

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

15 MARCH 2016

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

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

73 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillor Morgan and Patricia Arlotte.

The Chairperson advised that Ms Catrin Lewis had resigned from the Committee with immediate effect. The Committee wished to express their thanks for her valued contributions to the Committee over the last 4 years.

74 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairperson reminded Members of their responsibility under Part 3 of the Members' Code of Conduct.

75 : MINUTES

The approval of the minutes of the meeting on 12 January 2016 was deferred to the next meeting of the Children and Young People Committee.

76 : SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELL BEING ACT 2014 - BRIEFING PAPER

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Lent (Cabinet Member for Early Years, Children and Families, and Deputy Leader), Tony Young (Director Social Services, Nichola Poole (Regional Lead, Sustainable Social Services) and Irfan Alam, (Assistant Director – Social Services) to the Meeting.

Members were provided with a briefing in relation to the Information and Assistance Service which is central to the success of the transition to the care and support systems under Act. As the Committee were aware that system is to be operational from 6 April 2016. Information was provided in relation to the new resource directory which will be available across Wales – Dewis Cymru.

The Chairperson thanked Officers for the briefing and invited questions and comments from Members.

- Members questioned the use of the name Dewis Cymru, explaining that they felt that it was not a memorable name and did not describe the purpose of the directory. Officers advised that the public would not search for the name, they would for a service.
- Members queried whether there was any proposal to operate the C2C service 7 days a week as not everyone had access to the internet. Officers advised

that there were no plans to increase the hours as the amount of usage outside of office hours is low.

- Members requested information in respect of the vetting process of the services that can be accessed through the site, together with information about how the information about the use of resources will be used. Officers advised that the information on the site is owned by the organisation/provider of the service however, there are journalists and editors populating the site. There will be records of 'hits' on the system and the information accessed which will evidence of any gaps in the resources being offered.
- Members queried the effectiveness of the first point of contact for Adults, bearing in mind the experiences evidenced by NHS Direct. Officers advised that some analysis has been undertaken, the volume of call from members of the public is low, the majority of referrals are from professionals. However, further analysis is being undertaken in the next quarter.
- Members queried whether analysis of the currently accessible information is being conducted to ensure that any outdated information is removed. Members were informed that the Family Information Service currently provides statutory information, Dewis Cymru is to provide information in relation to a broader and more specialised range of options/services.

The Chairperson thanked the Cabinet Member and Officers for their attendance, briefing and for answering Members questions.

AGREED – That the Chairperson writes to the Cabinet Member on behalf of the Committee expressing their comments and observations.

77 : CHILDREN'S SERVICES QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Lent (Cabinet Member for Early Years, Children and Families, and Deputy Leader) and Tony Young (Director Social Services) to the meeting.

The Chairperson invited the Cabinet Member to make a statement in which she explained that the overall performance in Quarter 3 was good, in particular in relation to the implementation of MASH and the Single Gateway for young people.

The Director advised that local authorities must introduce a new set of performance measures as a result of the implementation of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.

The full year outturn performance for 2015/16 will be reported in September, Members were advised that it is anticipated that the outturn will be satisfactory, better in most areas, if not all.

There has been some slippage in progress, the Child Sexual Exploitation and Corporate Parenting Strategies are to be considered by Cabinet in May.

The Chairperson thanked Officers for the briefing and invited questions and comments from Members.

