



To be submitted to the Council at its meeting on the 17th September 2020

CHILDREN AND LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL

9TH JULY 2020

Present:

Councillor Freeston (in the Chair)
Councillors Abel, Cairns, Rodwell, Rudd, K Swinburn and Wheatley

Officers in attendance:

Joanne Hewson (Chief Operating Officer)
Michelle Thompson (Assistant Director Women's and Children's Services –
Clinical Commissioning Group)
Megan Dennison (Assistant Director for Children's Services)
Paul Allen (Strategic Lead – Business Partnering)
Zoe Campbell (Scrutiny and Committee Advisor)

Also in attendance:

Councillor Ian Lindley, Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Young
People

SPCLL.1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received for this meeting from Councillors
Goodwin and Woodward and Greg Marsden, Church of England
Representative.

SPCLL.2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received in respect of any item on
the agenda for this meeting.

SPCLL.3 QUESTION TIME

There were no questions from members of the public for this meeting.

SPCLL.4 MINUTES

The minutes of the Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 30th January 2020 were agreed as an accurate record.

SPCLL.5 TRACKING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SCRUTINY PANEL

The panel received a report from the Statutory Scrutiny Officer tracking the recommendations previously made by this scrutiny panel, which was updated for reference at this meeting.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

SPCLL.6 FORWARD PLAN

The panel considered the Forward Plan and members were asked to identify any items for examination by this Panel via the pre-decision call-in procedure.

RESOLVED – That the Forward Plan be noted.

SPCLL.7 CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE IMPROVEMENT

The panel received a report summarising the Council's response to the Ofsted monitoring visit in 2019, and progress on the identified actions within the Department for Education (DfE) Improvement Notice

Ms Hewson explained to the panel that the DfE sent a letter to the Local Authority to confirm that the escalation measures had been removed. Progress would continue to be measured over the next six months to ensure that improvements continued to be made.

A member queried if the DfE had made any allowances and been understanding about the rate of progress throughout the Covid-19 lockdown period? Ms Hewson confirmed that DfE were due to visit in May 2020 and this has been moved to September 2020 due to the circumstances around lockdown. She reassured the panel that officers were reporting back to the DfE on a weekly basis to give them reassurance of the progress made against the plan.

Members were pleased to see in the report that the number of cases each social worker had, was dramatically reduced. A member queried if this was financially sustainable and how was the extra resources being funded? Ms Hewson explained that the Council had put investment into a project team to reduce the caseloads which enabled officers to interrogate each case. They found a number of cases that did not necessitate social care intervention and these cases would be repositioned in the early help offer and some of the families referred to the local family hubs for support, advice and guidance. Officers were

confident that working with families at an earlier stage was already seeing benefits. Officers were also reviewing the thresholds for referrals and forging relationships with the voluntary sector and other partners including schools to offer families much needed support within their communities.

A member queried why the caseloads were high? Ms Hewson confirmed that this increase in numbers and the demand on the services was common across most local authorities. She explained it was key to establish what the stabilised number of caseloads were going forward so that resources could be allocated accordingly in the future.

Members were keen to understand what support was being offered to those families who were borderline of requiring social care. Ms Hewson reassured the panel that officers were aware that there were families who would require support during the covid-19 lockdown a Vulnerability Hub was set up support families across the borough. The hub made over 4000 telephones to families during this time and where required offering them help and support. Schools were also able to contact the hub and escalate concerns over any child or young person. All these calls were followed up on. Ms Hewson confirmed that the work of the hub was positively received by families and schools.

Cllr Lindley acknowledged all the hard work and dedication by officers in making significant progress towards the improvement plan and that it should be celebrated. Children's' social care was in a better place than 10 months ago and it was key that members recognised the work done is a short space of time.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

SPCLL.8 CHILDREN & LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL WORK PROGRAMME 2020/21

The panel received and agreed a report outlining the panel's work programme for the ensuing municipal year 2020/21

The panel discussed the work programme and suggested that the following items be considered:

- To receive the Youth Crime Board report at a future meeting.
- Use of outdoor space for children and young people if there were to be another further lockdown to reduce the impact on children's mental health.
- Children's dental care and oral hygiene.

RESOLVED – That the items be considered in the work programme for 2020/21.

SPCLL.9 PROVISIONAL OUTTURN REPORT 2019-20

The panel received a report from the Director of Resources and Governance providing key information regarding the Council's provisional financial outturn for 2019/20.

Members queried that given we don't know what financial support that would be given by government to help local authorities how could the financial position be predicted going forward given that these are unprecedented times with the Covid-19 pandemic. Mr Allen explained that it was difficult to forecast. So far, the Council had received £9.6m grants to support adult services, food hubs and extra support where required. It was uncertain whether the government would give local councils further grants to support the loss of income however we might get support round loss of income. Mr Allen gave an examples of staff expenses where savings had been made during the lock down. He confirmed that the quarter one monitoring report was due to go to Cabinet at this would give a better financial picture.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

SPCLL.10 QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDER

There were no questions for the Portfolio Holder at this meeting.

There being no further business, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 5.20 p.m.