

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD
Wednesday, 2nd September, 2020

Present:- Councillor Steele (in the Chair); Councillors Cusworth, R. Elliott, Jarvis, Keenan, Mallinder, Napper, Taylor, Walsh and Wyatt.

Apologies for absence:- Apologies were received from Councillor Jepson.

The webcast of the Council Meeting can be viewed at: -

<https://rotherham.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

198. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 15 JULY 2020

Resolved: -

That the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board held on 15 July 2020 be approved as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

199. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor R Elliott declared a personal interest in agenda item 7, Children's Placement Provision, as he was a foster carer.

200. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

There were no questions from members of the public or press.

201. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no items requiring the exclusion of the press and public.

202. RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE SICKNESS ABSENCE WORKSHOP

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Finance and the Assistant Director – Human Resources and Operational Development attended the meeting to present a report that provided a progress report on the recommendations made in February 2020 by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board in response to the Board's concerns relating to the underperforming sickness absence measure in the Council Plan.

The Cabinet provided a progress report on the three recommendations that had been made.

- 1. That consideration be given to developing guidance for managers around enhanced emotional support for employees during a restructure, given the links to absence through stress and anxiety.**

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Finance advised that a Rotherham Leader Wellbeing Guide had been developed for managers in response to the recommendation. It was noted that the guide included information and guidance for managers on identifying the early signs and symptoms of mental distress, the appropriate support mechanisms that were available and on how to promote the Five Ways to Well-Being within their teams. The report stated that the Five Ways to Well-Being were: Be Active, Connect, Give, Keep learning and Take Notice, and advised that managers were being encouraged to promote these actions within their teams in order to help maintain good mental health for staff.

2. That data be disaggregated regarding absence through anxiety, stress and depression, as these should be recorded as discrete issues and to have a better understanding of sickness absence.

The Cabinet Member advised that the HR and Payroll system was able to break down the broad anxiety, stress and depression category into work related and personal stress, work relates stress, non-work-related stress and depression anxiety. The full year break down of sickness for 2019/20 was detailed in the officer's report. It was noted that the most frequent reasons for sickness absence were: Other Musculo/Skeletal (20%), Genito Urinary/Gynaecological (14%), Infection/Virus (11%) and Depression/Anxiety (9%).

3. That follow up work be undertaken to ensure managers proactively support staff and manage workloads across teams to prevent any potential knock on effect in terms of sickness absence as a result of staff assuming additional work to cover for an initial long-term sickness absentee.

The Cabinet Member advised that the Council's Performance Development Review (PDR) process had been updated with managers advised to start conversations by focusing on the well-being of the individual employee rather than going straight into discussions regarding their performance. It was noted that the PDR process provided a good opportunity for managers to find out if team members were facing any particular challenges and if there were any specific actions required in order to support them. The report stated that the HR Consultancy Team continued to provide advice, guidance and support to managers in relation to long-term sickness absence.

Members noted concern about the amount of sickness absence attributed to anxiety and depression and asked whether comparisons on this issue had been made against levels of absence for this reason at other authorities. The Assistant Director – Human Resources and Operational Development advised that comparisons regarding the levels of sickness attributed to anxiety and depression was planned, noting that the Council did speak with other authorities to share and learn from each other's experiences.

The Chair asked for further information on sickness absence amongst staff who had been working at home since the restrictions due to the pandemic had been implemented in March. The Assistant Director advised that having compared levels of sickness absence against the same period in 2019 that the number of occurrences of sickness absence in 2020 were comparable to those previously experienced but noted that the average length of absence had increased. The Assistant Director advised that this had been potentially caused by home working practices making it slightly more difficult for managers to support staff with their return to work.

Members asked whether staff who were absent from work due to stress or anxiety would be considered for redeployment into less stressful roles in order to manage their return to work. The Assistant Director advised that in such situations all options would be explored including redeployment in order to manage a successful return to work.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Finance and the Assistant Director – Human Resources and Operational Development for attending the meeting and for answering members questions.

Resolved: -

That the report be noted.

203. CHILDREN'S PLACEMENT PROJECTIONS

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Neighbourhood Working and the Interim Strategic Director of Children and Young People's Services attended the meeting to present a report that provided an update on the Children and Young People Services (CYPS) Directorate placements spend and the development of further developments of in-house placements of Looked After Children.

