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CHILDREN YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES POLICY AND PERFORMANCE BOARD

At a meeting of the Children Young People and Families Policy and Performance Board on Monday, 23 November 2020 held remotely

Present: Councillors Dennett (Chair), Logan (Vice-Chair), M. Bradshaw, Carlin, Cassidy, Leck, P. Lloyd Jones, J. Stockton, Teeling and Whitley

Apologies for Absence: Councillor P. Hignett

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: M. Vasic, A. McIntyre, A. Jones, T. Coffey, D. Roberts and K. Mackenzie

Also in attendance: One member of the press

ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD

Action

CYP12 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2020 were taken as read and signed as a correct record.

CYP13 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Members were advised that no public questions had been received.

CYP14 COVID-19 UPDATE

The Board received a presentation on the current response to the Covid-19 Pandemic and how service delivery had been altered to respond to initially Tier 3 and now lockdown restrictions.

Following the Education part of the presentation, Members queried:

The morale of teaching staff and how this had been affected during the Pandemic – staff were feeling the strain due to the need to catch up on teaching lost due to students and teachers not being in school during periods of isolation. Remote learning was challenging for some teachers and

students and some teachers were now teaching in the classroom and remotely as well.

Positive feedback had been received from schools who felt that they had been well supported. Staff were understandably anxious and school leaders were feeling the stress. To help prevent burn out they were encouraged to encourage distributive leadership and put a greater emphasis on health and wellbeing. The Council's Education Team had made themselves available at any time to provide advice and support, schools had been provided with regular briefings and there had been weekly meetings with each of the school groups to discuss and address any emerging issues. Additionally, the Health Improvement Team, Behaviour Support and the Educational Psychologists were available as part of the support offered.

How was the morale of Headteachers – The Council was trying to support Headteachers and offered advice from Senior Officers when support was needed. Ofsted inspections in the near future could be difficult to manage with staffing levels changing, so they had been requested to defer these. Weekly meetings were taking place with headteachers from primary, secondary and special schools to discuss emerging issues and share good practice. To date thirty-two schools had been audited by Health and Safety colleagues and advice and guidance had been provided to headteachers. It was noted that The Heath Academy had received a Health and Safety Executive (HSE) inspection with support provided by Health and Safety colleagues. There were no recommendations for improvement.

How has Covid-19 effected school budgets – at the start of the Pandemic some costs were covered by additional Government funds, however supply teaching cover was not included. It would not be clear for some time how schools' finances would be effected by the Pandemic.

Following concerns over the lost time for Year 11 students and the likely impact on their GCSE's, Members were advised that a letter had been sent from the leaders of the LCR authorities to the Head of Ofsted, the Head of Ofqual and the Secretary of State for Education, requesting flexibility with exam timetables and Ofsted inspections in the region.

The Board was also advised of the some unintended benefits since the Coronavirus had taken hold, such as the increases in pupil attendance; the increased attendance in

early years settings with 86% of them remaining open in Halton during the Pandemic; no large increases in the number of pupils being home educated compared to last year and the reduction in exclusions.

Following the Children Social Care and Early Help part of the presentation, Members queried:

Staff morale and welfare in the care sector and effects of self-isolation on the service – very few staff needed to self-isolate as early on in the Pandemic office based staff had formed bubbles in specific groups to include a manager and supervisor. If self-isolation was required, the impact was manageable. The welfare support provided helped staff enormously and they knew they could meet face to face if required. It was commented that although the sickness level had dropped during the Pandemic and the staff were generally healthy, they would be monitored and support services would continue.

It was noted that the financial information for quarter two of 2020-21 was unavailable at the time of publishing so this would be sent to the Board when it was completed.

Members welcomed the positive feedback received and agreed that staff had coped very well during this difficult and challenging time and gave their thanks. It was understood however that more challenging times lay ahead as the demand for social care referrals, child protection plans and children in care placements were ever increasing.

RESOLVED: That the presentation be received.

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CYP15 CHILDCARE SUFFICIENCY ASSESSMENT REVIEW
AUTUMN 2020 – 2021 (CSA)

The Board considered a report from the Strategic Director – People, which provided a summary of the revised Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA) Report.

It was noted that Sections 6 and 7 of *The Childcare Act (2006)* and the associated statutory guidance: *Early Education and Childcare – Statutory guidance for local authorities (March 2018)*, required all local authorities in England to undertake and provide an annual childcare sufficiency report to elected Council Members on how they were meeting their duty to secure sufficient childcare and to make it available to the public. In accordance with this, Halton's Childcare Sufficiency Assessment had been reviewed and updated – this was attached to the report.

