

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

15 SEPTEMBER 2015

Present: Councillor Richard Cook (Chairperson), Councillors Boyle, Chaundy, Gordon, Murphy, Dianne Rees and Lynda Thorne

: Co-opted Members: Mrs P Arlotte (Roman Catholic representative), Carol Cobert (Church in Wales representative) and Mrs Hayley Smith (Parent Governor Representative)

23 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Morgan and Catrin Lewis (Parent Governor Representative)

24 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairperson reminded Members of their responsibility under Part III of the Members' Code of Conduct to declare any interest in general terms and to complete personal interest forms at the start of the meeting and then, prior to the commencement of the discussion of the item in question, specify whether it is a personal or prejudicial interest. If the interest is prejudicial Members would be asked to leave the meeting and if the interest is personal, Members would be invited to stay, speak and vote. The following declarations were made:

| Name | Item | Nature of Interest |
|------------------|---|---|
| Councillor Boyle | CHAD Inquiry Update | Personal – Councillor Boyle has a child with ASD |
| Hayley Smith | Families First – Annual Report was a witness at the Committee and | Hayley Smith's line manager so Hayley Smith withdrew from the meeting when this item was discussed. |

25 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings of the Committee meeting of 14 July 2015 and of the Joint Scrutiny meeting of 29 July were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairperson.

26 : EDUCATION PERFORMANCE - QUARTER 1 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT AND PROVISIONAL SCHOOL RESULTS

The Chairperson welcomed Sarah Merry (Cabinet Member for Education and Skills) and Nick Batchelar (Director of Education and Lifelong Learning).

The Chairperson invited Councillor Merry to make a statement. Councillor Merry informed the Committee that results have improved on the previous year and staff

and pupils should be congratulated. It is pleasing that there has been consistent improvement across all levels. For a number of indicators improvement has been greater than it has been in local authorities across Wales. However, there is no room for complacency. The performance of children in receipt of free school meals (FSM) has improved but the performance of Looked After Children (LAC) is of some concern, as are the figures on suspensions and exclusions. The local authority has shown that it is prepared to act decisively where there are shortcomings in leadership. There has been some good work on partnerships.

The Director gave a presentation on the Corporate Performance Report, following which the Chairperson invited questions from the Committee.

The Committee asked what the local authority and the Central South Consortium Joint Education Service are doing to bring about major improvement in relation to performance on the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs). The Committee was advised that there is no complacency around NEETs. The data shows that action is being taken. From an unacceptably high starting point there has been a steep decline in the numbers of NEETs. Last year only Newport had better performance than Cardiff. The Vulnerability Assessment Tool is now being used. The local authority has taken action in schools where there has been poor performance on NEETs due to poor leadership. Data on individual young people is now being shared across organisations and commissioned partners will provide appropriately targeted support.

The Director was advised by the Committee that it has been reported that there have been some delays in placing children in primary schools and the Committee asked if Education has sufficient resources. The Committee was advised that all parents who have children going into Reception year at primary school have, in each case, received offers of places at two schools. A number have turned down the places offered and their appeals are being processed. The number of applications for in-year places has increased in Cardiff this year and this has led to an increase in the number of appeals.

The Committee asked whether appeals are being heard and what the timescale for hearing them is. The Committee was advised that there has been a rise in applications and this has put demand on the Admissions team and other staff. There are various reasons for appeals and the Director advised the Committee that he could provide further information on this if required and that there is a statutory timescale for dealing with appeals, all of which would be processed within the statutory timescale.

The Committee expressed its concern about the time it takes to carry out consultations in relation to the Schools Organisational Plan (SOP). Consultations can take over a year to complete. The Committee was advised that the SOP is a very big programme, both in terms of capital and workload. The team has been expanded. There was some concern about capacity to deliver and so mitigating action was taken. There has been no slippage in the published timetable of consultation.

The Committee asked whether the Youth Service will be able to keep up its programme of support to those young people who are at risk of becoming NEET and was advised that its area-by-area programme of support has moved ahead.

The Committee asked whether budget reductions pose a risk to the ability of schools to sustain improvements in performance. The Committee was advised that there will have to be further economies in schools budgets and the local authority will have to work with schools to achieve greater efficiencies. The local authority is being more robust with schools on how they use their budgets. In some cases the local authority has withdrawn the delegated budgets of schools that have large deficits.

