

## **SCRUTINY ADVISORY BOARD - CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

Minutes of a Meeting of the Scrutiny Advisory Board - Children and Young People held on Monday, 21 February 2022 at 10.30 am at Cumbria House, Carlisle

### **PRESENT:**

Mr P Dew (Chair)

Mrs C Bowditch  
Mrs S Evans

Mrs EA Mallinson  
Mr CP Turner (Acting Vice-Chair)

Also in Attendance:-

Mr D Barton	- Assistant Director - Education and Skills
Mrs L Berryman	- Acting Director – Children’s Services
Mrs F Musgrave	- Assistant Director - Integration and Partnerships
Ms L Ormesher	- Planning and Commissioning Officer
Mr C Campbell	- General Advisor - LIS
Ms L Sanczuk	- Senior Manager - Allerdale and Copeland (Neglect)
Mr J Rasbash	- Strategic Policy and Scrutiny Advisor
Mr D Hamilton	- Democratic Services Officer

### **PART 1 – ITEMS CONSIDERED IN THE PRESENCE OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS**

#### **88 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Mr G Robertson, Mrs A Burns and Mrs S Sanderson.

#### **89 MEMBERSHIP**

Members shared kind words in memory of Mrs V Tarbitt the former Chair of the Board and noted that following her sad passing Mr P Dew had been appointed Chair on a permanent basis.

It was also noted that Mr P Turner would be acting as Vice-Chair for this meeting only.

#### **90 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST**

There were no disclosures of interest made on this occasion.

## **91 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

**RESOLVED** that, the press and public be not excluded from the meeting during consideration of any items of business on the agenda.

## **92 MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** that, members agreed the minutes of the last meetings as an accurate and complete record.

## **93 EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE**

Members considered a report from the Acting Director – Children’s Services which provided an overview to members on tackling disadvantage and closing the attainment gap.

Members heard by way of an introduction that the Education Policy Institute’s Education in England: Annual Report 2020 stated that, ‘In last year’s Annual Report, we modelled that if the trend over the last five years were to continue, it would take over 500 years for the disadvantage gap to be eliminated at secondary level in English and maths. This year the data suggests an even more extreme conclusion: the gap is not closing. Over the last five years, our headline measure of the gap at secondary level has not changed. If this were to continue, the gap would never close’.

The General Adviser – Learning Improvement Service discussed the opportunities to genuinely address the attainment gap, the new approach by the DfE upon a wider definition of disadvantage is an important and helpful distinction for those who may be able to influence future actions at operational and strategic levels. The definition ensures that all those with a desire to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils were able to focus upon the actual, significant barriers to learning for children. Cumbria’s forthcoming Local Government Organisation would no doubt provide opportunities and new ways of working to allow for a strategic approach to be embedded from the outset within, and possibly across, the new authorities. Such opportunities would need to be considered in the very earliest stages of LGR planning to ensure that new frameworks take new approaches into account.

The General Adviser – Learning Improvement Service answered a question relating to the Disadvantage Performance data. Schools were doing a very good job but even with the efforts of schools there were too many children still not able to attain their potential. There would need to be a clear approach to systemic change.

A discussion took place whereby members showed their gratitude to schools but asked what that more could be done to ensure there was closer work going on with

families and with the District Councils. The Assistant Director - Education & Skills mentioned the Education Vision and System Plan and how these aligned strategies would attempt to address structural inequalities.

The Vice-Chair asked about support in place for families who may be less open to accepting help, the question particularly focused around families those with children attending rural schools. Officers recognised that there was sometimes a stigma attached to asking for help but that there were ongoing campaigns such as the Think Family strategy which attempts to seek out families in need offer support. In addition, there were adult education parenting classes in place and the ongoing work to establish School Hubs which it was hoped would go much further in removing the stigma attached to asking for help.

