

**Author/Lead Officer of Report:**

Meredith Dixon-Teasdale

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Report of: Meredith Teasdale-Dixon

Report to: Education, Children and Families Committee

Date of Decision: 27th September 2023

Subject: Update report from the Strategic Director of Children's Services

Has an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) been undertaken?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If YES, what EIA reference number has it been given? <i>(Insert reference number)</i>				
Has appropriate consultation taken place?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Has a Climate Impact Assessment (CIA) been undertaken?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If YES, give details as to whether the exemption applies to the full report / part of the report and/or appendices and complete below:-				
<i>"The (report/appendix) is not for publication because it contains exempt information under Paragraph (insert relevant paragraph number) of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended)."</i>				

Purpose of Report:

The paper provides a Strategic Director's update on the performance and governance of Children's services, including progress in meeting DCS (Director of Children's Services) accountabilities and delivering on our statutory requirements. It also provides an update regarding progress in relation to the Council's Delivery Plan, key strategic events and issues on the horizon.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that Education Children and Families Policy Committee:

1. Notes the Strategic Director of Children's Services report and agrees key activity for the coming months.

Background Papers:

(Insert details of any background papers used in the compilation of the report.)

1. Background Papers:
 - a) Statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children's Services

Lead Officer to complete:-		
1	I have consulted the relevant departments in respect of any relevant implications indicated on the Statutory and Council Policy Checklist, and comments have been incorporated / additional forms completed / EIA completed, where required.	Finance: <i>Liz Gough</i>
		Legal: <i>Nadine Wynter</i>
		Equalities & Consultation: <i>(Insert name of officer consulted)</i>
		Climate: <i>(Insert name of officer consulted)</i>
	<i>Legal, financial/commercial and equalities implications must be included within the report and the name of the officer consulted must be included above.</i>	
2	SLB member who approved submission:	<i>Meredith Teasdale Dixon</i>
3	Committee Chair consulted:	<i>Councillor Dawn Dale</i>
4	I confirm that all necessary approval has been obtained in respect of the implications indicated on the Statutory and Council Policy Checklist and that the report has been approved for submission to the Committee by the SLB member indicated at 2. In addition, any additional forms have been completed and signed off as required at 1.	
	Lead Officer Name: <i>Meredith Teasdale-Dixon</i>	Job Title: <i>Strategic Director of Children's Services</i>
	Date: <i>(18/09.23)</i>	

1. PROPOSAL

1.1 This report starts with recognition and gratitude for all those working in children's and education system, who continue to work together to ensure our children and young people are safe, healthy, attaining and moving towards an independent adulthood.

1.2 Leadership and Partnership

Over the last two months I have been working to ensure that I have spoken to key leaders across the system who work with and or influence the work for children and young people. This includes South Yorkshire Police, the Integrated Care Board, Sheffield Children's Hospital, leaders in the Voluntary and Community Sector, including On Board and Sharrow Community Forum, Learn Sheffield, Government Departments and Education Leaders. I have co-chaired the Children's Delivery Group which is a sub-set of the ICB in Sheffield. The meeting focused on the many challenges in the system at present and the possibilities of improvement as we work together. This has focused on a Belonging Framework where we create a common vision and language to talk about how our children and young people belong in a loving family, in a local school that supports them, in a community that listens to and respects them and in a city that champions them.

I have met with Headteachers to discuss the challenges in schools, particularly around our Special Educational Needs and Disability system and possible changes that will support better opportunities for our children and young people.

My meetings with Learn Sheffield as a conduit for all schools in Sheffield have been fruitful and will, I am sure, mean that we are sharing the same vision and working to the same goals over the coming months and years. We have also focused on how we support more diverse governing bodies and the recruitment of teachers and leaders of colour from our local communities.

I have met with a number of leaders of colour and aspirant leaders and am working with them and Learn Sheffield to create a group where we can focus on this work.

Over the coming months

I will continue to develop these relationships and work to ensure that we have a common vision and plan for the children and young people in our city linked to the Our City Goals work.

I will also continue to be a key advocate for all our children and young people.