The Committee noted that there has been particularly poor performance in three schools and asked what action is being taken and what evidence is there that it is working. The Committee was advised that Estyn had made recommendations in relation to improving safety in schools and improving behaviour and school environments in order to support learning. Estyn carried out a monitoring visit in June and has indicated in a letter that there have been some improvements in these areas. The focus must now be on teaching and the Director advised the Committee that he has observed some improvement in that. There is capacity to deliver better outcomes but this can not be done overnight as previously there had been year-on-year of endemic failure in performance.

The Director briefed the Committee on the report on provisional school results, after which the Chairperson invited questions.

The Committee asked whether there are difficulties in recruiting teachers and was advised that there is a national shortage of very good maths teachers. There are some very good maths teachers in some of Cardiff's schools and discussions have been held with headteachers with the aim of promoting best practice across the system.

The Committee asked whether enough is being done to attract talented leaders to Cardiff's schools. The Committee was advised that more could be done on this. The Consortium is taking steps to improve leadership development but it is a problem across Wales. There is a need for a more tailored approach to the developing school leadership and the local authority is working with the Consortium on this.

The Committee noted that even though results have been improved targets have still not been met and asked whether the targets were realistic. The Committee was advised that good schools set ambitious targets. Schools are asked to report based on their expected outcomes at a number of points through their cycle and this year saw more schools getting much closer to their projected outcomes.

The Committee noted that there are some schools whose performance is slipping and was advised that in a number of schools the slippage was attributable entirely to performance in maths, which was not as good as expected. The local authority is commissioning a maths specialist to identify what needs to be done in those schools.

The Chairperson thanked the Cabinet Member and the Director for attending the meeting, for their presentation and for answering questions from Members.

AGREED: That the Chairperson on behalf of the Committee writes to the Cabinet Member highlighting the issues raised during the Way Forward discussion. [View Letter](#)

27 : CHILD HEALTH AND DISABILITY (CHAD) INQUIRY REPORT UPDATE

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Sue Lent (Cabinet Member, Early Years, Children & Families and Deputy Leader), Irfan Alam (Assistant Director, Children's Services), Eve Williams (Action for Children) and Sarah Woelk (Operational Manager, Intake & Assessment).

The Assistant Director presented the report, following which the Chairperson invited questions from the Committee.

The Committee noted that there has been a review of the process for the use of purchase orders (CP12s) and asked whether managers are now being stricter on expenditure. The Committee was advised that the CP12 is now aligned with the care plan, so every time the care plan is reviewed the purchase order is reviewed as well.

The Committee asked how the service ensures that people are aware of the services that they could have access to and was advised that one way in which awareness is promoted is through the Cardiff & Vale Parents Federation. The local authority has a duty to publicise services and this has not always been done well. One concern was the lack of a register of children who might be entitled to access services.

The Committee asked if there are any problems putting eligibility criteria in place and was advised that there are not any particular problems in this but the priority has been the action plan, to make sure the service is as good as it can be. There is a need for Cardiff Council to work with The Vale of Glamorgan local authority to try to align eligibility criteria across the two areas.

The Chairperson thanked the Cabinet Member, officers and Eve Williams for attending the meeting, for their presentation and for answering questions from Members.

AGREED: That the Chairperson on behalf of the Committee writes to the Cabinet Member highlighting the issues raised during the Way Forward discussion. [View Letter](#)

28 : FAMILIES FIRST ANNUAL REVIEW 2014/15

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Sue Lent (Cabinet Member, Early Years, Children & Families and Deputy Leader), Rachel Jones (Operational Manager - Partnerships & Citizen Focus), Sara Payne (Barnardo's/Cadam Service) and Eve Williams (Action for Children/Disability Focus Service).

Having declared an interest for this item, Hayley Smith withdrew from the meeting.

The Chairperson invited the Cabinet Member to make a statement. Cllr Lent informed the Committee that the annual review is encouraging. The only concern is that the Team Around the Family thresholds are quite high, and so Families First is

working with families that are borderline in terms of their needs, families who in other areas would be catered for by other types of service. This means that Families First is not working with families with a lower level of need and these families would also benefit from the services that can be provided.

Rachel Jones (Operational Manager - Partnerships & Citizen Focus), Sara Payne (Barnardos / Cadarn Service) and Eve Williams (Action for Children / Disability Focus Service) gave a presentation, following which the Chairperson invited questions from the Committee.

The Committee asked whether there is a mechanism for measuring effectiveness across the participating organisations and a common reporting policy, so that the success of Families First can be fed back to the Welsh Government. The Committee was advised that the means by which outcomes are measured are robust. The local authority is working with Families First, Communities First and Flying Start to achieve 'joined up' reporting. If the programme continues post March 2017 the intention is that these approaches will be embedded.

