

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee

held on Monday, 28th September, 2020 at Virtual Meeting

PRESENT

Councillor J Saunders (Chairman)
Councillor C Bulman (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors M Addison, J Barber, M Beanland, D Brown, J Buckley, P Butterill, S Handley, A Moran, L Smith and N Wylie

PORTFOLIO HOLDERS IN ATTENDANCE

Councillor K Flavell, Portfolio for Children and Families

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Jacky Forster, Director of Education and 14-19 Skills
Madeleine Lowry, Associate Director of Operations, Cheshire and Wirral Partnership NHS Foundation Trust
Steve Nevitt, Service Manager for Resources*
Mark Palethorpe, Executive Director of People
Jacquie Sims, Director of Children's Social Care
Alison Stathers-Tracey, Director of Early Help and Prevention
Jamilia Tausif, Associate Director of Commissioning (NHS Cheshire Clinical Commissioning Group)

* Attended for Minute No. 26 only

21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received.

22 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED –

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 5 August 2020, be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

23 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

24 WHIPPING DECLARATIONS

No declarations of a party whip were made.

25 PUBLIC SPEAKING/OPEN SESSION

Councillor A Critchley spoke to the committee about the nature of Ofsted inspections – which are usually completed through three separate types of inspections – and whether the new, single inspection arrangement put in place following the Covid-19 outbreak, could be continued hereafter instead of returning to the more resource-intensive, three inspection arrangements.

Councillor A Critchley also talked to the committee about how schools had been managing Covid-related staff shortages, following a communication he had received about a school in his local ward regarding a shortage of catering staff and the responsive measures they had put in to manage this. He queried whether this was a local issue that had been resolved, or if it was indicative of a problem being experienced by schools across the borough.

The Chairman then spoke about Covid-19 and the impacts that it had had on school attendance across the borough. requested officers provide clarity on attendance at Cheshire East schools and how the overall levels had been impacted by Covid-19. Members raised other queries such as how infection rates in Cheshire East compared to other regions, and how Cheshire East schools had interpreted government guidance about what parents/carers should do at school drop-off and pick-up times.

RESOLVED –

- 1 Officers provided assurance that Cheshire East had not experienced a significant, widespread shortage of school catering staff, and that this particular instance was specific to the local school.
- 2 Members thanked Councillor A Critchley for attending the meeting and making his statements.
- 3 That the update on Covid-19 be received and noted.
- 4 That officers be asked to provide a written answer in response to members' query regarding how Cheshire East schools had interpreted government guidance.

26 CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON'S STORY

A case study was outlined to the committee about a young person who had recently moved back into a local Cheshire East children's home, after a lengthy adoption process that only saw him be officially adopted at age 11. After being brought into Cheshire East care at 13, this young person

had been supported to deal with the complexities of their upbringing. They were now due to start at a local college in September 2020.

Members discussed the issue of adoption breakdown and its common causes, and noted that the cause of such a breakdown is not always related to the child, but can stem from other types of abuse or negative behaviour from the adoptive families.

RESOLVED –

That the young person's story be noted.

27 SPOTLIGHT REVIEW ON CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

The Chairman presented to the committee the proposed final report of the committee's spotlight review on Children's Mental Health Services, undertaken on 24 February 2020.

Members discussed the pertinence of such a report in the current climate of Covid-19 and the reported impacts that lockdowns and restrictions have had on children and young people's mental health and wellbeing.

Officers from the council and Cheshire and Wirral Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (the main provider of young people's mental health services in Cheshire East) attended this item and talked about how the two organisations, amongst other partners, had worked to ensure that there was additional funding and support available to meet these needs.

RESOLVED –

- 1 That the report be agreed, endorsed and passed on to Cabinet to consider and respond to its conclusions and recommendations.
- 2 That officers be asked to provide a focused update to the committee at its next meeting on 23 November, 2020 on the mental health and wellbeing impacts caused by Covid-19, and the work undertaken by the council and partners to ensure the right support was available.

