

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

8 DECEMBER 2015

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

Co-opted Members: Mrs P Arlotte (Roman Catholic representative) and Carol Cobert (Church in Wales representative)

50 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Morgan and Thorne and from Ms Catrin Lewis & Hayley Smith

51 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairperson reminded Members of their responsibility under Part 3 of the Members' Code of Conduct. There were no declarations of interest.

52 : MINUTES

The minutes of the Committee Meeting of 10 November 2015 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairperson.

53 : ESTYN INSPECTION - SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENT VISIT LETTER

The Chairperson welcomed Clive Phillips, Assistant Director, Estyn and Huw Davies, Estyn Inspector.

There had been a second monitoring visit during October 2015. The purpose of that visit was to address Recommendations 2 and 4 arising out of the initial visit, namely to reduce exclusions and reduce the proportion of young people who are not in education employment or training post-16 and to improve the effectiveness of joint planning across the range of partnership working respectively.

Verbal reports of the findings were provided at the conclusion of the monitoring visit. Written details have now been provided by letter of 30 November 2015.

Mr Davies advised the Committee that the outcome of the monitoring visit was positive. Whilst there is still some variation in the level of exclusions in schools it is something about which the Directorate is fully aware and the issues are being addressed. In relation to the 5 step approach that is provided to schools by the local authority the visit highlighted that schools are generally unclear as to how to access the specialist external provision (step 5).

The Committee were advised that whilst there has been a reduction in the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET). The monitoring visit

highlighted that the variation across Wales is too great, however a trainee programme has recently been implement.

Members were advised by Clive Phillips that there has been a positive improvement in partnership working; there has been a shift in culture in the relationship between schools and the local authority.

The Committee were advised that the relationship between the local authority and the consortium had also improved. However, the Committee needs to continue to scrutinise the work of Challenge Advisors on the level of exclusions and NEET's.

The Chairperson invited questions and comments from the Committee:

- Members queried the lack of involvement of Headteachers with NEET's and were advised that more focussed work is now being done; careers information, signposting and work with those likely to become NEET prior to their leaving school;
- Partnership working has had a positive impact on trying to reduce the percentage of NEET's. There is positive involvement with Further Education Institutions and Youth Support in helping to identify, support, mentor and coach those who are at risk of becoming NEET;
- Members were advised that not all Challenge Advisors discuss concerns over exclusions of NEETS with schools despite being provided with the information;
- Members were advised that it is still the vulnerable or those with special needs who are statistically more likely to become NEET;
- The vulnerability assessment profile is important and is being used within schools - it does help in the identification of those at risk.

Members were advised that the final monitoring visit will take place on 25 January 2016 at that time recommendation 1; the raising of standards, particularly at Key Stage 4, and progress against all recommendations will be considered. Information will be provided at that time as to whether or not monitoring is still required.

The Chairperson thanked Mr Davies and Mr Phillips for attending their attendance at the meeting and answering Members questions.

Sarah Merry, Cabinet Member for Education and Nick Batchelar, Director Education and Lifelong Learning were present during the presentation. The Cabinet Member wishes to thank the Director and staff for all their continued hard work in relation to the Estyn visits.

AGREED: That the Chairperson, on behalf of the Committee, writes to the Assistant Director, Estyn. [View letter](#)

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

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

The Director presented the report advising Members that Quarter 2 has consolidated the positive improvements achieved in Quarter 1. However, there had been slippage in progress relating to the Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy. Members were assured by the Director that that strategy will be in place at the beginning of 2016.

Members were informed that the new Personal Education Plan process had not improved the timely completion and quality of those plans.

Finally, Members were advised of the current difficulties with the Enhanced Fostering Scheme and the distinct likelihood that the contract with Core Assets will be terminated. The Director advised Members that in the circumstances it was unlikely that the £780,000 budget saving would be realised.

The Chairperson invited questions and comments from the Committee.

The Committee queried the decision to award the contract. Members were advised that there were two bidders for the Enhanced Fostering Scheme, one a private company who were able to provide results more quickly and the least expensive option and the other a company involved was a charity. The scoring was in favour of the private and as a consequence they were awarded the contract. As a result of performance issue concerns were raised with the provider, their reaction to the issues raised was positive and there was a clear indication that they intended to address the issues. However, the issues were not addressed and the contract is to be terminated.

Members questioned the caseloads of Social Workers and whether they were too heavy particularly if a crisis arose. Officers advised that there is supervision and monitoring of case loads, Social Workers with more serious cases do not have as many cases to deal with, however, they are used to prioritising cases, managing their cases and balancing the needs of those whom they are trying to help.

Members expressed their concerns about the continued low performance in completing Personal Education Plans. Whilst they understood there are issues with timeliness they were concerned and disappointed that quality has not yet improved. They were advised that there are now weekly updates on performance.

Further to a question from the Committee, Officers advised that whilst there should be a more 'joined up approach' in relation to young people not in education, employment or training, Nick Batchelar, Director Education & Lifelong Learning is the lead. There is a determination to improve the education of and maximise the lifetime chances of Looked After Children.

The Committee questioned the number of referrals and whether or not, if there was a spike in those referrals, targets would remain achievable. Officers advised that the Project Manager, Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) is now in post providing greater confidence that targets can be met. Officers advised that there has been an increase in the complexity of cases, but at this point it is not possible to identify particular trends. However, Officers did identify issues such as Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and the complex needs of Eastern European migrants.

Members queried the figures provided in relation to the percentages of children in out of the area placements. Officers explained that for some children placement outside the authority is in their best interests.

Members queried why Foster Carers have migrated toward the independent agencies. Officers advised that data has shown that the overriding reason for this is the lack of support provided. It was noted that recently a new strategy has been launched to increase the number of Foster Carers, and an offer of direct care involvement. Social media has been used to get the recruitment message across. Members were advised that recently Foster Carers are returning to the authority and have been expressing concern at the 'money making ethos' of the independent agencies.

The Cabinet Member advised that the work of a great deal of people has resulted in the change in the Looked After Children figures and she wished to thank all those involved and praised the 'Safe Families' Scheme which has been developed by the Service. Reference was also made to the Campaign Briefing Paper produced by the Assistant Director.

Members were provided with information in relation to a number of inspections:

- A youth offending service inspection commenced on 30 November, involving a number of inspectorates. Feedback from that inspection is expected on 18th December.
- A CSSIW inspection of Children's Services is due to commence on 11 January 2016, there are to be 6 inspectors examining 60 cases. Feedback is expected during the week of the 25th January.
- There is a Fostering Service inspection due to commence at the end of January 2016.

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

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](#)

Martyn Hutchings, Principal Scrutiny Officer, presented this report and updated the Committee on the outcome of the second meeting of the Budget Monitoring Panel.

AGREED: That the reports recommendations were approved.

56 : COMMITTEE BUSINESS REPORT

This report was presented by Martyn Hutchings, Principal Scrutiny Officer.

The Committee received copies of correspondence sent and received in relation to matters previously scrutinised by this Committee.

Members had decided to scrutinise the Corporate Plan 2016-17 and the Budget Proposals 2016-17. The proposed date for that meeting is 16 February 2016 at 10.00 am with any Members of the Public being invited to attend at the beginning of the meeting.

AGREED: That the correspondence be noted and confirm that the Budget Scrutiny Meeting is to take place on 16 February at 10.00 am.

57 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday 12 January 2016 at 2.30 pm in Committee Room 4.

The meeting terminated at 6.20 pm