A discussion took place regarding the scope of the report whereby officers were asked to capture the work carried out by the District Councils so that the education disadvantage picture can be informed by the wider picture. The Assistant Director – Learning and Skills gave assurances that at a strategic level the service was aware and incorporating the work of the District Councils. It was **AGREED** that the Children’s Trust Board bring a report to a future meeting which would provide an update on the work from the Locality Groups.

**RESOLVED** that,                    members note the report.

#### **94     EARLY HELP BOARD BRIEFING**

Members considered a report briefing which provided an update to the Board regarding the progress of the Cumbria Early Help Strategy, as well as providing an overview of the work undertaken during the Covid pandemic and key developmental activity.

The Senior Early Help Manager highlighted some key areas beginning with the ‘Think Family’ approach which builds on family strengths by allowing practitioners to work in partnership with families to recognise and promote resilience and build their capabilities. Members heard that this often meant empowering a family to find their own solution to a problem.

A key mechanism for taking forward the early help strategy were the Children’s Trust Board Locality groups. It was explained that the locality groups were the delivery partnerships that work together to deliver the priorities in the early help strategy. The partnerships focused on early intervention, building preventative places and ultimately improving outcomes for children and young people and families. The 6 locality groups were: Allerdale, Barrow, Carlisle, Copeland, Eden and South Lakeland.

The Senior Early Help Manager explained that the County and partners were committed to embedding Signs of Safety as a practice methodology across all thresholds of need and new Signs of Safety bottom lines had been agreed.

A discussion took place regarding the promotion of breastfeeding. Officers provided assurance regarding the support and promotion of breastfeeding within communities as well as the speech and language pathway which included the 'time to talk' program which was offered across the county.

Members asked what further initiatives could be promoted in communities and officers suggested that bringing different services, voluntary organisations and third sector groups together in the community centre was always very helpful.

Members heard that in order to successfully communicate the importance of Early Help would likely need a change in the culture of the system and this highlighted the importance of championing the approach. The Senior Early Help Manager stated that it was not an Early Help Assessment or an Early Protection Plan which kept children safe it is what people do alongside families.

**RESOLVED** that,

- 1) Scrutiny note the progress being undertaken regarding the implementation of the early help strategy as well as noting the work still to do.
- 2) Elected Members promote early help and ensure that it is central to the discussions around support to families.
- 3) Elected members take on the role of Champions of early help in their communities.

## **95 ADDRESSING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES HEALTH INEQUALITIES**

Members considered a report which provided an overview of key issues regarding children and families health inequalities and update on current and planned approaches to addressing these across the County, with a particular focus on partnership working with health.

Members heard that the challenge with available data is that it was no longer reflective of current times, largely as a result of COVID and the impact the pandemic had on children and families. It was explained that the number of children in absolute low income or relative low-income households was increasing. Locality data collected during lockdown indicated a significant increase in families applying for benefits and classed as 'newly vulnerable'.

Members reflected on the significant concerns relating to 'healthy weight'. Though, data was insufficient and incomplete as a result of part screening (impact of COVID) the screening did indicated rising trends.

With regard to mental health, demand on systems continued to increase with services and schools seeing an increase in the number of children and young

people with lower-level anxiety, disordered eating and Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) being at the fore front.

The Children and Families Public Health Lead explained that partnership and integrated working underpinned many of the strategies to tackle health inequalities in Cumbria, such as Early Help, The Children and Young People's Plan and our Think Family/Family Hub approach.

It is recognised that there was not the level of resource within individual organisations to meet the needs of children and families, but through working in partnership services and resources could be streamlined, ensuing a seamless offer to families.

With regard to Family Hubs, members heard that they would host integrated multi-agency teams, including a Start for Life focus, Early Help, Supporting Families Workforce, 3rd sector providers and community-based practitioners, whilst investing in local people and developing effective data sharing.

Members asked sought assurance that the 'Healthy Weight' approach still accounted for weight management for children with SEND. The Children and Families Public Health Lead explained that within the National Child Programme they did not usually measure children with SEND due to complex health needs. It is quite a specific area and the Clinical Commissioning Groups were responsible for weight management for children with SEND and the pathway would usually go through their paediatrician. It was **AGREED** that this would be taken back to the Healthy Weight Partnership Group and that the pathway be clarified. It was also **AGREED** that within the SEND update there would be inclusion of work on mental health and wellbeing specific to SEND.

