

Bristol City Council Minutes of the People Scrutiny Commission

13 December 2021 at 5.00 pm



Members Present:-

Councillors: Tim Kent (Chair), Christine Townsend (Vice-Chair), Kerry Bailes, Brenda Massey, Tim Rippington, Sharon Scott, Lisa Stone, Mark Weston and Tim Wye

Also in Attendance:-

Councillor Asher Craig, Deputy Mayor, Children Services, Education and Equalities;
Councillor Helen Holland, Cabinet Member, Adult Social Care and Integrated Care System

1 Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information

The Chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting.

2 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

There were none.

3 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Wye declared that he is chair of West of England Friends Housing Society which provides 30 residential care home places, 5 of which residents are funded by the City Council.

The Chair, Councillor Kent, declared that his wife, Sally Kent, had made a Public Forum submission (Question 15 in the Public Forum pack).

4 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 July 2021 were agreed as a true record.

5 Chair's Business

There was no Chair's Business.



6 Public Forum

Questions

Ref	Name	Topic
Qs 1 - 12	Clive Stevens	Adult Social Care
Qs 13 – 14	Kay Galpin	Special Educational Needs and Disability
Q15	Sally Kent	Special Educational Needs and Disability
Qs 16 - 17	Jen Smith	Special Educational Needs and Disability
Qs 18 - 19	Hayley Hemming	Special Educational Needs and Disability
Q 20	Clive Stevens	Performance
Q 21	Clive Stevens	Adult Social Care

Statements and Petitions

Ref	Name	Topic
P1	Hannah Summers	Education
S1	Clive Stevens	Adult Social Care
S2	Hannah Summers	Education
S3	Jen Smith	Special Educational Needs and Disability

Jen Smith spoke to her statement.

Cllr Edwards spoke on behalf of Hannah Summers statement and petition.

Clive Stevens spoke to his statement.

Supplementary questions:

Jen Smith (Qs 16 & 17):

Jen Smith asked that the issue and delay with Freedom of Information requests be looked into; and raised concerns about the number of children going through managed moves.

The Chair requested the Freedom of Information (FOI) response to FOI request 16225729 be published.

Clive Stevens – all responses from the Director of Adult Social Care;

Q2: Clive Stevens asked if any officer planned to visit Coventry Council to understand its approach, and was told that there was an interest in Coventry's approach, it had not been practical to visit. Coventry



used a higher number of Occupational Therapists than was available in Bristol. It was important to look at different models in different cities. There had been conversations with Plymouth and Swindon, and other local authorities in the Southwest.

Q3: Supplementary question was whether the offer was open for the demonstration of the workflow accelerators to Scrutiny Members, and it was confirmed this could be provided.

The Chair recommended that this was brought to a Leads meeting, and that Clive Stevens was also invited to the demonstration.

Q5: Clive Stevens asked for confirmation that the backlog would be cleared as soon as possible and was told that the installation of aids and adaptations was managed by the Growth & Regeneration directorate, with whom Adult Social Care officers worked closely to address the backlog.

The Chair asked for further information regarding the size and detail of the backlog and it was agreed to request a written response from the Growth & Regeneration directorate to be published on the Action Tracker.

Q20: Clive Stevens asked for reasons for long term increase in service user numbers; and whether mental health needs referred to aspects of Special Educational Needs as young people move to adulthood. The response was that the ratio between people under and over 65 had reversed itself (there has been a reduction in the number of over 65s and a general increase in the population preparing for adulthood), and there was a general increase in demand for people with mental health needs and a slight increase for people with learning disabilities throughout the pandemic (the impact of the pandemic meant fewer services being available to them). This meant there has been an increase in the total number of people between 18-64 who have received adult social care services. Also, people within the 18-64 age range would receive a service for a longer period.

For a large proportion of service-users, mental health needs manifested during adulthood, or they might not have been recognised as children.

The Chair stated the Educational Health Care Plans went up to the age of 25, so with a cross over into adulthood.

Q21: This also referred to Q8 – Clive Stevens welcomed the scheduled deep dive to investigate travel time as one of the issues which affected recruitment and retention; and asked whether the deep dive would address what is meant as travel problems, and how they are defined. The Chair recommended that the Director of Adult Social Care provided a written response following the meeting, to be published on the Action Tracker.