The Committee asked whether there is scope in the programme to remove providers whose service is not working, providers that are under-performing and not meeting targets. The Committee was advised that there is scope to do this and it has been done, using the performance data as evidence but always working constructively with the providers to ensure maximum impact and value for money.

The Chairperson thanked the Cabinet Member, the Operational Manager, Sara Payne and Eve Williams for attending the meeting, for their presentation and for answering questions from Members.

29 : CHILDREN'S SERVICES - QUARTER ONE PERFORMANCE AND THE ANNUAL OUT-TURN FOR 2014/15 PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Chairperson welcomed Sue Lent (Cabinet Member, Early Years, Children & Families and Deputy Leader), Tony Young (Director of Children's Services) and Irfan Alam (Assistant Director, Children's Services).

This report set out performance data outlining progress against the objectives aligned to the social theme for the quarter ending 30 June 2015 and the annual out-turn for 2014-15.

The Director presented the report, following which the Chairperson invited questions from the Committee.

The Committee suggested that in the report the figures given on performance in relation to recording of decisions on referrals do not indicate that performance is improving in this area, as although the percentage figure makes it seem as if performance has improved, the actual number of referrals has gone down. The Director advised the Committee that performance on this has been better, although a smaller number of referrals could perhaps be taken as a sign of success in itself. The Director advised the Committee that the measure on the timeliness of referral decisions is one that has been set by the Welsh Government and is not one that he would have chosen.

The Committee commented that figures from the Data Unit – Wales would suggest that the service is not doing as well as the report to the Committee indicates and asked which should be believed. The Director advised the Committee that Children's Services is not concentrating on the performance indicators that Data Unit – Wales has been looking at. It has been more important to improve the service from the position that it had been in. The indicators used by Data Unit – Wales may not be well-constructed. The Director advised that the CSSIW, in his most recent meeting with them, had confirmed that performance was heading in the right direction and at an appropriate pace, given the level of risks being managed.

The Committee informed the Director that it has been reported that social workers in some teams, such as the Children In Need team, have high caseloads. The Assistant Director advised the Committee that a representative number of individual cases have been reviewed and it was found that caseloads are appropriate and manageable and in line with teams in other parts of the service. The Children In Need team is not a special case. Intake & Assessment is also under pressure, as is the Youth Offending Team.

The Committee was also advised that data suggests that the levels of recruitment to social worker posts is healthy. Also, a team of seven social workers is being recruited to form a pool of social workers, from which vacancies that arise can be filled immediately. If a worker from the pool is appointed to another post then another social worker will be recruited for the pool. This arrangement will mean that social worker vacancies can be filled quickly and fewer agency social workers will have to be used.

The Chairperson thanked the Cabinet Member and officers for attending the meeting, for their presentation and for answering questions from Members.

AGREED: That the Chairperson on behalf of the Committee writes to the Cabinet Member highlighting the issues raised during the Way Forward discussion. [View Letter](#)

30 : WORK PROGRAMME REPORT

This report was presented by Martyn Hutchings (Principal Scrutiny Officer).

This report provided the Committee with the outcome of its consideration, at a forum meeting of the Committee, of the many issues that it could scrutinise. The resulting prioritised list has been detailed in the calendar, which was included in the report for consideration and approval.

AGREED:

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) To consider the information set out in paragraph 10 of the report and agree the proposed Work Plan Timetable for 2015/16 as set out in Appendix C.
- 3) To agree to set up a performance Member panel and a Budget monitoring Member panel, in accordance with Part 1 of the Scrutiny procedure rules, with

authority for the Chair and Operational Manager (Scrutiny Services) to approve the report for presentation to the Cabinet Member.

- 4) To agree to undertake the Task & Finish Group Inquiries as set out in paragraph 11, in accordance with Part 1 of the Scrutiny procedure rules. with authority for the Chair and Operational Manager (Scrutiny Services) to approve the report for presentation to the Cabinet Member, and to seek nominations for the Sexual Exploitation of Children inquiry and a potential CIL joint sub-committee inquiry.
- 5) To seek nominations for the membership of the performance and budget monitoring panels as set out in paragraph 7.

31 : WAY FORWARD

During the Way Forward discussion the Committee agreed the content of the letter that the Chairperson would send to the Cabinet Member on behalf of the Committee, highlighting the issues raised and comments made in relation to the agenda items that had been discussed during the meeting.

32 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on 13 October 2015 at 4.30pm in Committee Room 4, County Hall.

The meeting terminated at 6.05 pm