

## **Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board**

**14 October 2020**

**-: Present :-**

Councillor Howgate (Chairman)

Councillors Atiya-Alla, Barrand, Brown, Bye, Mandy Darling, Foster, Kennedy (Vice-Chair) and Loxton

(Also in attendance: Councillors Brooks, Steve Darling, Douglas-Dunbar, Hill, Law, Barbara Lewis, Chris Lewis, Mills and Morey)

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### **13. Apologies**

It was reported that, in accordance with the wishes of the Liberal Democrat Group, the membership of the Board had been amended to include Councillor Atiya-Alla in place of Councillor Doggett.

### **14. Children & Young People and the Impact of Covid-19**

The Board received an update in respect of the impact of Covid-19 on children and young people in Torbay. The Cabinet Member for Children's Services and the Assistant Director Education, Learning and Skills gave a presentation on the key issues in connection with education and Members also heard representations from the Principal and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of South Devon College, the CEO of Coast Academies (Eden Park Primary, Preston Primary, Cockington Primary), the CEO of Riviera Education Trust and the CEO of Bay Education Trust in respect of the successful return of pupils to schools and colleges in September 2020 and the impact of Covid-19 and responded to questions in relation to:

- (i) the personal impact on children, such as isolation, being away from their friends, increase in financial difficulties for low income families, impact of parents and carers being Furloughed, e-learning, exposure to reports of high levels of death and numbers of people catching the virus;
- (ii) how the local authority, education providers, the community and voluntary sector had worked together successfully to support the children and young people and their families in Torbay;
- (iii) the systems in place to manage the 19 confirmed Covid-19 cases impacting education in Torbay, which had resulted in 739 children and 52 staff members having to isolate, whilst enabling as many children and young people to remain in attendance;

- (iv) attendance levels compared to previous years and the reasons for non-attendance and action being taken to try to secure a return to school of non-attenders;
- (v) the impact on teachers and head teachers and the support available to ensure their wellbeing as well as the wellbeing of the children and young people;
- (vi) the financial impact on educational establishments and the support available from the Government;
- (vii) access to free school meals, especially for those children who needed to isolate and during lockdown;
- (viii) the impact on educational attainment;
- (ix) PPE, wearing of face coverings, social distancing and making facilities Covid Secure; and
- (x) opportunities for reskilling, retraining and apprenticeships.

The Board also heard from the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Director of Children's Services in respect of the impact of Covid-19 on children's social care. Members noted that there had initially been a decrease of 70% of referrals through the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) but that this had increased by 40% in July. These referrals resulted in some form of intervention from the team but did not necessarily translate into children being taken into care. There had not been an increase in high level domestic abuse cases during lockdown which had been predicted, but it was felt that affected children needed time to re-settle back into their schools and feel safe before they would start to open up, therefore it was likely that new cases would be known over the next few months. Members noted that £150k had been allocated by the Government across the whole of Devon to help address domestic abuse and that the Directors of Children's Services across Devon were working together to determine how best to utilise this funding.

The Board noted the flexible approach taken by social care staff to utilise alternative communication methods such as Zoom, WhatsApp, text etc. whilst maintaining face to face visits where possible, ensuring appropriate social distancing and Covid Secure measures were adhered to, which was welcomed and embraced by the young people.

Members acknowledged that, whilst there had been a reduction in the number of children in care from 353 to 332, there was a backlog of court proceedings which were due to be heard by the end of November, resulting in social workers having higher caseloads than anticipated.

Resolved:

- (i) that the Overview and Scrutiny Board express its appreciation to the Assistant Director Education, Learning and Skills and education providers for their leadership and support to the whole of the education sector within Torbay using a collaborative and partnership approach to ensuring the best outcomes for our children and young people in education;
- (ii) that all those involved in enabling the 96% attendance for the looked after children in Torbay be congratulated for all their work;
- (iii) that the Chief Executive Officers and Heads of Maintained Schools be requested to ensure that priority support is given to children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to enable them to catch up and flourish in their education and achieve the best results possible;
- (iv) that the Chief Executive Officers and Heads of Maintained Schools continue to explore all options available to enable children and young people to have access to the internet and appropriate devices to ensure that they are able to fully access online education resources;
- (v) that the Cabinet Member for Children's Services be requested to lobby the Government to ensure that reasonable funding in respect of the additional costs incurred by the Primary, Secondary, Further Education and Early Years Sectors are covered to ensure that their overall budgets are not adversely impacted as a result of Covid-19;
- (vi) that we collectively identify with local businesses opportunities to emphasise the importance of utilising apprenticeships in the workplace and encouraging take up of apprentices through the recovery phase of Covid-19 and to assist in our economic recovery and help secure jobs for the young people in Torbay, who are at risk of being adversely impacted by Covid-19 and may have reduced employment opportunities due to the number of experienced adults seeking jobs; and
- (vii) that the Board thanked the Director of Children's Services and her team for all their help supporting some of the most vulnerable children in the Torbay impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

(Note: Councillor Barrand arrived during discussion of this item.)

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Chairman