

## **CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

MEETING, 20<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2020

Present – Councillors Iqbal (Chairman), Brady (Vice-Chairman), Connor, Donaghy, Fletcher, Gibbon, Heslop, Khurram, McGeown, McMulkin (as deputy for Councillor Ismail), Murray, Newall, Radcliffe (as deputy for Councillor Dean), Walsh and Weatherby.

### Also in attendance

Canon C. Bracegirdle	-	Co-opted Member
Councillor Galloway	-	Executive Cabinet Member for Children's Services
Ms. B. Brown	-	Director of People
Mr. I. Walker	-	Assistant Director of Children's Social Care and Early Help
Mr. P. Rankin	-	Assistant Director of Performance, Planning and Resources
Mrs. H. Gorman	-	Borough Solicitor
Mrs. V. Ridge	-	Democratic Services Manager
Ms. S. Bradshaw	-	Principal Democratic Services Officer

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Dean and Ismail and Ms. J. Bond, Co-opted Member.

Councillor Iqbal in the Chair.

### **1. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

Resolved – That the minutes of the proceedings of the meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2019 were submitted and signed as a correct record.

## **2. CHILDREN'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19**

The Director of People introduced the speakers for a presentation which detailed the response from Children's Services to Covid-19.

The Assistant Director of Performance, Planning and Resources presented on Schools & Early Years:-

- Vast majority of schools and early years providers remained open for vulnerable children and children of keyworkers;
- Over 100 requests for keyworker places were managed during lockdown;
- Children began moving back to schools from 1<sup>st</sup> June, 2020 following detailed risk assessments; and
- Planning was underway for September, 2020.

The Assistant Director of Children's Social Care and Early Help advised members on the impact on service demand in Staying Safe:-

- The increasing demand on the system;
- There was a reduction in Looked After Children in comparison to other Local Authorities who had seen an increase; and
- A strategy for Demand Management was being implemented.

Referral rates:-

- Downturn in referrals from partner agencies post-lockdown with incremental weekly increases thereafter;
- Schools referrals at 25% of previous levels;

- Complexity of referrals leading to high levels of Strategy Meetings; and
- Substance misuse, alcohol, mental health, poor home conditions and domestic abuse were recurring issues.

Launch of the Early Help Offer:-

- 4 High level Measures –
  - Reduction in Child in Need cases.
  - Reduction in Child Protection cases.
  - Reduction in Looked After Children numbers.
  - Increase in Early Help Assessments and associated plans to respond to need earlier.
- Earlier identification of need system-wide and ability to respond, thus ensuring response was more timely.
- Increased capacity for Step Down cases and associated reduction in re-referral rates.
- Implementation of Early Help delivery model with Early Help Access Point impacting on reducing inappropriate referrals to Social Care and therefore reducing the No Further Action rate. It was advised that there was an increasing demand on the whole system.

The Committee also received a presentation from the Director of People Revenue in relation to the Children's final outturn position for 2019/2021, viz:-

- Significant overspend projected for Children's Social Care and Education.
- Placement pressures continued to be an issue. Steps were being taken however to reduce placement costs and retain children within the Borough and at home safely where possible.
- Transport costs for children remained to be an issue.
- Children with complex and additional needs often had to be placed outside the Borough with higher

cost implications. Officers were working hard to address this in line with all other Local Authorities across the country who were experiencing the same situation.

Members in their deliberations made the following comments/observations:-

- Parents concerns about their children returning to school in September, 2020;
- Referral rates were 25% on previous levels. Was there confidence that no children had been missed by the system during the Covid-19 pandemic;
- Concerns were raised as regards the budget overspend and it was questioned as to how many children were placed outside of the Borough and at what cost;
- The budget was £12m adrift at this time in the year with Covid-19 continuing to have a negative financial impact. It was queried how this was being addressed;
- The home-schooling programme for those children not back at school in September
- There was a notable difference in approach with individual schools for those children starting reception in September, 2020;
- It was queried whether the budget deficit was from the previous financial year and how this would be funded;
- The number of Looked After Children in Farnworth appeared to be higher than the average across the remainder of the Borough. It was queried whether children were being brought into that area or whether it was an issue relating to the area itself;
- It was raised as to what level of help there would be in respect of mental health support for children and staff returning to the schools in September; and
- It was questioned as to whether there would be sufficient providers to support children after lockdown; were businesses still operating and managing financially due to the downturn in attendance during lockdown; and
- Sincere thanks were given to all staff for their work during the Covid-19 pandemic. It was acknowledged that the

settling down period should be reviewed into the new academic year in September.

Resolved - That the presentations be noted.

### **3. THE COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME, 2020 / 2021**

The Director of People gave a brief presentation to members which put forward suggestions for inclusion in the Committee Work Programme for 2020/2021, which were as follows, viz:-

- Inspections, Youth Justice, CSC and Demand Management;
- School Results;
- SEND; and
- EH and Demand Management.

During their deliberations, Councillors also put forward the following areas, viz:-

- Standing item on Covid-19; and
- Looked After Children.

Members were also advised that if they had any other items for inclusion in the work programme they should email them to Vicky Ridge.

Resolved – (i) That the various documents and the presentation be noted.

(ii) That the suggested work programme items be noted and that discussions be now held with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of this Committee and the Director of People Services and a draft programme be prepared for agreement at the next meeting.

(The meeting started at 6.00 p.m. and finished at 7.00 p.m.)