1.3 Safeguarding

This continues to be a key focus. The overarching Sheffield Children's Safeguarding Board is well attended and creates a focus in this area across the city. A review of the profile and importance of Safeguarding in the City is currently taking place which will ensure we are in a strong position in the future. A key focus for me is ensuring that the profile of Safeguarding is high in the Council and also the City. This will include ensuring that the profile of the Local Area Designated Officer (LADO) is high and understood across all organisations that work with children and in the city.

Sheffield is doing well. Even though there is an increase in demand at the front door we are maintaining our number of children in care that is with a backdrop of increased Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children in the city (UASC).

Number of Children Looked After at 31st of March has continued with a slight drop from 674 (2021), to 666 (2022) to 653 (2023). Rate per 10k at 57.2, 56.3 and 55.2 respectively, remained low comparing to our comparators range 70.0 to 81.0.

Over the last 2 – 3 years there has been a stark increase in the costs of placements. The average placement is £5400 per week. However due to a limited number of places and profiteering within the independent care market, the most complex children can cost a

great deal more. Whilst we have maintained our numbers, as we have stated costs have increased and there is a gap between the money received for UASC Care leavers and actual costs which is contributing pressure to a £2m overspend in the placement budget. We also have more costs for Special Guardianship Orders and kinship care with children and young people staying in their extended family. This is a positive shift as it provides greater security and opportunities.

We are working closely with Integrated Commissioning on ensuring that we regularly monitor, and quality assure all our contracted care and support provision including onsite visits to all providers, robust contract management, financial governance and care quality assurance. The last year has seen a particular focus on placements in scope of the National Review and on ensuring we have a grip on the welcome forthcoming changes that will extend regulation to include Supported Accommodation for young people aged 16-18 years. This includes working with existing providers to support them to become registered and working with the wider market to encourage a diverse and high-quality offer of appropriate registered care provision for Sheffield children who need it. This work has progressed well, and we are confident that we will be able to mitigate any risks to continuity of care for our children.

The National Review Phase 2 has also been completed and we are about to undertake a further round of visits to our remaining three placements that are in scope. This collaborative approach with colleagues from social care and health has been positively received by providers with action plans being delivered where providers have needed to make improvements and more effective relationships with providers who have recognised the value of our support and challenge approach to the review. We are looking to build on the success and learning of this work beyond the scope of the National Review and will provide further updates on this work in future DCS updates.

We have been looking at increasing the number of foster carers. This marketing is taking place now but at present our number of foster carers is remaining quite static. Nationally this has been an issue since the pandemic as older foster carers decide to exit the market and there is not the like for like recruitment to new foster carers. In the last few weeks, we have however begun to see greater interest from potential foster carers.

Foster placements have dropped from **71.0%** to **65.1%**, this has caused the major rise to the number of children placed in **children's homes, secure units and hostels (including semi-independent living)** from **19.0%** to **25.1%**, which is largely higher compared to our comparators. It is important that we continue to increase our special guardianship order and kinship care placements, increase our number of foster carers as well as review our residential home provision.

Over the next few months

We will be reviewing the makeup of our placements for children coming into care as well as all our early intervention and prevention activity both within Children's Services but more broadly across the Council. Our focus will be to ensure all activity is having the required impact in stopping the escalation of need and being proactive to address issues with children, young people, families, and schools at the earliest opportunity.

1.4 Vetting and barring scheme

The lead members for each party for the Education, Children and Families Committee have asked me to work with Democratic Services and Legal to ensure that the right DBS checks are in place for all Elected Members especially as all Members are Corporate Parents. I will keep Committee updated on progress around this, acknowledging that it is also central to the current safeguarding review being undertaken.

1.5 Vulnerable children and young people

We know that nationally our system and process for both assessing need for our children

with special educational needs and disabilities and providing the right support is, at best, difficult. This picture is reflected in Sheffield with a high level of complaints and tribunals in this space. There is an urgent need to look at how we do things to ensure that where children and young people have special needs there are interventions that help them address these issues and for all our children to have the same opportunities as their peers.

