

	AGENDA ITEM 4
	PAF/23/19
Committee:	People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee
Date:	10 October 2019
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RESPIRE CARE IN ESSEX

Purpose and background:

This item is to be updated on follow-up/action points agreed as a result of a discussion on respite care on 27 June 2019. That agenda item had initially been prompted by issues raised in a petition received on the services provided at Lavender and Maples facilities and was expanded to include broader discussion about respite care in Essex. A link to the meeting papers for the above meeting in June is here - [PAF 27 June 2019 meeting papers](#). An extract of the minutes of the discussion is attached as **Appendix 1** to this report.

In particular, the Committee recommended that the Cabinet Member:

- (i) Undertake a review of the respite care assessment process to address issues raised in the meeting specifically around the transparency of the process and the eligibility criteria thresholds and to consider service user representation on the assessment panel;
- (ii) Review procedures to improve communications with families and carers particularly around the assessment process, appeals process;
- (iii) Investigate and check that social workers are providing all necessary advice on options and process to escalate dissatisfaction with assessment outcomes, including the formal complaints procedure;
- (iv) To report back on the review being undertaken to investigate further empowering some families through the Direct payments Scheme.
- (v) Provide further information on historical trends for overnight respite care demand with particular reference to the type of service provided at Lavender and Maples.

An update from the Cabinet Member and Lead Officers is attached as **Appendix 2**

Continued overleaf....

Attendees:

It is anticipated that the following will be in attendance on the day:

Russel Breyer, Director of Local Delivery (South), Essex County Council.

County Councillor Louise McKinlay, Cabinet Member for Children and Families.

Christina Pace, Head of Strategic Commissioning and Policy, Essex County Council.

Next steps

A wider/broader review of Respite Care is being undertaken and it is anticipated that the Committee will be updated on this early next year once the review has been completed.

In addition, Members may also wish to consider if any further information or further scrutiny work is needed as a result of the update today on the specific actions arising from the meeting on 27 June 2019.

Extract of the minutes of a meeting of the People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee held in Committee Room 1 at County Hall on Thursday 27 June 2019

5. Respite Care

The committee considered report PAF/14/19 incorporating details about a petition received regarding services provided at Lavender House and The Maples short break residential respite facilities in Colchester and Harlow respectively and further information on respite care provision in Essex. From April 2019, an operational short term decision had been taken at both homes to operate one flat (four beds) rather than two in response to reduced use of both homes over time.

The following petitioners were invited to address the committee, outline their concerns and respond to questions from members.

Gary Knowles – Lead Petitioner
Fay Knowles - Petitioner
Lorraine Who – Petitioner

During the subsequent discussion, the following was highlighted:

- (i) Children using the facilities were all individuals with unique needs and could not be easily categorised. It was also stressed that children needed respite as well as the parents;
- (ii) The facilities at lavender and Maples provided 24 hours a day support and it was questioned whether that was available for those needing it in all the alternative facilities;
- (iii) Lavender and Maples residents were supported in safe and secure surroundings and encouraged to develop life skills and taken on outings and it was questioned whether other care settings would be able to offer all this;
- (iv) There was a suspicion that qualifying for respite care had become more difficult and that there was little information about the eligibility criteria;
- (v) There was little information available about how the assessment panel was constituted and any appeals process.

Thereafter, the petitioners returned to the public gallery and the following joined the meeting:

Councillor Louise McKinlay, Cabinet Member – Children and Families,
Christina Pace, Head of Strategic Commissioning and Policy, Essex County Council,
Russell Breyer, Director Local Delivery (Children and Families).

The Chairman asked for a response to the concerns raised by petitioners and to be updated more generally on respite care provision in Essex. Councillor McKinlay advised that no final decision had yet been made on the proposal to confirm the continuation of the current short-term change to capacity at Lavender and Maples although she expected to make that decision soon. She acknowledged that respite care for each individual child was a complex and emotional issue.

