusions, admissions and SEND was stored in three different systems; consequently, it took a long time to compare information. A more up to date and efficient system was required to gather and compare data efficiently for better analysis.

Members sought clarification with regard to the percentage of school exclusions in Trafford, in 2017/18, in comparison to the percentage in England and in the North West. Officers reported the following statistics of children excluded from school:

Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee
8 October 2019

Trafford 0.6%, England 0.1% and the North West 0.11%. Officers added that, since 2015, there had been a constant increase in school exclusions. Members queried the reason for this trend. It was explained that several factors such as the SEND reform, decrease in school funding and its impact on school staff. Changes in society also impacted on behaviours and school's expectation. Members queried why it was not possible to identify the schools with high levels of exclusions and SEND. Officers explained that figures varied from year to year. However, schools with high cases of exclusions were those which took the highest number of pupils in year. Members raised concerns with regard to the fact that the high rate of exclusions in Trafford could be caused by the cuts to school budgets. Officers explained that certain data, such as ethnicity of children excluded from school, was currently being recorded manually by individual schools; consequently, gathering these figures was very difficult and a new system was necessary. It was explained that plans were in place to acquire a system able to capture the necessary data. Members queried the cost of the new system. Officers explained that, in Trafford, all schools but one had their own admission process. A solution could be for all schools to have a unitary authority managing admissions. With regard to academies sharing data on exclusions, it was explained that it was a statutory duty to report these figures, although, at times, this data was not communicated by schools quickly enough. Members queried what interaction existed with pupils who were out of the area and their families. Officers explained that in the instance of fixed period exclusions, the school would address the issue with the pupils and their families. Officers also explained that the exclusion of children with EHCP would be very rare. Officers added that local authorities and schools had invested substantial resources to make sure that school exclusion was the last resort to manage pupils' behaviour.

Members also raised concern with regard to the fact that off-rolling of Year 10 pupils was a common pattern to avoid bad exam results. However, this was difficult to evidence.

The Executive Member for Children's Social Care explained that there was a national movement that aimed to put pressure on Ofsted in order to increase support in schools through pastoral care and early intervention strategies. The Executive Member mentioned the work of Children and Young People's Scrutiny's Task and Finish Group on SEND and School Exclusion and stated that it was important to have mechanisms in place, such as scrutiny committees, to ensure that Trafford was an inclusive borough.

Officers explained that the Bridge Programme offered tailor-made support to ensure that, after a period of time spent at the Pupil Referral Unit, children could go back to the mainstream school. If a child was permanently excluded twice, schools could refuse to admit him/her.

RESOLVED –

1. That the report be noted;
2. That the actions outlined in the report be endorsed:
 - a. A new data system be purchased which can bring together all of the non-academic information around pupils, so that vulnerable cohorts can be more easily identified and tracked.

- b. When the Behaviour and Standards Officer post is filled, the Officer carries out:
 - i. An analysis of permanent exclusion from secondary school to determine how many permanently excluded pupils have transferred into the school after the start of Year 7;
 - ii. Initiates shared conversations across groups of schools to consider the appropriate length of fixed term exclusions depending on age and what the behaviour policy reach relates to.

36. UPDATE ON OFSTED REPORT MAY 2019 - INSPECTION OF CHILDREN SOCIAL CARE SERVICES

The Committee gave consideration to a presentation of the Interim Corporate Director of Children's Services which provided the latest developments on the Children's Improvement Programme. The programme had been devised following the outcome of the Ofsted inspection in May 2019 to address the regulator's recommendations.

The Executive Member for Children's Social Care was in attendance to respond to the enquiries of the Committee.

The Senior Officer explained that phase one of the programme, "Responding", was being completed and in the next weeks, phase 2, "Strengthening" would start being embedded, focussing on shifting culture to support families at the earliest stages of issues arising. There were nine work streams with 100% of tasks either complete or on target. The Improvement Board monitored progress against the action plan. A project manager was in place to bring forward the programme. The Department for Education (DfE) funded a peer support approach and Trafford was working with Cheshire West and Chester Council focussing on front door services, children's first response and MARAT (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Team). In September, members of staff had been trained on the Voice of the Child as part of a major drive to engage with young people and their families. The Restorative Practice Approach started to be embedded to build on strength of families. The referral forms had been updated and Liquidlogic (social care management system) had been modernised and a new dashboard had been introduced in order to manage information more effectively. Front line staff had been trained on a new level of needs and a new risk register had been introduced to mitigate potential risk that had been identified. An Early Help offer had been put together with additional support. Child protection plans and child protection cases had reduced. Proportion of Looked After Children (LAC) with annual health assessment had been completed above target. Referral decisions had been made in line with timescales.

The Interim Corporate Director of Children's Services went on to inform the Committee of work strands that required improvement. LAC cases had increased, although, lately, figures had decreased through an intense assessment process. The number of open cases was on the increase; officers explained that this might be due to Ofsted report making agencies and partners more risk adverse and reporting cases more quickly.

Members sought and received clarification on the risk register, specifically the post-mitigation activity and how related to the objectives highlighted. The Committee requested to see the risk assessment in detail. Members queried whether the Ofsted visit next week would find that Trafford Council was performing according to its standards. The Senior Officer explained that Ofsted's visits would take place periodically to ensure scrutiny of the improvement process which took place in stages. A new, full inspection would take place in two years.

