

PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16 MARCH 2021

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

(1) Question from Tricia Cowdrey to the Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care

As a resident I have been deeply concerned by some of the statements made on social media by a few councillors about cuts to Children's Mental Health Services by the current administration.

We are being asked to believe that this is an uncaring administration who do not care about our children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and in particular those with mental health needs.

Having listened to the webcast of the Full council meeting on 25th February this year there was the accusation that, during a mental health crisis, the mental health budget is being cut by £100,000, linking this to the treatment of parents of children with special needs and disabilities. The implication of this, alongside the social media content, is that these parents are very worried about the potential impact on their families.

As someone who falls within this category, I would like to ask for clarity about the impact of the new budget on children with special educational needs and disabilities and their families. Could the Chair please assist in providing this clarity given this committee's role in the scrutiny of children's education and social care as well as commissioning and procurement for children and an overarching remit for health scrutiny.

Thank you for your question Ms. Cowdrey. I believe that the saving referred to is SW06. This is described in the Budget Savings and Income Generation Initiatives Appendix 2(ii). This is available here:

<https://democracy.southend.gov.uk/documents/s43319/Appendix>

2ii - Budget Savings and Income Generation.pdf.). The papers for the meeting make it clear that there is no saving expected in 2021/2022, and that there will be a saving of £100,000 expected in 2022/2023.

The papers make it clear that this is a saving on adult social care support, currently delivered in partnership with Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust (EPUT) through a Section 75 partnership agreement. Details of the delivery of the saving are not provided as these will be developed in partnership with NHS colleagues. The Council will work with EPUT to identify a shared way of delivering more effective and targeted support for people with statutory adult social care needs in relation to their mental health. We will also work to increase the focus on the delivery of prevention and support for the general population. We will develop these plans through coproduction and in light of changing patterns of both demand and support. This will take into account increased availability of community and voluntary sector delivered services.

As such I am pleased to confirm that this saving is unlikely to have any impact on children receiving services, although there may be some impact on children approaching

transition who are likely to have eligible social care needs when they become adult. If, during the development of savings proposals with EPUT, there appears to be an impact on children, this will be brought back to the Committee.

(2) Question from Tricia Cowdrey to the Cabinet Member for Children and Learning

Would the Chair please provide information about the newly formed parent forum for families with children with Special Needs and Disabilities, how this came about and what its role and function is as, similarly to my previous question, there appears to be some debate on social media about this.

Thank you for your question Ms. Cowdrey. Each local authority is required to have an independent body to represent the views of parents and families who have children with SEND. The role of a Parent Carer Forum is to ensure the services in their local area meet their needs.

Contact (for families with disabled children) is the Department for Education delivery partner for supporting parent carer participation in England and as such provides the grant funding to the approved Parent Carer Forum in Southend, which for the previous 9 years was "Southend Family Voice".

The contract for the Parent Carer Forum came up for renewal in July 2020. Two organisations expressed an interest and submitted a bid to Contact to run the forum, Contact determined that neither group were able to fulfil the role of Parent Carer Forum for Southend and that despite attempts by Contact to broker a partnership between the two groups this was not successful.

Contact therefore determined that a new Parent Carer Forum be established in Southend working to an agreed Code of Conduct and Service Level Agreement with Contact. Contact worked with any interested and eligible parents to support the formation of a new Forum.

As a result of Contact's work, Southend SEND Independent Forum (SSIF) was established as the official Parent Carer Forum for Southend. Membership is open to all parents of children and young people with SEND aged 0-25 in Southend.

SSIF sit on the multi-agency Southend SEND Strategic Partnership Board, alongside health, schools and the local authority. A revised Service Level Agreement between the Southend SEND Partnership and SSIF is currently being finalised.

(3) Questions from Lydia Hyde to the Cabinet Member for Children and Learning

- (a) Over the last year, we have all seen the negative impact on the mental health of children and adolescents of the pandemic and lockdowns. Putting some data to this, a recent study in the Lancet has shown that mental health incidents in those aged 5-16 years has risen from 10.8% in 2017 to 16% by last summer, and this percentage continues to rise. Looking deeper, we see that children are reporting lost sleep, loneliness, and anxiety at leaving the house. And sadly, this is also linked to socioeconomic issues, with children suffering from mental health problems twice as likely to come from homes struggling to pay bills or with food insecurity.**

So, with one in six young people likely to suffer from mental health problems, could the portfolio holder explain what actions the council are taking to support these young people in regaining good mental health?

Thank you for your question Ms. Hyde. As you will be aware, with the wider return of schools and other settings from 8 March 2021, all professionals working with children and young people are acutely aware of the potential effects of the pandemic on their mental health and wellbeing. Many schools and settings will already have in place a wide range of support mechanisms to welcome pupils back, and to work to identify and support any pupils who may need it.

With regard specifically to the actions of the Council, a range of council services, in conjunction with our partners in the borough have several support and referral mechanisms to work with young people who have been affected. A number of these will be commissioned through our partners, such as the Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Service, and the Mental Health in Schools Teams.

However, of particular note would be the work undertaken by our own Educational Psychology Service, who work with schools to respond to identified needs through early intervention. This can take the form of, for example, a link Educational Psychologist working with each school around Social and Emotional Mental Health; phone line support; live webinars and other resources.

(b) Could she also indicate any other measures that are to be taken to tackle the socioeconomic aspects that are worsening this impact on children with less affluent backgrounds?

Thank you for your question Ms. Hyde. The Council is proud to be a partner to A Better Start Southend, a Big Lottery funded project led by the Early Years Alliance. It is focused on the development of under 4s in the six most deprived wards in Southend. Recognising the links between socioeconomic activity and the health and wellbeing of individuals and outcomes for children, the Council has been commissioned by A Better Start Southend to deliver WorkSkills, a series of interventions to support parents in these wards, in returning to work, beginning a new career, finding a voluntary role or gaining skills and accredited learning opportunities.

We are also delivering, directly and in partnership with others, a number of other projects seeking to improve skills and employment outcomes in Southend including:

- supporting employment in construction and care, as two growth sectors locally, through funded training and employability skills programmes.
- directly creating employment and learning opportunities through Kickstart and apprenticeships.
- investing multi-millions of pounds creating an environment in which jobs and skills can be grown, such as Better Queensway and the Airport Business Park, the latter of which has already created 80 construction jobs.
- utilising our buying power and social value responsibilities so that those we buy from also create jobs and learning opportunities where possible and appropriate.
- our provision at Southend Adult Community College includes careers advice as well as a wide range of courses which could assist residents to gain the skills they need to gain employment or open a their own business.
- the Council is demonstrating community leadership having declared in 2019 that it would be a Real Living Wage employer and actively work towards obtaining the Real Living Wage accreditation.