

PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 4 July 2019

Young Carers Deep Dive – Next Steps

Report by Chairman of the Performance Scrutiny Committee

RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Committee is RECOMMENDED to agree how it wishes to proceed with the Young Carers deep dive work.**

Introduction

2. The Performance Scrutiny Committee decided to undertake a deep dive into young carers in January 2018 and a report was completed in September 2018. Cabinet requested that the Committee undertake further engagement activities to support the recommendations. This report reminds the Committee of the original report and draws attention to a subsequent report that has been published by Healthwatch covering the Oxford City area. The Committee are asked to agree how they wish to proceed with the investigation.

Background

3. In January 2018 the Committee reviewed the recommendations of the Oxfordshire Health Inequalities Commission and scrutinised the County Council's progress in taking them forward. The Commission highlighted the importance of supporting carers to maintain their health and wellbeing but focused on the challenges faced by older carers rather than having a specific focus on young carers.
4. Under the Children and Family Act 2014 and the Care Act 2014, the Council has a legal duty to identify young carers and carry out assessments that consider the impact on the child and the whole family.
5. The Committee identified that it can be difficult to identify young carers as they are often isolated and agreed to establish a working group to examine how the Council identifies and supports young carers to reduce the inequalities they face. The working group consisted of Cllrs Carter (Chairman), Phillips and Smith. Cllr Smith stood down from the Performance Scrutiny Committee but expressed a desire to continue with the deep dive until completion. The working group met with the Young Carers Team Manager and Senior Practitioner to understand the context in which support for young carers is provided and representatives from Be Free Young Carers who operate primarily in South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse.

6. Cabinet deferred the final report in October 2018 and requested that the Committee undertake engagement activities involving young carers to provide further evidence to support the recommendations.
7. Since the report was published, Healthwatch have completed an investigation into support for young carers in Oxford city which was supported by the organisation Be Free Young Carers that highlighted similar issues to the deep dive report.

Scope

8. The deep dive group agreed that the scope of the investigation was to understand:
 - (a) The profile and number of young carers in Oxfordshire;
 - (b) The key challenges faced by young carers;
 - (c) The range of ways that young carers can access support;
 - (d) Services currently offered to support young carers; and
 - (e) How the Young Carers Service works in partnership (across service areas and with other organisations) to identify and support young carers

Findings

9. The report highlighted that the number of young carers that the County Council is aware of has grown each year with more than 2,900 in Oxfordshire at the time that the report was completed in September 2018. It also highlighted that it is often difficult to identify young carers. The type of caring responsibilities varied with the most common responsibility being supporting a parent with mental ill-health.
10. The Council's Young Carers Service works with children aged between 4-18 and young adult carers aged 19-25. The type of support offered includes liaison with schools and other professionals, referrals or liaison with the services supporting the person being cared for, signposting to support activities and short-term specialist provision on building emotional resilience and getting the child's voice heard.
11. The Young Carers Service consisted of 13 staff including specialist workers and social work qualified staff. The service was currently in the process of becoming part of the Council's Family Solutions Service. The team works in partnership with health partners, schools, the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board and voluntary sector providers. There are particularly strong links with the School Health Nursing Service as they are well placed to identify young carers and the wider impacts of a child's caring role.
12. The deep dive group also met with representatives from Be Free Young Carers who operate in South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse areas. The organisation offers social activities, training, workshops and opportunities for relaxation for young carers. The charity noted that awareness of young carers varies significantly from school to school. It also noted that the charity is

heavily reliant on donations and fund raising which makes long-term sustainability challenging.

13. The report concluded that only a small proportion of young carers in the county had been identified. It was important to take a whole family approach and encourage information sharing across statutory agencies and community organisations to build a better picture of young carers across the county. It noted that whilst the Young Carers Service has identified an increasing number of young carers, focusing on delivering statutory assessments and support had left a vacuum of broader support for young carers. The deep dive group made 12 recommendations to Cabinet, though a decision on these was deferred:
- (a) Ask the Cabinet to explore ways of funding the unique support to young carers provided by Be Free Young Carers
 - (b) Support the development of good quality, evidence based targeted group therapeutic work for young carers within the Young Carers Service
 - (c) Review the impact of moving the Young Carers Service into the Family Solutions Service in 12 months' time
 - (d) Ask the Cabinet to review and improve the timescales for completing statutory young carers' assessments and delivering support
 - (e) There are examples of good in identifying and support young carers practice in some schools e.g. opportunities for young carers to complete homework on school premises. This good practice needs to be recognised, captured and shared.
 - (f) Invite the Regional Schools Commissioner to make it a requirement for school staff to identify where a child may be undertaking a caring role, the impact of that responsibility, and to understand what support is available to minimise the impact
 - (g) Ask the Education Scrutiny Committee to review the measures used by Ofsted to assess the standard of support delivered to young carers as vulnerable learners, and to scrutinise the effectiveness of this regulatory oversight
 - (h) Ask the Education Scrutiny Committee working group focused on rates of school attendance to give specific attention to young carers, as a cohort at particular risk
 - (i) Ensure Oxfordshire's health and social care system specifically considers the impact of its drive to deliver more community-based care on young carers and ask the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee to review this as part of its scrutiny of transformational change across the system
 - (j) Ask the Council to establish a Young Carers Councillor Champion to help people understand the needs of young carers and promote the identification and support of young carers
 - (k) Review progress against these recommendations in 12 months' time

Next Steps

14. In April 2019, Healthwatch published a report that looked at the support available for young carers in Oxford. The research was compiled by Be Free Young Carers via surveys/interviews with young carers, parents/guardians and local schools. The report concluded that there was an under identification of young carers in the city and that whilst there was a clear demand for young carers and their parents to access out of school activities, these tended to be informal arrangements rather than specialist provision. The Healthwatch report can be found on [their website](#).
15. The deep dive group has not been able to undertake consultation with young carers and so the Chairman has requested that the Committee reflects on the original reasons for the deep dive and decide how it wishes to proceed.
16. The Committee are asked to consider how they wish to progress the next stage of the young carers deep dive. Options could include:
 - (a) Review the original scope and membership of the deep dive group and agree how the group wishes to consult with young carers.
 - (b) Consider whether the Committee wishes to commit resources to other areas of interest/work

Financial and Staff Implications

17. Staffing resources from the Policy Team and Young Carers Service have been utilised to complete the deep dive work to date. If the deep dive work is to continue, resources will need to be balanced against priorities in these service areas.

Councillor Liz Brighthouse
Chairman – Performance Scrutiny Committee

Background papers: Young Carers Deep Dive Final Report (Performance Scrutiny 6 September and Cabinet 16 October 2018)

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June 2019