In introducing the report, the Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Neighbourhood Working stated it was the Council's ambition to reduce the number of Looked After Children in the care of the authority to as low a number that could be managed safely as possible.

It was noted that order to set a robust budget for 2019/20 and 2020/21 a review of the CYPS spend had taken place to identify estimated reductions in costs that could be expected to be achieved over and above delivery of existing budget savings. It was further noted that a major element in the reduced budget estimates had been with regard to the placement projections of Looked After Children in the Borough that reflected a transfer in the number of high cost to lower cost placements combined with a reduction the numbers of Looked After Children from 651

to 600 by March 2020 and a further reduction to 541 by March 202. The report stated that at the end of the 2019/20 financial year Looked After Children placements had reduced from 647 on 1 April 2019 to 595 on 31 March 2020, however the placement spend was £5.4m over budget due to the placement mix with significantly higher number of children in “high cost” residential and independent fostering placements.

It was noted that the COVID-19 pandemic had had a negative impact on the allocated budget and the planned reductions of Looked After Children across different placement types, with more children than anticipated being placed in more costly provision and for these placements to last for a longer period of time that would be usually the case. It was noted also that the pandemic had also led to an increase in the number of children in emergency placements. Members were also advised that while still increasing the projected number of new in-house foster carers had not increased at the levels predicted at the start of the year due to restrictions related to the pandemic.

Members asked for information regarding the backlog of cases in the Family Courts and how this was impacting on the number of Looked After Children. The Interim Strategic Director of Children and Young People’s Services noted that currently there were 30 children waiting in the court system, noting that this was an incredibly high number. The Interim Strategic Director advised that while new court dates were being added the backlog of cases could take up to four months to be cleared.

Members welcomed the invest to save activity that had been taking place such as the increased recruitment of in-house foster carers but asked that as demand was always greater than supply whether there was any risk averse activity taking place with some children being taken into care when doing so was not the most suitable intervention. The Interim Strategic Director advised that the decision to take any child into care was taken very seriously and at a very senior level, and assured members that all the children that were currently in the authority’s care should be in the authority’s care. The Interim Strategic Director advised that work was always taking place to ensure that families received the most appropriate support for their own circumstances, either from Early Help or from a full social care intervention, and to ensure that these services worked together in the most effective manner possible.

The Chair asked that with children returning to school whether an increase in Looked After Children was anticipated. The Interim Strategic Director advised that there was always an increase in numbers of Looked After Children after the summer holidays as schools played an essential part in identifying children who may be at risk.

The Chair thanked the Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Children’s Services and Neighbourhood Working and the Interim Strategic Director of Children and Young People’s Services for attending the meeting and answering members questions.

Resolved: -

1. That the report be noted.
2. That if the number of Looked After Children increases to 630 or more, then a report be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board or the Improving Lives Select Commission, whichever meeting is soonest.

204. ADULT CARE: BUDGET FORECAST AND SAVINGS UPDATE

The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health and the Strategic Director of Adult Care, Housing and Public Health attended the meeting to present a report that provided an update on the forecast budget position for Adult Care, the Housing General Fund and Public Health.

The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health in introducing the report advised that prior to the pandemic that the Adult Care, Housing General Fund and Public Health budgets had been on track and that all of the overspend in the budget had been caused by the extra spending that had been needed in response to the pandemic. The Cabinet Member noted that due to the constantly evolving situation regarding the pandemic that it was not currently possible to predict a final budget position.

The Strategic Director advised that overall the Directorate was forecast to have an overspend of £8.4m on general fund services after taking account of the additional one-off budget support of £4.65m for 2020/21. It was noted that the Covid-19 pandemic had created a negative cost impact of £8.4m on the Adult Care budget, with £6.3m of the overspend being caused by the need for additional expenditure in areas such as new packages of care; financial support for the independent care sector and the provision of personal protective equipment. The Strategic Director further advised that the pandemic had delayed the work required to deliver £2.1m of identified savings in the Directorate as due to the pandemic staff resources had been diverted to support work related to the pandemic and away from planned transformational activity. It was also noted that anticipated additional income had also reduced as the implementation of social distancing measures had prevented some of the tasks required from taking place.