The Cabinet Member and officers considered that the proposed confirmation of the reduction in capacity at both Lavender and Maples would not impact on availability due to a reducing demand for overnight stays at those homes. An array of options for overnight respite care were available in Essex ranging including short term- foster carers which, it was acknowledged, would only be suitable for some and not all children.

Reviews

- A review was looking at the range of options for the overall provision of overnight care, which included family-based care, short break foster care as well as some early discussions with schools. However, it was recognised that not all the options would be suitable for all children. The intention and opportunity afforded by the review was to expand choice.
- There would be a review of direct payments arrangements and whether, in some cases, they could further empower some families. It was acknowledged that this needed to be flexible as extra responsibility may overly burden some families and carers.

Assessment process

- There had been no recent changes to assessment criteria. However there had been a pause put in place in new referrals specifically to Maples and Lavender in December 2018 to facilitate the review of the service and range of support available.
- The assessment of need for respite care was a professional process instigated by the social worker, informed by both national and local criteria, which would then be brought before an assessment panel. The conduit for communications with parents and carers was through the social worker and it was acknowledged that that conduit may need further review. It was stressed that the social worker should explain to families the process for escalation and complaints process if they are dissatisfied with the assessment outcome.
- Since the temporary pause in new referrals to Lavender and Maples, there had been 17 cases identified for overnight respite care with some placements to still be found for the very recent ones. However, respite care had been provided for the remainder.

- The panel membership included two service managers to bring an element of peer challenge, as well as other professional practitioners. Whilst the managers of both the Lavender and Maples facilities were usually consulted as part of the assessment process, it was acknowledged that perhaps they could be used more.
- Members were keen to encourage greater transparency about the make-up of the assessment panel and to consider if families should be represented on the panel.
- Where a need for respite had been identified, a range of options within a reasonable travelling distance would be discussed with families and carers and might include some out of county options depending on circumstances.
- A recent OFSTED review had concluded that there were adequate social workers in place to undertake assessments and that caseloads were deemed to be manageable.

Trend data

Collection of further historical trend data for children requiring the type of overnight respite care accommodation available at Lavender and Maples was underway.

Transparency

Members stressed the importance of there being a robust assessment process, a clear and transparent decision-making process and clear guidance and transparency on dispute escalation and complaints options.

Respite care would be discussed at the Essex Family Forum and members encouraged working with petitioners to help formulate ideas about future service delivery and consider a more formal service user group.

Conclusion and actions

At the invitation of the Chairman, the Lead Petitioner responded to the discussion by emphasising his continuing frustration with the lack of consultation with families and carers on the respite needs for children and inadequate communication of a number of processes.

It was agreed that further updates were required to provide members with assurance about the robustness and transparency of the assessment and appeals process for respite care, that there was clear communications with families and carers, and that there would be opportunities for families and carers to help influence future service delivery and range of options. Specifically, the Committee recommended that the Cabinet Member and officers:

- (i) Undertake a review of the respite care assessment process to address issues raised in the meeting specifically around the transparency of the process and the eligibility criteria thresholds and to consider service user representation on the assessment panel;
- (ii) Review procedures to improve communications with families and carers particularly around the assessment process, appeals process;
- (iii) Investigate and check that social workers are providing all necessary advice on options and process to escalate dissatisfaction with assessment outcomes, including the formal complaints procedure;
- (iv) To report back on the review being undertaken to investigate further empowering some families through the Direct payments Scheme.
- (v) Provide further information on historical trends for overnight respite care demand with particular reference to the type of service provided at Lavender and Maples.

[During the Work Programme agenda item later in the meeting, some members suggested the Committee should be able to have further formal discussions and updates before a decision was made specifically about the facilities at Lavender and Maples. After further reflection after the meeting, those members agreed that this was not necessary as they had been re-assured that further discussions between Cabinet Member, officers and petitioners would now be established allaying many of the concerns about service providers being involved in future consideration of service improvements, options and delivery].