

PP5. Children's Services Performance Update

The panel considered a report by the Director of Children's Services setting out a summary of performance for the period April 2017 to December 2017. The Director of Children's Services provided an overview of the report.

The report provided information on:-

- significant challenges and changes in Service pressures since the last Performance Panel update; and
- an update on relevant underpinning strategies, including the Children and Young People (S) Act 2014, the Expansion of Early Years Provision, the National Improvement Framework (NIF) and the Pupil Equity Fund.

The Head of Education highlighted:-

- progress made by the Regional Improvement Collaborative, highlighting that a phase 2 Regional Improvement Plan would be submitted to the Scottish Government/Education Scotland by early September 2018;
- progress in the National Improvement Framework (NIF) plan, in particular work to align schools in their work with NIF priorities;
- that a detailed analysis of expenditure and outcomes ongoing from Pupil Equity Funding would be prepared at the end of year one on 30 June 2018;
- the development of the Closer to Home Strategy which is intended to reduce the Council's reliance on external residential and foster care. Based on a "family first" approach, the shift in the balance of care towards family assets and creative support will improve the outcomes of looked after children; and
- progress in replacing the Social Work Information System. Tenders were currently being evaluated and it was anticipated that system configuration and implemented will begin following the appointment of a supplier in the summer.

Members discussed Pupil Equity Funding and requested examples of projects in order to understand the range of projects in place to reduce the attainment gap. The Head of Education confirmed that 5 examples were being worked up and these would be provided to elected members shortly. Additionally a report on the outcomes of PEF projects would be submitted to the Education Executive. The Head of Education emphasised that work continued alongside PEF projects to raise attainment for all. He gave an overview of the methodology used to review and evaluate the various PEF projects. It was important that reviews were ongoing and not simply at the

end of the school year in order that adjustments could be made as the projects mature and take hold.

Following a question in regard to the redesign of the Criminal Justice team, Lesley James confirmed that there had been a service redesign and that there were now 3 teams in place. She stressed that although there had been a reduction on funding, officers had been successful in mitigating the effects by attracting external funding, in particular from the voluntary sector and that the structure in place was fit for purpose.

Following a question in regard to literacy, the Head of Education confirmed that literacy and numeracy remained priorities and that the Council sought to maintain and improve standards. Members had suggested that, anecdotally, the standards set by the SQA were lower than in previous years. The Head of Education emphasised that the Council aimed for higher standards regardless and gave a detailed explanation of the work of both literacy and numeracy officers. There was a focus on consistency and he emphasised, “adequate” was not acceptable.

In regard to the indicator PED.02.13.CS17 – “social work staff will ensure all service users are supported to receive welfare benefits checks”, the Head of Education confirmed that social work staff had been provided with a Universal Credit toolkit and information on Child Poverty Action Group training. Staff had also been provided with a link to an e-learning module on Universal Credit which should be completed by all staff by September 2018. Ms James confirmed that the subject was complex and could be difficult for the public to understand.

The panel then sought information on progress in meeting SOLD.13.02.CS17 – “reduce draft and delay for looked after children achieving permanence by implementing permanence and care excellence programme”. Lesley James explained that 7 areas had been identified in the child’s journey and tests identified to determine whether these could impact on key stages. The key areas which had been identified included areas where bureaucracy caused delays such as the reporting process, the timescales for reporting to court, setting panel dates. In response to a question, Ms James confirmed that the transition stage was vital and explained that there was not a one size fits all solution, however where possible a family based solution was the preferred outcome.

Following a question, the Head of Education gave an update on the transfer of community halls. Work was ongoing with communities to ensure that any proposed transfers were viable. It was not a case of the Council shedding its assets and it was vital that the communities fully understood the risks and challenges.

Decision

The Performance Panel noted the performance of Children’s Services over the period April to December 2017