28 UPDATE ON KICKSTART AND APPRENTICESHIPS

The committee considered a verbal update on the Kickstart scheme – launched on 18 September, 2020 – which aimed to get 16-24 year old NEETs (people not in education, employment or training) into robust, effective work placements.

Members asked questions and put comments in relation to:

- how many kickstart placements the council would be able to offer across its service areas, and

- the particular challenge faced by cared-for children seeking to gain these placements and/or employment, and the how the council was specifically supporting these children.

RESOLVED –

That the update be noted.

29 UPDATE ON OFSTED INSPECTIONS

The committee considered an update on the interim arrangements for inspections of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) and Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) Inspections, following a pause to inspections due to Covid-19.

Members queried how the forthcoming ILACS inspections would take into account the impacts of Covid-19 and how this took certain things out of the council's control, for example, the availability of the local police service.

RESOLVED –

That the update be noted.

30 VISION FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

The committee considered a report that outlined the council's overarching vision for what it wants to achieve for children and young people in Cheshire East, which would be used to ensure that there was a shared aim and clear expectation that all work should be done together with children, young people and families.

Members asked questions and put comments in relation to;

- whether this was a realistic ambition in light of the current and future impacts that will be caused by the Covid-19 pandemic;
- if any adjustments had been planned for; and
- that more referrals would have been expected.

The committee was advised about the Comprehensive Spending Review by Directors of Children's Services, which had set out in detail the general challenges and financial challenges faced by children's services.

RESOLVED –

- 1 That the Vision for Children and Young People in Cheshire East be endorsed and adopted.
- 2 That the Comprehensive Spending Review by Directors of Children's Services be circulated to committee members outside of the meeting.

31 PROGRESS AGAINST OFSTED RECOMMENDATIONS

The committee considered an update on progress the council had made against the recommendations put by Ofsted following its standard Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services in November 2019.

Members asked questions in relation to;

- the employment of quality social care workers and whether the council was able to appoint people from a student level and support them in their training;
- how many Cheshire East cared-for children were in out-of-borough placements, and how many of these could potentially be able to return to Cheshire East, subject to the right support systems being put in place; and
- how many foster carers the council had, and how this compared to other local authority areas.

RESOLVED –

- 1 That the update be noted.
- 2 That officers be asked to provide a response in writing to the question regarding the number of cared-for children in out-of-borough placements.

32 UPDATE ON SEND

The committee considered an update on the progress the council has made against the recommendations put to Cabinet in the SEND Reforms Task and Finish Group report (date), and an update following agreement of the Written Statement of Action.

Members sought assurances that, after an issue was identified regarding the capacity of people working in the team, additional funding would remain ongoing so that jobs/roles do not get cut and the important support services remain in place for those that need them.

RESOLVED –

That the update be noted.

Councillor A Moran took the position of Vice-Chairman in the Chair, whilst the Chairman resolved connectivity issues.

33 PERFORMANCE SCORECARD - QUARTER 1, 2020/21

Members considered the performance data from the council's Children's Services directorate for the period of Quarter 1, 2020/21.

RESOLVED –

That the report and update be noted.

Councillor J Saunders resumed the Chair.

34 FORWARD PLAN

The committee reviewed the council's Forward Plan of key decisions.

RESOLVED –

That the Forward Plan be noted.

35 WORK PROGRAMME

The committee reviewed its work programme and discussed how best to programme its business into the remaining three meetings of the year.

RESOLVED –

That the following updates be made to the work programme;

- a Covid-19 update be added as a standing item to be received at the top of forthcoming meeting agendas;
- a follow-up update on progress made against the recommendations in the spotlight review on Children's Mental Health Services be added to the agenda for March 2021; and
- a further review of the Kickstart scheme be brought for consideration by the committee in January 2021.

The meeting commenced at 1.30 pm and concluded at 4.38 pm

Councillor J Saunders (Chairman)