

Meeting	Children, Education and Communities Policy and Scrutiny Committee
Date	27 September 2021
Present	Councillors Baker (Chair), Webb (Vice-Chair), Fenton, Fitzpatrick, Heaton, Barker and Orrell
In Attendance (from 5:54pm)	Councillor Cuthbertson (Executive Member)

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## **7. Declarations of Interest**

Members were asked to declare, at this point in the meeting, any personal interests, not included on the Register of Interests, or any prejudicial or disclosable pecuniary interests they may have in respect of business on the agenda.

None were declared.

## **8. Minutes**

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting of the committee held on 6 July 2021 be approved as a correct record and then signed by the Chair.

## **9. Public Participation**

It was reported that there had been no registrations to speak at the meeting under the Council's Public Participation Scheme.

## **10. Reducing Service Cost Boards**

Members considered a report that provided a summary of Reducing Service Cost Boards across Education and Skills and Children's Social Care. It was agreed that the meeting would focus primarily on the Children's Social Care Reducing Service Costs Board, as this was the area that the Committee had been specifically asked to investigate.

It was noted that the Assistant Director of Adult Social Care was in attendance to present the report along with the Director of People, who had dialled into the meeting.

Officers explained the role of the Reducing Services Cost Board, highlighting how they worked, the key financial pressures and what was being done to tackle these issues. It was noted that:

- Each section of the People's directorate had their own Reducing Cost Board which fed into a Cost Control Board chaired by the Director of People.
- The Cost Control Board met fortnightly to consider the Reducing Cost Boards plans and any issues that could not be managed by the individual Boards. This information was then fed back to Corporate Services and Corporate Management Team.

The Director of People invited questions in response to the written report, which included how the overspend was being mitigated in relation to Children's Services. It was noted that:

- There had been a rise in demand of early help and mental health services. There was a cohort of young people that required residential care due to more complex needs.
- Early help services had been redesigned and families were receiving more targeted support earlier through children's social care services. There were improved family early help assessments (FEHA's) in place, which were used by other agencies to provide a more sufficient early help offer.
- There was a shortage of experienced social workers and the cost of agency staff was a challenge across the country. Officers had mirrored the approach around the region with 'grow your own' schemes such as the approved and supported year in employment (ASYE).
- A decision for referral to a social worker was made within 24 hours, although any urgent child protection matters, would quickly be addressed.
- There was a stable management team in place and fifteen Social Workers had been trained and were in post. Social Worker apprentices had been recruited and there was a social work academy in place.
- The agency market was lucrative and very attractive to experienced social workers. It continued to be very difficult to recruit and retain experienced social workers in the

complex areas, such as child protection, so a career grade had been introduced and caseloads were kept low.

- The figures for the twelve month spend on agency staff were requested and the Director of People agreed to circulate these to Committee Members.
- Placement costs for children was high so there had been investment in a foster carer campaign, which had been successful in exceeding the target for recruitment.
- The annual review of fostering allowances would be reviewed and would take into account the national review.
- There was a crisis in the care provision for young people with complex needs, including mental health issues. The Director of Commissioning and Prevention was leading on working with providers to develop provision and an integrated children's system.
- An OFSTED inspection was imminent.
- Officers were working with the White Rose Group on regional and national foster carer recruitment campaigns and the Director agreed to provide Members with the number of foster carers coming through the White Rose Group.
- There was currently 262 children and young people in City of York Council's (CYC) care and the expenditure did not lower significantly when a child was placed. There was not a linear relationship with the numbers of children in care and the costs associated with this. York was working on its own provision, improved early preventative measures and the Autism Strategy to reduce costs.
- The special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) review, commissioned by the Department of Education, had still not been published.

Following further discussion, the Chair noted that at a previous forum meeting the Committee had considered home to school transport and the results of the inclusion review. The Director of People highlighted the following points:

- The Dedicated Schools Grant budget was spent in consultation with the schools forum and may merit an individual review.
- The high spend and challenge within the inclusion review was related to post 19's leaving the area for education and employment.

- The inclusion review was central to providing local provision, which would be more useful to the children within the city.

In response to questions from Members regarding the Education and Skills Reducing Costs Board, it was noted that:

- There was a continued rise in requests for autism assessment and for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP's) for children where autism was a factor.
- There was also a rise in children with emotional needs requiring EHCP's.
- Officers were working with health partners and schools to enhance mental health support, as pre-diagnosis support reduced the need for diagnosis and EHCP's. Officers were also working to establish why some parents did not engage in the 2 year old health check, which would allow problems to be identified earlier and support put in place more quickly.
- The academisation of Danesgate was currently not being pursued.

Officers were thanked for their update and it was confirmed by the Chair that further detail on children and young people in care would be provided at the next meeting.

Resolved:

- (i) That the report be noted.
- (ii) That the new Secretary of State be written to regarding the delay in the publication of the SEND review.

Reason: To ensure the Committee were kept up to date with progress in reducing service costs.

## 11. **Work Plan**

Members considered the Committee's draft work plan for the 2021/22 municipal year.

Following discussions, it was:

Resolved:

- (i) That a finance first quarter monitoring report for children's services be received at the next meeting.
- (ii) That the new Director of Commissioning and Prevention be invited to the Forum on 7 December to discuss the Autism Strategy.
- (iii) That the Early Help via CYC Local Area Teams update, including the Community Hubs scrutiny review interim report and the Holiday Activities and Food Programme 2021 update, including winter planning, be moved to 4 January 2022.

Reason: To keep the work plan updated.

## **12. Urgent Business**

There was a request made by Cllr Webb to discuss the departure of two senior members of staff.

This was rejected by the Chair who noted that Staffing Matters and Urgency Committee would consider this on 18 October. The Chair confirmed she was content that interim measures were in place.

Cllr R Baker, Chair

[The meeting started at 5.30 pm and finished at 7.03 pm].