7 Performance Report (Q1 & 2)

The Director of Education & Skills introduced the report.



- There was a discussion around KPI BPB225e 'Increase the percentage of Final EHCPs (Education Health and Care Plans) issued within 20 weeks excluding exception cases and Members were advised that the 42.7% of finalised plans within the 20-week timescale was a quarterly figure, and that a decline was expected due to increased requests.
- The Chair noted that there had been increased requests for plans which reflected a higher demand on the service.
- There was a discussion about how capacity could be increased to mitigate issues with processing EHCPs, and members were advised that there was an ongoing recruitment process to appoint additional educational psychologists over the next 12 months; and that the service had experienced a significant amount of pressure due to staff absence and staff retention had been a challenge; the dip in output due to a lack of staff capacity in the system had been mitigated by a salary review of case workers which had enabled better recruitment and retention.
- The Commission was advised that as well as a salary review and use of the Educational Transformation funding to assist in increased capacity, there had been a review of how staff could be supported within the end-to-end process, and that the increase in strategic management capacity had a positive effect.
- Members were advised that there were plans to provide increased support for early communication and family support to take pressure off later stages; and that this was part of a wider transformation project, and that the team was reliant on assessments from a wide range of professionals across the system whose services were also under significant pressure.
- The Deputy Mayor, Children Services, Education and Equalities, told the Commission that she had recently met with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) staff and noted that the system was under pressure; and that she had met with Cabinet lead members across the country to discuss those issues, and good practice to increase capacity across the system; that everything was being done to reach the 20 week target; and that a move to prevention via planned services required better integration polices, which demanded accountability and engagement of school leaders and different ways of delivering Special Educational Needs services for young people.
- The Director of Education & Skills referred to the need for early identification and support which prevented needs from escalating; that the importance of the wider Education Transformation Programme was to ensure the system worked holistically and that the right support for children and families was identified and introduced before need escalated; and this, which included looking at school -based provision, enabled staff to ensure children who required EHCPs received them in a timely manner.
- The Commission was advised that the dip in August was due to the timing of the school year – comparative charts of previous year had the same dip. Staff were encouraged to take leave in August; also, it had been particularly challenging leading up to the summer holidays as there had been



attendance issues and so some of the assessments that were due to take place could not be done as many assessments were undertaken as possible.

- There was a discussion about BPC222 'Increase the take-up of free early educational entitlement by eligible 2 year olds' and the Vice-Chair raised the importance of this programme, that children from more deprived areas were behind their peers when they started school, and so this programme assisted with the essential preventative 'up-stream' work, to identify children who required support before needs escalated.

RESOLVED;

That;

- Members be provided with further detail and clarification of the figures related to BPB225e 'Increase the percentage of Final EHCPs issued within 20 weeks excluding exception cases';
- Members be provided with detailed outputs of the Education Transformation Programme which had been looked at by the Schools Forum;
- Members be provided with further detail and clarification of the % take-up of the free early educational entitlement by eligible 2 year olds (BPC222), and detail of the Parent Champions, including whether they are paid;
- Members send further questions about the Performance Report to the scrutiny advisor, at scrutiny@bristol.gov.uk; and written responses be published.

8 Risk Report (Q1)

- The Vice-Chair stated that there was a need to clarify why school places were not referred to on the risk report (whilst leisure services were).
- The Commission was advised that, although a great deal of the Written Statement of Action (WSOA) was either completed or on track, the risk associated with the WSOA remained at a high level, due to increased demand and COVID-associated system pressures it had been decided that the risk should remain high until there was more certainty regarding capacity and demand issues.
- The Chair noted that the Written Statement of Action was due to come to the Commission in March 2022, and so more detail would be available at that point.
- It was noted that BPB528 'Increase the percentage of employment offers made to people living in the 10% most deprived areas' was under Workforce, which fell under the remit of the Resources Scrutiny.

RESOLVED;

That Members be provided with an explanation as to why school places were not referred to on the risk report.