A review into our SEND process is coming to fruition and this will feed into work we are looking to undertake with IMPOWER to transform how we work in this space. This has very exciting possibilities and I will keep committee updated.

The SEND Accelerated Progress Plan has progressed well and was signed off by DfE and NHS England last month following a review that recognised the accelerated progress we had made on SEND Multi Agency Transitions to adulthood. Despite this 'sign off', we recognise as a system that the improvements for children and their families and carers requires further collaborative effort to embed so that every child and family experiences the benefits of improved multi agency working and able to achieve better outcomes as they move into adulthood. This focus will be continued as we retain the multi-agency approach in our response to the new SEND Inspection Framework and embed the outcomes framework developed through the SEN APP process.

We have recently commissioned Sheffield Inclusion Centre to accommodate more young people excluded from school. They are starting this term with around 220 pupils. We know that last year over 150 young people were permanently excluded from their school. Unless we are working together as a system to address these issues, we will not have the required places to meet the educational needs of excluded children. The Belonging Framework, which Joe Horobin (Director of Integrated Commissioning) and Andrew Jones (Director of Education and Skills) are leading on for the City, is an opportunity for us across this system to have a different conversation about alternative curriculums, how we support schools to address issues of anxiety, how we ensure our neurodiverse young people can succeed in school, and how we are providing the right support for our children and young people who have social, emotional and mental health needs.

We are also focusing on how we support all our children and young people to be in school every day. That they see it not only as a place to learn, but also to socialise and gain greater opportunities. This needs a shift that the whole of Sheffield is embracing. We have been too long at the bottom of the table for our children and young people's attendance at school. Currently around 28% of our school age children and young people – 5-16 are not in full time education.

Over the coming months

We will draft and share the Belonging Framework which will be a coproduced framework with key partners and stakeholders across the education, Health and VCS sector ensuring children and families voices are at the heart of it. We will focus across Sheffield on children attending school. We will look to get the right building blocks in place to transform our special educational needs and disability system ensuring as well that resources are in the right place to support this.

1.6 Fair access to services

As higher numbers of children move from primary into secondary, we are looking to have a targeted focus on admissions to support parents to make the most informed decisions about the right place for their child in a system that has little space at present. This pressure will ease as the higher number of children move through the school system. We are beginning to see more space in our primary sector whilst still seeing pressure in the secondary sector.

Through this process we are also looking to ensure that families from different parts of the community are not impacted more than others. We are developing our renewed race equality action plan which we will share with committee this term.

Over coming months

Draft and share the renewed Race Equality Plan for children and young people.

Provide the right support at the right time for admissions to school at primary and secondary.

1.7 Educational excellence

Early results as reported by schools indicate that Sheffield school pupils GCSE results have improved compared to 2019 (the last comparable year due to pandemic changes).

Currently 60% of schools have provided information and the key headlines are as follows:

- a) Attainment 8 – the average points score comprised from eight qualifying subjects
 - o Sheffield has improved from 44.9 in 2019 to 46.4 in 2023, in comparison National performance in 2019 was 46.7.
- b) English and Maths grade 4+ - the proportion of pupils achieving a pass at grade 4 or better in both subjects
 - o Sheffield has improved from 59.5% in 2019 to 64.4% in 2023, in comparison National performance in 2019 was 64.6%.
- c) English grade 4+ - the proportion of pupils achieving a pass at grade 4 or better in English
 - o Sheffield has improved from 70.8% in 2019 to 74.5% in 2023, in comparison National performance in 2023 is 74.2%.
- d) Maths grade 4+ - the proportion of pupils achieving a pass at grade 4 or better in Maths
 - o Sheffield has improved from 65.2% in 2019 to 69.1% in 2023, in comparison National performance in 2023 is 72.3%.

Please note that as only 60% of schools have currently provided information these figures are likely to change and from experience, we would anticipate a small drop in the provisional 2023 figures.

For information, grade 4 is equivalent to previous grade C and is used as the pass mark. Young people who do not achieve a grade 4 in either English or Maths are required to re-sit the qualification.

