

Lead Member Report to CAHW 13/11/2023

1. General Operational issues.

The services have been under considerable pressure due to volume and complexity of cases across the board.

The **SEND Service** lost key staff and have now recruited a new Head of Service who is dealing with a considerable backlog of issues and complaints. The numbers of children requiring Education Health Care plans have doubled since just before the pandemic. We are pulling in agency support and going to a specialist company to look at our systems etc..

Capital Funding: DFE have still to confirm the AP or SEND capital commitments but we remain optimistic re the outcome. The issue of site location, funding, design, construction and then commissioning one or probably two MATs to run them means the benefits for vulnerable children and finance savings will probably take a couple of years to achieve.

In **Children's Services** the issues can and do have life threatening consequences so with some recent cases this has involved our dedicated social workers not only having to spend much time but also dealing with stressful circumstances.

Having been away from the detail for sometime I observe the levels of stress and strain on our staff. They need safe areas to support one another. I have made it clear how much their personal commitment means.

Our roles and procedures are set in legislation.

2. Budget.

The service committed last year to savings of £1.2m and in year savings of a further £1m. These efficiency savings are in line to be achieved. New underlying budget pressures have emerged during the year.

Unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) are allocated to the council and unfortunately the funding does not reflect the full costs especially when the young people go past the age of 18.

There are also some risks re home to school transport which has to be re commissioned this year.

Moving forward there will be a new Data and Finance system introduced to replace time consuming manual systems with real time information. This will be welcomed by the workforce.

Pressures on Children service budgets is a national issue but the DFE are hopefully going to help us with their Safety Valve Scheme.

As a small local authority we gain by having such loyal and dedicated staff but in some respects we do not have economy of scale especially dealing with out of area vastly expensive independent providers.

3. Positive issues to note.

WECA have just agreed to introduce a scheme that supports Care Leavers with **free bus travel** from the ages of 18-22. It will be easy to register and most of the established bus companies are supporting it.

Care Leavers Week started on 24th October. We launched our wonderful photography exhibition at the Egg Theatre to launch and showcase the work and messages our Care Experienced young people. The exhibition will remain in the Egg Theatre until the 3rd of November. The exhibition will then move to Keynsham Library from the 6th of November and will be in Bath Library from 4th of January.

Sector Led Improvement. Children's Social Care have made a recent bid for Sector-Led Improvement Programme. We are in a strong position to be successful in this bid as the criteria is that you have to be a high performing Local Authority that are already delivering excellent services to children and young people and are able to support other Local Authority's to improve. We will hear if we have been successful in our bid before the end of the year.

Supported Lodgings. The service transferred from Housing to the Family Placement Team in July 2023. The service recently applied to be Ofsted registered in line with changes to the Ofsted Framework.

The Health and Well being Board had a full report on the ban of single use vapes and I have written to the Secretary of State asking for the formal government position following the ADC call for a ban.

The 4th Suicide Prevention event took place in the Guildhall with an outstanding participation and full agenda. The aim is to produce a revised strategy and plan for 2024-2028.

The first promised community event re youth crime issues is planned for Keynsham November 27th 5.30-8.30 in the Community Space. It will include police and our staff to listen and respond to parent and children's concerns following the recent violent deaths in our area. We will feed back issues into the CAHW study .

4. Early Years Childcare & Entitlement

Following on from the March 2023 budget the DfE made several announcements on Friday 27th October 2023 with regards to Early years childcare, in particular for working families. In summary these include:

- Expanding the Early Years Entitlement (EYE) offer to working families with 2-year-old children from April 2024, 9-months-old from September 2024 and to increase the

offer for both groups to 30 hours from September 2025. The Council has received an initial grant of £55,000 to help us get to the April 2024 launch date.

- That there will be a national capital programme worth £100 million to support Councils with sufficiency of Early Years Education and Childcare place provision with details to follow in November.
- A childminder start up grant will open for applications by 30 November 2023. The government will offer £600 for those registering with Ofsted and £1200 for those registering with a childminder agency if they complete registration between 15 March 2023 and 31 March 2025.
- A number of changes to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) from January 2024 including no longer requiring level 3 practitioners to hold a level 2 maths qualification and creating provider specific versions of the EYFS. The former may help to ease some of the recruitment challenges the sector has faced.
- A national wraparound childcare programme for all parents of primary school children can access term-time childcare in their local area from 8am – 6pm by September 2026. It has just been announced that the Council will receive £992,919.42 between November and the 25/26 financial year to support this with the majority of funding due in the 24/25 financial year.

These announcements are very high level at this stage and the Early Years teams and their managers will need time to assess the details of the announcements. These initiatives will place a significant additional burden on the existing teams delivering these services in the Council, particularly wraparound childcare. Supporting these teams to ensure they have the capacity to step up to the additional responsibilities will need to be something the Council gives thought to.