9 Recruitment and Retention - Adult Social Care

The Director of Adult Social Care introduced the report.

- The Director of Adult Social Care thanked care workers for their continued hard work, and recognised the excellent work they have done and continued to do.
- The Chair, on behalf of the Commission, thanked care workers, and commented that the work of carers, especially in the last two years, had been well above what they had been paid to do; and that many of our relatives and friends had been kept safe and alive through their efforts, skill and care.
- The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Integrated Care System thanked care workers, and commented that there was a huge debt owed to unpaid carers; and that Bristol was not unusual to have challenges in recruitment and retention in the sector, although not complacent. She advised Members that the winter would be very challenging, although some things were beginning to work and a wide range of partners continued to look at the situation to find solutions, which was incredible; for example 40 partners attended a productive round-table discussion earlier that morning.
- Cllr Massey stated that when she accessed the system earlier in the year she found everyone professional, responsive, and helpful, and thanked the care workers.
- The Chair commended the report, and commented that it had good detail and helpful infographics.
- David Smallacombe, Chief Executive, Care & Support West explained the organisation represented care providers, both regulated and non-regulated services, and welcomed the partnership working the Council had been involved in with the providers. He advised the Commission that care providers particularly welcomed the conversations which had taken place to address issues that affected recruitment, such as COVID and related issues and cost of living; and providers had been able to influence some change and Care & Support West supported this approach.
- The Director of Adult Social Care stated that there was a need to develop an action plan to respond to the challenges, to re-imagine social care for the future; that care partners were part of the solution; and that there was a need to be innovative and ensure the career paths within the sector were meaningful for people - in terms of pay, opportunities and development – and the work with the [Ethical Care Charter](#) and [Proud to Care](#) helped ensure this was the focus.
- There was a discussion about mental health, depression cited as a large factor for staff absence and reasons for leaving. Members were advised that counselling and psychological support was offered, but varied across providers who had different approaches; that, with regard to wellbeing and work-life balance, working in the care profession offered flexibility, as it demanded a range of skills and choice of hours – this was promoted to attract people.



- The Deputy Mayor, Children Services, Education and Equalities advised Members that Thrive Bristol Mental Health ten year programme had been launched four years ago; and [Thriving at Work Bristol](#) had been rolled out with funding secured from West of England Combined Authority. This included a website with a range of tools and resources around mental health.
- The Commission was advised by David Smallacombe (Care & Support West) that there was a programme of workshops that promoted staff-wellbeing providers were involved in; and that professionalisation was a significant factor for recruitment and retention, which it was acknowledged had not previously embedded across the sector, so there was a need for professional recognition and for the workforce to be better valued.
- The Commission was advised that it varied how long people waited for care services, and that there were 60-70 people on the 'unable to source list for homecare'; some of those people were in a different service, but unable to move into permanent homecare; about two-thirds would be in a service and the others would be known and they would be prioritised based on risk. The position was better now, and everybody's situation was known and assessed.
- There was a discussion on gaps in staffing and members were advised that it was difficult to accurately calculate and report on vacancies, that it depended on what factors were considered; and that there was a discrepancy between vacancies and number of places available which could be linked to insufficient number of staff. It was agreed that the vacancy level across the sector could be 10%+.
- There was a further discussion about workforce challenges in care homes and home care; and it was acknowledged that it had been a very difficult period for care workers, both in care homes and those who went into people's homes. Members were advised that the workforce challenge experienced now was across all areas; that it had been dominantly in home care but other areas such as community-based care and supported living had huge challenges; and that there were a wide range of roles.
- The Commission was told that there was a need for a more strategic home care model which was locally focused and more efficient, and the Council would trial new technology to organise and manage in a more effective and efficient way; and that social care providers had been invited to sit on the Integrated Care Partnerships which was positive, and would significantly increase the voice of providers.
- There was a discussion about the impact of Brexit on the workforces, and Members were advised that the figures were unknown.
- Members noted the need to raise the profile and value of care workers and the Commission was advised that the White Paper included the way social care would be funded, but also included investment in the workforce.

RESOLVED;

That the report be noted.



10 Contextual Safeguarding

The Safer Options Manager and Strategic Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service Manager introduced the report.