The Strategic Director advised that the delay in the delivery of savings beyond 2020/21 was currently being assessed along with potential mitigating actions and noted that any change to the expected saving profile would be addressed in the Council's Budget reports. The report noted that the Neighbourhood Services' (Housing) and Public Health budgets were both forecast to be delivered on target for the year. The report included tables that provided financial information on the Revenue Monitoring 2020/21 position as at May 2020, a summary of budget variances and the savings delivery forecast.

The Strategic Director noted that preparations for winter, changes to government guidelines regarding reassessments, longer timescales required to conduct reassessments for care packages virtually rather than in person and the changes to government guidelines on hospital discharges all presented challenges logistically but also with regard to adding further pressures to the budget.

Members noted that the budget pressures in Adult Care had been created by the extra spending that had been required due to the pandemic and that prior to this that the Adult Care budget had been in a positive position.

Members asked if there would be any further funding from the Government for local authorities to mitigate the extra costs that had been incurred in responding to the pandemic. The Strategic Director advised that there was currently no more additional funding available from the Government over what had already been received.

Members asked for further information on the number of vacancies that were currently being held within Adult Care and how this was being managed with regard to both the budget and service delivery. The Strategic Director advised that vacancies and recruitment were being managed in a way that would ensure resilience in the service, an example being that when recruiting social workers more were being recruited than were currently needed in the anticipation of other social workers leaving the authority. The Strategic Director also advised that ensuring recruitment to vacancies was managed at maximum levels would also provide future resilience in the service regarding sickness and maternity absences. The Strategic Director noted that while vacancy control was an essential part of delivering a balanced budget, reductions in staffing numbers would only be considered if the continued delivery of services that ensured the safety of service users could be maintained.

Members asked for further information on how the pandemic had impacted on the number of home care packages that were being delivered. The Strategic Director advised that initially in the pandemic that the demand for home care had dropped substantially as service users cancelled packages in favour of receiving care from relatives due to concerns about carers coming into their homes. The Service Director noted the financial impact of this as in order to support independent providers payments had been paid on a basis of planned hours, not hours delivered. The Strategic Director noted that the difference between home care hours paid for by the Council and home care hours delivered had reduced significantly and that new care packages were also starting to be delivered.

The Strategic Director advised that Adult Care services were also being impacted by an increase on demand related to unpaid carer's fatigued by the extra demands placed on them during the pandemic now seeking

extra support from Adult Care. The Strategic Director also noted the future pressures on the service of supporting service users to be able to remain in their homes over the winter and also of the impacts of the pandemic and the related restrictions increasing demand from services users with mental health, debt or housing problems.

The Chair asked how the extra funding that had been allocated to the Council to support the extra expenditure incurred related to the pandemic had been spent. The Strategic Director advised that it had been spent on areas including additional personal protective equipment, additional placements and payments to independent sector care providers who had been negatively impacted financially by the pandemic.

The Cabinet Member in conclusion noted the excellent work of the Adult Care, Housing and Public Health team and its partners throughout the pandemic and welcomed the news that there were currently no Covid-19 patients in hospital in Rotherham.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health and the Strategic Director of Adult Care, Housing and Public Health for attending the meeting and answering members questions.

Resolved: -

1. That the report be noted.
2. That a further report on the Adult Care Budget position be brought to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board in November 2020.

205. WORK IN PROGRESS - SELECT COMMISSIONS

The Chairs of the Improving Lives, Improving Places and Health Select Commissions provided an update on the work of the Select Commissions.

206. FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS - 1 AUGUST - 31 OCTOBER

Members considered the Cabinet Forward Plan for the period 1 September to 30 November 2020.

Resolved: -

1. That the Forward Plan be noted.
2. That the following reports be considered at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board on 16 September 2020:
 - Annual Housing Development Report
 - The Year Ahead
 - Advice Review and Advice Services Service Level

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Agreement

- Town Centre Public Spaces Protection Order, and a Dog Control Public Spaces Protection Order
- Voluntary Sector Infrastructure.

207. CALL-IN ISSUES

There were no call-in issues.

208. URGENT BUSINESS

There were no urgent items of business.

209. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Resolved: -

That the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board will be held at 11am on Wednesday 16 September 2020 as Microsoft Teams meeting.