The CSA Report detailed achievements since the last review and outlined Halton's current position. It also highlighted any gaps in provision and explained how these were being addressed. It also discussed the early indications of how the effects of Covid-19 were affecting the childcare sector. Members queried:

What can the Council do to provide extra day care provision for under 2 year olds – in terms of provision this segment was reliant upon the Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) sector to meet demand. Halton did promote early years provision and encouraged existing providers to expand and potential new providers to open.

How residents from the most deprived Ward in Halton (Windmill Hill) were able to take children to nurseries outside of their area due to lack of provision – the review highlighted a deficit in places in Windmill Hill but feedback from parents and other users of childcare in the area had shown a willingness to travel outside of the area. Parents from Windmill Hill and other areas were generally satisfied with early years childcare provision in the Borough and were prepared to travel to access the setting they preferred. Members asked that the data be looked at again to ensure that this was still the case.

How long does it take to become registered as a childminder – the system needed to be rigorous to ensure health and safety training and safeguarding checks were all in place, there was also the requirement to be registered with Ofsted. Information on the actual length of time this took would be sought and provided to Members.

It was noted that part of the Council's CSA Action Plan 2020-21 focussed on the encouragement of new providers to enter into the local childcare market in the Borough.

RESOLVED: That the revised Childcare Sufficiency Assessment be approved.

CYP16 ANNUAL REPORT - COMMENTS, COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS RELATING TO CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SERVICES 1ST APRIL 2019 - 31ST MARCH 2020

The Board was presented with the Annual Reports for Comments, Complaints and Compliments relating to Children's Social Care Services from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020.

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The report provided analysis on complaints processed under the *Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure*, and evidenced how feedback from service users had been used to improve service delivery. It was reported that the aim of the Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure was for children and young people to have their concerns resolved swiftly and wherever possible, by the people who provided the service locally. It was noted that a complaint may generally be defined as an expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet in relation to an individual child or young person, which required a response.

Members were advised that there were four categories to the representation process: Statutory Complaints; Representations; Customer Care Issues; and Compliments. Commentary on these was provided in the report which also presented detailed information and data relating to the numbers of complaints received between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020.

The report also detailed feedback on compliments made by clients and positive feedback from workers / professionals relating to Children's Services in the Directorate. The positive impact and outcomes on the lives of people accessing services in this Directorate were highlighted.

Members welcomed the report and recognised the good work that goes on, as presented in the feedback examples from Child Protection and Children in Need, Children in Care and Care Leavers, and Team around the Family (paragraphs 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3 respectively). It was also understood that managing complaints was also about managing a client's expectations which these days was much higher due to improved technology and communication, and people forget that staff have caseloads to manage and were not available all the time. Officers did learn from complaints and some learning had informed future modelling and made a difference.

Members commended the Children's Social Care Services and all the staff working in the various departments who had improved the quality of or saved people's lives.

RESOLVED: That the reports presented be accepted as the mechanism by which Elected Members can monitor and scrutinise Children's Social Care complaints and compliments.

CYP17 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORTS FOR QUARTER 2 OF 2020/21

The Board received the Performance Management reports for quarter 2 of 2020-21 (1 July 2020 to 30 September 2020).

It was noted that the key priorities for development or improvement in 2020-21 were agreed by Members and included in the Local Authority's Business Plan, for the various functional areas reported to the Board as follows:

- Education, Inclusion and Provision Services; and
- Children and Families Services.

The reports detailed progress made against objectives and milestones and performance targets and provided information relating to key developments and emerging issues that had arisen during the period. Members were requested to consider and raise any questions or points of clarification in respect of these.

The following queries were made:

The numbers of children who were placed in foster care was up – due to an increase in older children with complex needs requiring care from specialised carers who were unavailable, resulting in the use of independent fostering agencies. Recruitment for foster carers had continued throughout the Pandemic.

There was a decrease in the number of Care Leavers in education, employment or training – funding had been received for an extra staff post to support this as extra capacity was needed, as identified in the Ofsted Action Plan.

Was there a limited amount of places available in further education in Halton – the numbers of NEETS (Not in Employment, Education or Training) in Halton was well below the national average, although there were problems with NEET in Care Leavers as mentioned above. There were less young people accessing 6th Forms in schools in Halton because they were moving onto Cronton or Riverside Colleges which offered excellent academic and vocational courses. Neither College had reported being oversubscribed.

Was Covid responsible for those children admitted to Welfare Secure – no it was for safeguarding reasons for children at risk of criminal or sexual exploitation not Covid.

Welfare Secure provided safety and security for the children involved.

RESOLVED: That the quarter 2 performance management reports be received.

Meeting ended at 8.28 p.m.