

Children's Services Lead Member Report to CAHW Panel

15th January 2024

Intro

As agreed, my report is relatively brief to allow additional time to discuss Adults' and Children's Services budgets at this meeting.

Service pressures

Following my last update on the pressures facing the SEND and education teams, I am pleased to say that some progress is being made in improving service delivery. The issues of demand and sufficiency remain the same, but the teams are being assisted to work more effectively and supported by the additional capacity and experience of new managers.

Home-to-School Transport

Education and Transport teams are drafting a new HTST policy. This policy is in response to the Department for Education's consultation on changes to the statutory Home to School Transport guidance issued by the DFE in 2014. In July this year, the DFE concluded this consultation and issued updated guidance for all local authorities. All LAs are expected to update their HTST policies per this guidance by September 2024.

Our new HTST policy is being redrafted as we speak. As part of the development of the policy, we will go through a consultation process with parents and carers and our solicitors examine our policy to ensure we comply with the new DFE guidance. I plan to ask officers to bring the draft policy to scrutiny in May 2024. We aim to implement the new policy in time for the new academic year in September 2024.

Corporate Parenting

A Corporate Parenting meeting (CPM) is scheduled for Wednesday, the 17th of January; we hope to make it a face-to-face meeting. I reported to the last full council that I am seeking protected status for care leavers (care experienced). At this meeting, I will discuss the reasons behind this recommendation and the need for a council joint motion to promote and adopt this status. I have also spoken to Curo, seeking their similar support, though, of course, we will need the council to adopt the proposal first.

Faulty concrete in schools (RACC)

So far, no RAAC has been identified in B&NES schools. However, the DFE have commissioned and instructed LAs and Trusts to conduct more intrusive RAAC examinations of school buildings. When findings of these reports become available, we will report anything that detrimentally affects education provision in B&NES.

DFE Safety Valve scheme.

In previous panel reports, you will have read about the DFE's Safety Valve programme and the work officers are doing to improve our placements and services for children with SEND. Whilst this programme has challenging expectations from the DFE, there are many positive developments that

the programme will deliver. I will ask officers to bring a full report to scrutiny to bring a spotlight on this work.

Evidence based working.

Children's Services is adopting a new data and finance system in March of this year. In time and with the support of finance and business intelligence colleagues, we should be able to produce more evidenced-based performance reports for teams within Children's Service. Once these systems have been tested, we will ensure these reports are available to the panel.