The Committee also queried open cases and whether there were any common themes. It was explained that a common theme was certainly caseloads for members of staff. However, management was currently working to ensure that workers had a maximum of 20 cases, currently 19-21. Ofsted wanted to see progress and development in the areas identified for improvement. The Committee asked when a permanent Corporate Director of Children's Services would be appointed. It was explained that the interviews were on progress. The Committee also queried the reasons for such a sudden deterioration in the Ofsted rating. The Lead Member for Children's Social Care explained that, over a number of years, social workers' caseload had increased substantially, exceeding national standards and managers had been unable to properly audit children's files. Consequently, leaders had not had effective oversight of the situation. Following the inspection, the leader and deputy leader of the Council were members of the Improvement Board and a more rigorous scrutiny of data sets available was in place.

Members asked what progress had been made against the four measures in red related to Early Help. The lead member for Children's Social Care explained that a piece of work had recently been completed to make the Early Help offer more effective through modified levels of need and supporting schools where the requirement did not meet social care intervention. Members also requested to have more information with regard to the Risk Heat Map, in particular, the service performance indicators.

RESOLVED: -

1. That the update be noted;
2. That more information be provided with regard to the Risk Heat Map, in particular, the service performance indicators.

37. FOSTERING PROCESS

The Committee considered a progress report of the Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care on the recruiting activity to increase fostering capacity in the Borough. The Interim Corporate Director of Children's Services attended the meeting to present the information and address the enquiries of Members.

The target for 2019/20 was to recruit 18 fostering household. To date, 10 fostering households had been approved and 9 were currently being assessed. The service delivery risks were outlined. These consisted in delay in allocation for assessment due to capacity within the Family Placement team; however, at present, there were no applicants who were unallocated.

Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee
8 October 2019

The Corporate Director of Children's Services draw the attention of the Committee on the fact that 8 young people had moved not according to the plan. Studies would be carried out to establish why this had happened.

Members queried why only one Fostering Plus Household had been approved. Officers explained that the services continued to actively recruit and five additional carers were being through the process.

Members also asked how many foster carers there were in Trafford and how Children's Services balanced experienced foster carers with the less experienced ones. The Interim Corporate Director explained that in Trafford there were 128 foster families. Regular recruitment took place to ensure that new foster parents replaced those who had left the scheme. Training and mentoring was in place to support foster parents who also had their own peer support groups such as coffee mornings. The Committee asked about a recent survey carried out with foster parents. The Officer explained that this was an independent survey conducted by Ofsted. Some issues had been identified and these were being addressed with the involvement of Have Your Say group. The Committee queried about the lack of capacity to develop in house specialist fostering scheme. The Officer explained that there was an issue with recruiting foster carers across all authorities. Trafford Council was looking at increasing in house provision. However, a long term investment process was being planned for 2020/21.

Members queried about the in house specialist fostering services that existed a few years ago. It was explained that this was not financially viable. Members also asked whether any comparative work had been done to establish the most effective way of recruiting foster carers. It was explained that there was an ongoing campaign through social media as well as posters on public transports and through collaborative work with other authorities in Greater Manchester. Members sought and received clarification on the outcome of a meeting with foster carers concerning the Ofsted inspection as well as ways in which the Authority listened to the Voice of the Child and the input of Children in Care Council. Members carried on querying the reason why some children were placed with foster parents linked to Independent Fostering Agencies. It was explained that the main reason was to match the child with the right placement.

RESOLVED that the content of the report be noted.

38. OUT OF AREA PLACEMENTS

The Interim Corporate Director of Children's Services delivered a presentation on Out of Area Placements. Data was shared with Members concerning the number of placements with Independent Fostering Agencies, their lengths and costs. Figures were also provided about in-house foster and external residential placements.

Members sought and received clarification on progress concerning the development of in house provision for complex cases.

RESOLVED that the content of the presentation be noted.

39. CHILD PROTECTION PLAN UPDATE

The Committee gave consideration to a progress report of the Strategic Lead Quality Assurance and Improvement on the Child Protection Re-plans which occurred when a child that had already gone through the Child Protection process, was subject to a subsequent plan. In the last ten months, there had been 32 re-plans equating to 20%; this figure was in line with national and statistical neighbours and it represented a substantial improvement compared to March 2018 when the percentage of re-plans had been 29%. The improvement had been determined by the implementation of restorative Child Protection processes and close supervision of the Strategic Lead to ensure consistent application of thresholds.

The Interim Corporate Director of Children's Services was in attendance to present the information and address the enquiries of the Committee.

RESOLVED that the content of the report be noted.

40. CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD UPDATE

The Chair informed the Committee of the topics discussed at the latest meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board. Children in care had explained the importance of having their mobile phones to maintain contact with their friends when arriving at a new placement. Discussions took place with regard to care leavers and the importance of preparing for life outside of care and the support available. Officers reported that the themes raised by young people in care were investigated and feedback would be provided at the following meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board.

RESOLVED that the update be noted.

41. WORK PROGRAMME 2019/20

Members considered the work programme for the current municipal year. They noted the increase in needs and waiting times to access mental health services for children and young people. Therefore, the Committee agreed to start a task and finish group on Healthy Young Minds.

RESOLVED -

1. That: the work programme 2019/20 be noted;
2. That: a task and finish group be formed to focus on Healthy Young Minds, mental health services for children and young people.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and finished at 8.22 pm