- Members were advised Safer Options was the Bristol's Violence Reduction Unit which responded to serious youth violence, child criminal exploitation, sexual exploitation, peer on peer abuse, knife crime and missing children; that the aim was to build an integrated system which prevented harm to children and young people.
- The Commission was told that the Council and Barnardo's had developed a partnership to support this work.
- Duncan Stanway, Director (Barnardo's) spoke to the slides in the pack. He explained that the reason Barnardo's were involved in this work was to have an impact; that 'Roots' service was funded in partnership with the Council, delivered with Learning Partnership West, and had positive outcomes, which included an example of a 16 year old boy who had been referred in due to concerns about County Lines and relationship with his mother had broken down, that the intensive one-to-one support enabled changes that protected him and he was reintroduced to school, achieved GCSEs, was linked into employment and training opportunities, and his mum had a better relationship with him and no longer lived in fear for his safety at the level she did before.
- Duncan Stanway (Barnardo's) advised the Commission that Bristol was the first local authority that Barnardo's sought to partner to tackle the issue of exploitation of young people; and that Barnardo's continued to invest its own charitable money into the city as tackling exploitation was a strategic priority for Barnardo's, and proposed a piece of work around service design was carried out with the Council which would find solutions to support young people who faced harms from exploitation, co-designed with youth people, their families and communities as well as the professional network.
- The Deputy Mayor, Children Services, Education and Equalities, thanked all the teams and everyone who was engaged in this process. She advised Members that violence in the city was taken very seriously; and it was approximately 3 years ago when she and colleagues travelled to Glasgow to learn from their public health approach. The Safer Options approach was then set up with support from the Police & Crime Commissioner, the Police, and other agencies. She welcomed this approach, and that there was a need to understand what end-to-end services were available to support Bristol's young people.
- The Deputy Mayor advised that, although evidence was available to refer to, children and young people themselves needed to be central to how the issues were addressed; and that the Safer Options approach complimented the Mayor's ongoing initiative to address those issues, and that with the concerted effort of all partners engaged in this work it was hoped that more deaths such as the sad passing of Dontae Davis, 18, in October 2021, could be prevented.



- There was a discussion around cost and eligibility criteria for the services, and Members were advised that there were a wide range of interventions, from intensive long-term support to more targeted group work, which included girls groups, detached outreach and innovative work ongoing within outreach programmes; there was not a 'unit cost per child' as the graduated approach meant that there was intervention at every level and so types of intervention were different for everyone.
- The Commission was told that there was a high level of investment in the city through the violence reduction work compared to previous years; that £424,000/year had been received from Home Office which funded education and inclusion work, girls groups, parent support programmes and there were other streams of funding which included public health grants
- It was explained that Bristol had around 51% of young people at highest risk of exploitation in the most deprived areas of city where there was high levels of anti-social behaviour, crime, homelessness, and wider determinant factors such as poverty - which was a massive driver of all forms of exploitation.
- The Commission was advised that the specialist youth service offer was one strand and universal work, around education and support to parents, families, and children, was important – this was a driver for the 10-year strategy. This strategy was based on evidence that, for young people, adversity started at the age of 10, and had suffered long term trauma; and so secure funding was needed so investment could be used for a broad range of preventative options.
- The Vice-Chair referred to the importance of main stream schooling, that inclusion in mainstream was the foundation for what was discussed in this session, Special Education Needs, and all children's services - as until provision within mainstream worked for the needs of all children there would be a higher need for alternative provision, youth services and safeguarding; and requested clarification of how the different parts linked together in a coherent strategy, which included where schools fitted in, and so there was also a need to hear from Academies.
- The Deputy Mayor, Children Services, Education and Equalities advised Members that she had set up a series with conversation with head teachers in the city about what had been discussed and raised by the Vice-Chair; that she would have liked to see a move toward zero-tolerance to exclusions, as it was known staying in education was essential part of prevention and protection from exploitation.
- The Director of Children, Families and Safer Communities told Members that the discussion, and the team, had demonstrated that this was a societal and community-based challenge that was largely rooted in poverty, and so the solutions were for all to deliver. She referred Members to the 'Weapons In Schools' approach, which had helped to keep children in school, and this was based on the Safer Options and Strengthening Families teams working closely with schools to undertake the risk assessments and build the support plans required to enable a children to stay in school; that it would not be for any one part of the system to deliver that - it took the school, the family, the community, the police and social care that came together and focussed on the child's needs. Those were the



examples that needed to be built upon and invested in, as this approach could be used for other reasons for school exclusions.

