

Time commenced – 18.00pm

Time finished – 19.30pm

Children and Young People Scrutiny Review Board 27 March 2023

Present: Councillor Lind (Chair)
Councillors Bonser, Kus, Pandey, Pearce, and Whitby (Vice Chair)
Tracey Churchill, Co-opted Member Caltholic Diocesan Rep

In Attendance: Pauline Melvin-Anderson, Director, Learning, Inclusion & Skills
Suanne Lim, Director Early Help and Children's Social Care
Catherine O'Melia, Head of Service Children's Quality Assurance
Gloria Osei-Bonsu, Deputy Youth Mayor
Muhammad Muntasir Youth Mayor Elect
Harman Kaur, Deputy Youth Mayor Elect

50/22 Apologies for Absence

There were apologies from Andy Smith Strategic Director of Peoples Services and Omar Aslam, Youth Mayor.

51/22 Late items introduced by the Chair

There were none.

52/22 Declarations of Interest

There were none.

53/22 Minutes of the Meetings on 30.01.23 and 13.02.23

The minutes of the meeting on 30.01.23 and 13.02.23 were agreed

54/22 Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs) Quality and Timeliness

The Board considered a report and presentation from the Strategic Director of Peoples Services to provide the Board with an update on EHCP quality and timeliness.

The officer reported the number of plans completed in 20 weeks, giving reasons for the low proportion of EHCP completion within the 20-week statutory timeframe. This was partly attributed to the capacity of Educational Psychologists and a lack of uptake from recruitment exercises. DCC was still trying to recruit to posts; however, nationally there was a shortfall which had affected many Local Authorities. There was a renewed focus on clearing the backlog of EHCPs.

The service was exploring a new approach to Educational Psychologist (EP) capacity which would positively affect the completion in 20 weeks figure once

the backlog of EHCPs was cleared. A councillor asked how many EHCPs were being completed within 20 weeks, the officer advised that about 30% had been completed. A further breakdown would be available in the following months. The councillor asked how many EPs there were and how many there should be. The officer stated there were currently 3 Full Time EPs in most LAs there are about 12 to 15.

The Board heard that EHCP numbers are high in Derby, being at 4.7% which was the highest in the East Midlands, Leicester was at 3.4% and Nottingham was at 2.1%. There were 462 requests at the end of October and 376 at this point last year signifying a 23% increase. 357 new plans were finalised this year compared to 429 at the same time last year. A councillor expressed concern about the high figures for EHCPs in Derby. It was highlighted that the DfE had requested improvement in Derby's position.

The average number of requests for EHCPs from parents was 38% up to September 2022 when 72% were from parents bringing the average up to 42% for the year. The split over the past couple of years had been 60% from schools and 40% of requests from parents respectively.

Derby's SEND Tribunal appeal rate was 1.4% in 2021 a slight increase from 1% the previous year. It was much lower than it was in the peak years of 2014 and 2017-2019, when it had reached 3 to 4%.

Nationally there was a 17% increase in the number of SEND Tribunals, in Q3 of 2021/22 compared to the same quarter in 2020/21. Derby's rate was currently the second lowest among the regional authorities and in the middle among statistical neighbours. It was likely to be about 1.9% this year. A councillor asked what percentage of Tribunal Appeals resulted in out of area placements. The officer said that figures would be provided to the councillor. The councillor asked when the Tribunal statistics were last reviewed. The officer informed the Board the figures in the presentation were annual ones. The councillor thought that a more in-depth study was needed, the Tribunal statistics and appeals could be used to inform the provision. The councillor suggested recommending that Cabinet be asked that a review of SEND Tribunal and placements be undertaken.

The officer explained the service was looking at whether EHCPs provided the right support for children, perhaps there should be a focus on a graduated response, helping schools to recognise other support available if EHCPs were not suitable. The service worked with GPs, professionals, and the private and voluntary sector to meet the needs of children and young people with or without an EHCP.

A councillor spotlighted the current need for EHCPs at an earlier age, the officer agreed and explained that a pilot scheme had been set up in a city ward looking at children's needs, the situation they were in, if they had social or emotional issues, looking at the family dynamics.

The long waiting list for diagnosis was discussed, councillors were concerned about how children were supported during that time. The officer highlighted the work of the Family Hubs which provide advice and support for families.

The Board resolved to note the report and requested that Cabinet ask for review of Tribunals to be undertaken to understand common themes and reasons for going to Tribunal, and the main reasons for children and young people being placed out of area.

55/22 Monitoring Safeguarding Practice

The Board considered a report from the Director Strategic Director of Peoples Services which was presented by the Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care. The aim of the report was to provide assurance that safeguarding practice was robust and responsive to the needs of children and families in Derby.

The officer spotlighted the key issues for the Board.

The statutory "front door" service still experiences high demand with contacts from partner agencies remaining high and causing increased pressure. However, work was underway with partner agencies to support them with managing demand. Domestic Abuse was the highest referral category

There are still delays within courts, this is a national issue which has affected the work of the child protection teams, but the service was working with the judiciary to reduce delays in the court, there was a local commitment to achieving a target of 26 weeks for care proceedings.

Overall, the rate of re-referrals remains steady and was in line with national figures. Children in Derby are receiving the right support, at the right time by the right services.

Family Group Conferences are supporting families to use their own strengths to mitigate risks to children alongside the Staying Together Team who are successfully helping children to stay with their families. The number of children with Child Protection Plans has been reduced. The number of children coming into care has reduced, of those children who are in local authority care the majority are placed with family and friends.