On the topic of mental health, members asked about the input from Health Partners to improve the data deficit. The Children and Families Public Health Lead explained that there was an absolute recognition of the importance but the issue was that acute presentations would always take priority for Health Partners. However, the 'Family Hub' approach and the statutory requirement on publishing a 'Better Start for Life' offer shows the recognition within the system and would prove to be a large step forward.

A discussion took place regarding the Integrated Care System (ICS) and the Mental Health and Wellbeing work which had been carried out by a county-wide group of partners. It was **AGREED** that further information would be provided at later date on the work of the Hubs and the link to LGR.

**RESOLVED** that, members noted the report.

## **96 CABINET MEMBERS UPDATE**

The Cabinet Member for Schools and Learning was unable to attend the meeting but circulated the following update by email:-

“First of all my apologies about being unable to attend in person I have an eye condition and I am waiting for an operation at Manchester Royal Eye Hospital scheduled for early March. I am currently unable to drive and reaching Carlisle on public transport is not possible.

I was referring back to a report I did in 2018 and reflecting on progress. Schools and Learning includes all schools, CASL, LASLs, Schools Forum, LIS, area teams, apprenticeships, active Cumbria, CTB, SEND improvement board, Inclusion Strategy Improvement Board (now ceased) and many more. It is affected massively by national initiatives and a constantly changing landscape in terms of governance.

The staff teams have worked extremely hard to maintain progress throughout very challenging times and I would wish to thank them. A major objective throughout has been to maintain good relationships with all schools. The weekly meetings still continue and are highly effective in identifying issues and problem solving thanks to everyone’s contributions.

Delivery of the Inclusion Strategy : we have worked on this the Alternative Provision units are in progress. It seems to have taken a very long time but we are nearly there. That leaves improvements for the Pupil Referral Units all three establishments need upgrading and that is a priority that remains. The pandemic has not helped exclusion figures but school based work continues through LIS and external training through the SEND improvement programme is assisting in helping schools to manage better.

School funding : we have agreed to broaden the range of funding in special schools. This has been worked through with the special school headteachers and agreed by Schools Forum. This funding had not been reviewed for ten years and the changes will assist the special schools to cater better for ever increasing numbers and need.

A lot of work has been undertaken to augment the SEN provision as the numbers continue to increase this has been done in co-operation with the schools and using buildings when available e.g. Mayfield Sixth Form, Queen Katherine school and Sandgate. Some primaries are becoming low in numbers and could be used to increase provision e.g. Cabinet approved the closure of St Joseph’s Cockermouth this may be used to widen provision.

Continuing to develop partnership working enables us to improve standards across the board and the full range of schools: maintained, academies, teaching schools are all contributing to the education of all children. There has been a strong emphasis on early years and broadening opportunities for apprenticeships/traineeships. The Virtual School ( I am the Chair of Governors) also make a huge contribution. The WELL project is still working supporting pupils in west Cumbria.

Academisation remains a priority nationally and it is evident the playing field is not a level one. Access to capital funding being a major difficulty for LAs. Also funding to support school improvement has been halved this year (after budgets were set) and will disappear altogether next year.

My personal view is we should not be losing local accountability having seen a failing academy school in West Cumbria and one nearer to me and the quality and speed of response I remain unconvinced.

However we continue to do our best working with all educational establishments to provide the best for our children in Cumbria who deserve no less.”

## **97 BOARD BRIEFING**

Members considered a report which provided an overview of the Board’s business and opportunities for further scrutiny.

The Strategic Policy and Scrutiny Advisor explained that the following items had been identified as potential topics for May’s board:

- Children’s Participation;
- Youth Justice Strategy presentation;
- SEND improvement progress update.

## **98 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting was due to take place on the 24 May 2022.

The meeting ended at 12:25pm