Over the coming months

We will be undertaking a full review and working with Learn Sheffield and schools to assess how we continue to improve attainment and opportunities.

1.7.1 Quality of provision in schools

In relation to the quality of provision in Schools we continue to see an overall improving trend. In relation to comparative data the proportion of schools with good or better judgments is above average compared to all schools nationally, all schools in core cities and all schools in local authorities which are statistical neighbours.

% Of All Schools Good Or Outstanding in Sheffield - at 31/07/2023				
Area	Primary	Secondary	Special	All Schools
Core cities	91.5	76.4	86.4	88.3
National	90	81.4	89.2	88.7
Sheffield	93.2	76.7	81.8	89.3
Stat. neighbours	88.2	72.3	88	85.7

1.8 Early Years

We continue to maintain an overview of the quality of provision both for the Early Years and Schools sectors. Clearly, funding to the sectors is a key factor which underpins quality of provision.

1.8.1 Quality of provision in the early years

The Early Years National Funding Formula (EYNFF) is a move towards greater fairness, from Sheffield's perspective it appears that we continue to be underfunded compared to other local authorities. In 23/24 financial year, we received a 4-6% increase in funding settlement for early years. We believe that the increase being offered nationally is insufficient to meet the increasing costs due to the cost-of-living crisis and increases to the National Living Wage.

The inflationary pressure and insufficient increase in income will impact on our providers, in particular those in deprived areas and parents are already having to subsidise the increasing costs. Providers in Sheffield are faced with financial sustainability issues across the childcare sector, and this is starting to translate into closures, which in turn will seriously impact our ability to provide sufficient FEL and childcare places for parents in the city.

National government has recently launched an expansion of early years provision for working parents and as part of this initiative funding for under 3 has been increased by 31% from £5.63 an hour to £7.36 an hour. Further work/analysis is required to establish if the increase offered is sufficient to cover inflationary pressures and cost of delivery.

This table sets out a summary of the quality of provision in Early Years settings:

Provider Overview (As of September 2023)	New registered	Inadequate	Requires Improvement	Good	Outstanding
Childminders: Total - 207	15	0	2	150	12
	Met - 26	Not Met - 2			
Group Care: Total – 122 settings including 2 maintained	8	2	4	86	23
Schools: total – 132 (*No data for school EYFS Ofsted gradings unless notified by LA that EYFS have entered a category)	NA	(EYFS Inadequate) 1	(EYFS Requires Improvement) 4	--	--

Our Early Years quality team continues to work with individual settings to focus on improving the quality of provision.

For the 12 month period to August 2023, 5 settings closed with funding and staffing being a main factor. We have also had 2 re-registrations of settings and a new setting open. We also had 25 childminders leave the profession, but we have also had 5 new registrations.

Overall, Sheffield providers are doing well. In Sheffield 98% of our childminders are achieving Good or better gradings and 95% of our PVI providers area achieving

Good or better gradings.

2. HOW DOES THIS DECISION CONTRIBUTE ?

2.1 This gives line of sight to committee members about activity being undertaken in children Services, specifically the work being undertaken by the DCS and priorities for the next period between committees.

3. HAS THERE BEEN ANY CONSULTATION?

3.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update in relation to Children Services.

3.2 Consultation is undertaken during the development of proposals for the budget and implementation of proposals for the budget as appropriate.

3.3 An overall approach to coproduction and involvement is also a key element of the delivery plan, ensuring that the voice of our children and Young People is heard and young people are happy who have the start they need for the future they want

4. RISK ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

4.1 Equality Implications

4.1.1 Reducing risk of committee members not being aware of the activity undertaken in children Services. Providing clarity and purpose and ensuring assurance whilst highlighting any risks

4.2 Financial and Commercial Implications

4.2.1 No financial and Commercial implications

4.3 Legal Implications

4.3.1 No legal implications as no formal policy and proposals

4.4 Climate Implications

4.4.1 No Climate implications

4.5 Other Implications

4.5.1 There are no specific other implications for this report

5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

5.1 Not applicable – no decision or change is being proposed

6. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 This report provides an update regards Children's Services activities for Members.

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