- Members were advised that Cabot Learning Federation had a task team established, funded by the Department of Education as it was recognised that there were children within the school with contextual safeguarding need, which, from January 2022, would consider interventions in the school to prevent exclusions which helped to build resilience in the community.
- There was a discussion around families who agencies found it difficult to engage, and the Commission was advised that there were systemic barriers to engagement, and real fears that families held about agencies involved in their lives. Local assertive outreach was provided to help mitigate those barriers, and relational offers to families, which would build confidence, were in use. This included community mentoring and ways to involve credible community members into the process. A graduated response was required as exploitation was a safeguarding and child protection issue, and so although there were legal powers in place to intervene, if necessary, these were at a high threshold and every opportunity to work with families were explored and undertaken before that level would be reached. There was a strategy to work with families on an equal basis as change would not be achieved without families being on board.

RESOLVED;

- That the report be noted.

The Chair, on the behalf of the Commission, thanked Ann James, Director of Children, Families and Safer Communities, who, after working at Bristol for 32 years, would be leaving. The Chair thanked her for all she had done for the city, and passed on everyone's best wishes for the future.

11 Sufficiency of Placements - Children's Homes, Foster Carers

The Service Manager for Fostering and Specialist Commissioning Manager introduced the report.

- The Deputy Mayor, Children Services, Education and Equalities paid tribute to foster carers in the city, who did a phenomenal job, and she had attended awards ceremonies in the city that thanked the children and carers.
- The Deputy Mayor informed Members of her first-hand experience of a young person through the care system in Bristol who had gone on to become a qualified midwife and her foster family had done everything they could to ensure wider family connection was sustained, which was just one of the great examples of the role foster carers had played in the city; and she encouraged as many people as possible to consider the role; that people became foster carers as they cared.
- Members stated that foster caring was phenomenal, as were the people who did it.



- Members asked how long the foster care recruitment process took, and were advised 6 months, and it was the aim for this to be reduced to 4-5 months for a thorough process; that 25 were recruited last year, and the ideal was to recruit 30 households a year.
- There was a discussion around foster carers fees, and it was commented that it was positive they had gone up, and Members were advised that people's motivation to foster was considered carefully when assessments were undertaken.
- There was a discussion around how the support to extend properties worked and the Commission was advised that there were checks and balances and strict criteria foster carers needed to have met to gain access to that.
- Care leavers' access to recruitment or work experience was raised, and Members were advised that there was currently an apprenticeship scheme which employed care-experienced young people within the service; and other services in the city and the Council were encouraged to provide apprenticeships for care-experienced people.
- Members heard that the apprenticeship scheme was positive and challenging for the young people, although they were very committed and some had ambitions to be social workers. There were five apprentices in the service now. There had also been a recent recruitment within the service of a care leaver, and their drive, determination and personal experience and understanding was beneficial to the work of the service.
- Members commended the content of the report and highlighted the move to smaller homes as positive; and enquired whether 'children's home' was an appropriate term to use. Members were advised that the team had carried out work on institutionalised language, which included changing terms such as 'having contact' to a more positive 'having time with your family,' and children's homes were previously known as 'units,' and 'group homes;' that this was a conversation to have with the young people.
- There was a discussion around practicalities of fostering, which include people who wanted to foster but did not have an extra room, and Members were advised that different options would be discussed with potential foster carers, this included room share dependant on age of children, different circumstances and options.
- The Chair provided thanks to all the staff who worked with foster carers and young people with care-experience, and the foster carers who did great work.

RESOLVED;

That the report be noted.



12 Work Programme

The Work Programme was noted.

13 Action Tracker

The Action Tracker was noted.

Meeting ended at 7.55 pm

CHAIR _____