- Members queried the need to recruit Agency Staff to aid the improvement in performance in Intake and Assessment and were advised that agency staff have been recruited to cover the period between the loss and reappointment of Social Workers. Officers advised Members that:
 - a) Information obtained as a result of a Freedom of Information Request dated 27.01.16 indicated that 48 out of 124 and 7 out of 124 Social Worker posts were filled by agency staff in Children's Services and Adult Services respectively.
 - b) That figure has reduced because of the ongoing recruitment. Currently there are 6 posts filled by agency staff.
 - c) There will be an element of over recruitment once the full complement of Social Workers has been reached as there is also the pool of Social Workers which will allow for the turnover of staff and any delays in the recruitment process.
- Members asked whether there had been any review of the difficulties faced in advertising and recruitment and were advised that there had been a review of the recruitment process and that it was currently as short as it could be. Delays can arise for a number of reasons, and often because of the Disclosure and Barring Service checks or notice periods. Certainly, managers are advised to start the recruitment process as soon as possible.
- Members noted that the figures showed a reduction in staffing levels, and that it appeared to be a recurring theme. Members queried whether the level of turnover of staff and sickness absences were due to pressures of work. Officers advised that this would be reported on in due course, but did not believe that moral was an issue in the retention of staff, however it was accepted that a shift in moral can take place very quickly.
- Members were advised that sickness is a global problem and not just confined to Social Workers. The figures could also be inflated due to the make-up of the work force, for example a young female workforce with maternity leave/absence.
- Officers are aware that the workload, by its nature, can be stressful and they work hard to mitigate the stress and support staff.
- Officers advised that the agency spend was off set against current vacancies.
- Members questioned the creation of a new post for a Quality Assurance Officer and were advised that it was a post that was created within the existing budget and necessary to monitor compliance in accordance with the Framework.
- Members asked about the recruitment of personal advisors and were advised that the recruitment campaign was still on going, however, recruitment was difficult bearing in mind the specialist nature of the work. At the present time 3 posts are being filled by agency staff.

AGREED – That the Chairperson writes to the Cabinet Member on behalf of the Committee expressing their comments and observations.

78 : EDUCATION QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE & CARDIFF 2020 - "AIMING FOR EXCELLENCE"

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Merry (Cabinet Member for Education) and Nick Batchelar (Director Education and Lifelong Learning) to the meeting.

The Chairperson invited the Cabinet Member to make a statement in which she outlined the national categorisation figures for both the primary and secondary sectors; work is proceeding as expected in relation to the new Eastern High School; and that a report in respect of Willows primary is due to be taken to Cabinet later this month.

The Director presented the performance report, the purpose of which was to update the Committee on the corporate performance indicators for the Education Department.

The Chairperson thanked the Director for the presentation and invited questions and comments from Members.

- Members expressed a number of concerns; firstly about the admission process, particular bearing in mind that pupils resident in the catchment area of schools are not able to attend their catchment school as school places are limited and further; that parents have indicated that they would rather home school their children that send them to a school not of their choosing and how it is intended to persuade parents that all schools are good; and also the issue of parents not confirming straight away whether or not a place is accepted.
- Members were advised that as there is such pressure on admissions discussions are ongoing about the feasibility of a co-ordinated admissions process involving faith and local authority schools.
- Officers advised that in the latest round of admissions 100 children resident in the catchment area of the school did not get a place.
- Members were advised that in some instances there is an initial reluctance for schools to accept Looked After Children but is resolved with discussion. There are occasions when schools have to accept a Looked After Child from another authority.
- Members were also advised that whilst there are criteria for admissions, Looked After Children do not have to be resident in the catchment area of the school.
- Members noted that whilst outcomes for vulnerable learners have improved they are still below the average, and what is being done to prevent them becoming NEET. Officers advised that in following up recommendations in the Estyn report ongoing work is being done to strengthen inclusion practice and

accountability and also challenge advisors are being briefed to support and challenge schools about their more vulnerable learners.

- Members asked about the reconfiguration of the Youth Service and were advised that progress is ongoing; grants have now been issued which will enable universal provision; reconfiguration of central staffing is due to be completed shortly after Easter; and the bid for European Social Funding is progressing well, this will allow for engagement work to take place in schools to support vulnerable children.
- Members discussed the lunchtime serving arrangements at schools.
- Members expressed concern at the level of School Governors, although noted that the position had improved. Officers indicated that the figures do fluctuate and that there has been a good response to the initiative to raise the profile of school governance. Members discussed the role of Governors and their work loads and were advised that consideration was being given towards a collaboration between schools. It was felt that it could strengthen school governance. The Committee advised that they would welcome further discussion on this issue.

The Director provided the Committee with a verbal update on the Cardiff 2020 – Aiming for Excellence Plan. The Committee were advised that the draft plan would be available for scrutiny at the time of the June meeting.

AGREED – That the Chairperson writes to the Cabinet Member on behalf of the Committee expressing their comments and observations.

79 : BUDGET PANEL

AGREED – That the points raised in the budget panel's report be passed to the relevant Cabinet Member for consideration.

80 : CORRESPONDENCE REPORT

AGREED – That the report be noted.

81 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Children's and Young People Scrutiny Committee is Tuesday 19th April 2016 @ 2.30 pm

The meeting terminated at 7.15 pm