Staffing Recruitment and Retention – nationally there was challenge around the recruitment and retention of staff. Derby has an experienced and stable workforce with few vacancies. There was a significant reduction in the use of agency staff, with only six agency workers.

Caseloads - the service continues to manage caseload demand; locality teams have an average caseload of eighteen.

Sickness absence - both long-term and short-term absence has reduced. The wellbeing of staff was catered for with wellbeing groups and a wellbeing room. Good training opportunities were available, social workers have access to supervision from experienced managers, group reflective practice has been provided, also specialist de-briefing.

The Board discussed the report and asked for more information about the Family and Friends Team. The officer explained this was a small team that act when a child was at risk of coming into care or when parents are not able to look after them. The team undertake an assessment to see if a child can be placed with other family members. Arrangements can be made for either short- or long-term placements. When a child was placed with people they know, the trauma was lessened. The Board asked if Family Hubs were in existence. The officer explained they were being installed on the previous premises of Children's Centres and other buildings which are being re-designed. Their vision was around strengthening families and providing a best start for life and health programmes. A website would be in place by April 2023 with information about the Family Hubs. A launch was planned for May or June 2023. There should be five Hubs in Children's Centres by October and a further five buildings were being converted for Hubs. Work was ongoing with the local communities, Parent Carer Forums, and local schools. The Family Hubs were a universal offer for all families.

The Chair thanked the officer and her team for all the work being done to safeguard children and young people in Derby which the Board supported unanimously.

The Board noted the content of the report and the plans to address future challenges.

56/22 Derby City Council and Partners Child Exploitation (CRE) Annual Report 2021-22

The Board considered the Annual Report of the partnership work on child exploitation in Derby City. The Director Early Help and Children's Social Care presented the report which documented the activities and achievements of the local authority and its partners.

The officer highlighted the actions set out for the year 21/22 which had been successfully met. They included.

- An update to the CE procedures and Risk Assessment
- Cross border audit of the effectiveness of work on criminal exploitation
- Updated training packages rolled out to early help, children's social care and the wider partnership
- Refreshed and strengthened approaches to identifying children at risk of sexual exploitation

There were clear examples in the report of proactive and reactive work to educate and protect children and families and to disrupt and prosecute offenders.

During 2020-21 172 children were considered at risk of exploitation. During 2021-21 this had increased to 237 children.

The key themes and actions from the 2022-23 Annual Report included:

- An interplay between missing and being assessed as medium or high risk of exploitation
- Referrals for child criminal exploitation (CCE) were higher than those for sexual exploitation. The CCE cohort referred are between ages 10 – 17 years
- The interplay between medium/high risk cases of exploitation and NEET or PT Timetables increased
- There was an increase in children being coerced to carry, move, and sell drugs locally and across borders
- There was an increase in violent offending and anti-social behaviour through coercion and drugs cultures.
- Neglect was a feature in Child Protection and Child in Need referrals (Medium/ high risk of exploitation)
- There was an increase in the use or carrying of weapons within CCE cases
- There were high numbers with Disability or Education Health Care Plans referred to the CE strategy

The Focus for 2022-23 was detailed:

- Restructure of the CRE Strategic Tasking Group – Capturing emerging risk and stronger focus on place-based risks
- Understand the effectiveness of new policies and strategic developments aligned to the Serious Youth Violence, Violence Against Women and Girls strategies
- Embed the guidance and recommendations from the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse into the strategy and partnership work.
- Audit the effectiveness of partnership work on child exploitation and use of the updated risk assessment will be a focus of the work in 2022/23.
- The partnership will support the regular campaigns, Safer Internet Day, CE Awareness Day, the #Look closer campaign and Stop CE, Say Something if you See Something Campaign.

The Board discussed the report and the increasing risks faced by children and young people. Concerns were raised about online risk which had spiked during the Pandemic, also children missing from school during the Pandemic who never returned, were they accounted for. Home Elective Education had this caused increased referrals into Social Care. Children and young people with SEND not being in school for more than 15 days, how was the LA ensuring education provision was put in place for them. One Board member asked if any publications or information were available. The officer confirmed that campaigns had taken place and information bulletins are sent out to schools. Also, a Place Based Risk Event had taken place which had raised awareness and enabled learning from young people of what they needed. The officer explained that the Head of the Virtual School had a statutory responsibility for children subject to a Care Plan. Additional funding was being invested in mentoring capacity to ensure more resources are attached to these children. Future plans included the Virtual School, being transferred into Early Help and Social Care Services whose focus was on looked after children (LAC) to support vulnerable children and young people better.

The Chair thanked the officer and her team for all their work.

The Board noted the report, it was a positive reflection of the partnership approach to identify and reduce child exploitation in Derby and supported this as a priority area of work to keep children safe from harm.

57/22 Work Programme and Topic Review

The Board considered a report which allowed the Board to study its Terms of Reference and Remit for the forthcoming Municipal Year. The report set out key work areas, issues, and potential topic review subjects within the service areas, for discussion or inclusion in the work programme.

The Board agreed the work programme set out in appendix 1 to the report.

The Board noted that a meeting with officers for the Topic Review “Off-Rolling” had taken place on 24 February 2023. Discussion had taken place around changing the focus of the Topic Review to a smaller and more targeted review on specific groups of SEND children and to analyse the reasons for placement breakdowns for children with an EHCP also if it could be deferred to the next municipal year 2023/24 so the Board can discuss whether to undertake it.

The Board resolved to note the information provided within the report and agreed the change of focus and deferral of the Topic Review to the next municipal year.

MINUTES END