

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

11 JULY 2016

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

10 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Gordon and Joyce.

11 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairperson reminded Members of their responsibility under Part 3 of the Members' Code of Conduct. Councillor Boyle declared a personal interest in item 3 & 5. His child has received outreach support from Meadowbank School and he is a trustee of Halcyon Charity referenced in the question asked. Mrs Hayley Smith declared a personal interest in items 3 and 4 on the basis that she is an employee of Barnardo's commissioned within Families First.

12 : SCHOOL ORGANISATION PROPOSALS - SPECIALIST PROVISION FOR PRIMARY AGED PUPILS WITH SPEECH AND LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES AND BEHAVIOURAL EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL DIFFICULTIES.

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Sarah Merry (Cabinet Member for Education), Nick Batchelar (Director Education & Lifelong Learning) and Jennie Hughes (Senior Achievement Leader Inclusion) to the meeting.

Councillor Merry made a statement to the Committee and advised that whilst, as a result of the initial consultation the closure of Meadowbank School was proposed, it is now recommended that a further review of speech and language support in Cardiff take place with the aim of bringing forward revised proposal and to ensure that the needs of children with speech and language needs placed at Meadowbank and Allensbank be considered.

The Director added that it is recognised that there is an ongoing need for specialist provision for children with the most complex speech and language needs, that ongoing need will remain a priority whether that provision is resource based or in a specialist school.

The Committee was invited to comment, raise questions or seek clarification on the information received. Those discussions are summarised as follows:

- Members queried the initial consultation and questioned why it appeared that so few of the issues had been identified initially. Officers advised that there needs to be further work done to understand the issues and find the best way forward.
- Officers advised that there were 3 elements of work to be undertaken: an evaluation of speech and language support in Cardiff; further engagement with

schools and other stakeholders, engagement with the Governing Bodies of Meadowbank and Allensbank schools to ensure that the needs of children with speech and language difficulties placed at the schools will be managed effectively meanwhile.

- Officers advised that there was no fixed time scale for this work at the present time.
- The Director advised that a SEN strategy working group has been established, initially the group involves headteachers, however there is remit to engage other stakeholders. It is hoped that an initial valuation of the mainstream speech and language service will be completed by Christmas.
- Officers emphasised that there is a commitment to ensuring that the needs of children with speech and language difficulties are being met and that they do not become NEET and it is not accepted that there would be a causal link between the closure of Meadowbank School and increase in those becoming NEET. There is clear evidence that the driving factor in those becoming NEET is the quality of education.
- Members queried the out of county placements for those benefitting from specialist support and the considerable cost of that, and why their needs are not catered for locally. There were 12 primary school children benefitting from that special support elsewhere at this time. Officers advised that those children are not placed out of county due to inadequate provision in county. 6 are looked after, placed in foster care outside Cardiff, and attending maintained schools in other Local Authorities. 6 were placed due to tribunal or legal advice. The Authority can cater for all their needs.
- Officers did not accept that parents have been directed away from Meadowbank School and advised that when a statement of special educational needs is issued the parents are provided with a full list of schools which includes special schools and specialist resource bases. The parents are asked to identify their preferred school.
- Members reiterated their belief that there is scope for specialist schools despite that fact that all local authorities seem to be moving towards mainstream specialist provision. There are concerns that children and young people would find it difficult to communicate which would lead to them feeling isolated in mainstream schooling. Officers agreed that there is a place for special school places but expressed the view this is not appropriate for a specific need where no learning disability is present.
- Concern was raised by Members about the position in which Meadowbank finds itself, pupil numbers are reducing and it is likely to take a further 9 – 12 months before any decisions are made. Officers advised that the difficulties currently being faced are exacerbated by the delay, there is going to be uncertainty but officers are working with the school to support the school moving forward and commented that expertise in the school needs to be valued and not lost.

- Members were informed that speech and language therapy is being provided to all children whether they are in a specialist resource base or mainstream support. Over the last 5 years there has been a collaborative relationship with the therapy service and mainstream support is strong.

RESOLVED: That the Chairperson writes on the Committee's behalf to the Cabinet Member and to convey their comments and observations.

13 : WORK PROGRAMME 2016/17 REPORT

Martyn Hutchings (Principal Scrutiny Officer) introduced the report and draft work programme for the 2016-17 municipal year.

AGREED: To note the issues to be considered for the Committee's work programme for 2016-17 to enable a final version to be prepared for approval at the September meeting.

14 : IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SOCIAL SERVICE AND WELL-BEING (WALES) ACT 2014

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Sue Lent (Cabinet Member, Early Years, Children & Families and Deputy Leader), Tony Young (Director Social Services), Cheryl Chapman (OM for Early Intervention) and Angela Bourge (OM Resources) to the meeting.

The report provided the Committee with a briefing on the progress being made to ensure the Council is prepared to implement the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 around the Prevention Services.

The Committee considered the written presentation and were invited to comment, raise questions or seek clarification on the information received. Those discussions are summarised as follows:

- Members queried whether there was any available data showing the use of Dewis Cymru directory of services and whether or not the service was being used by the public or organisations. Officers advised that the information could be provided in due course.
- Members asked about the new eligibility criteria for individual needs and were advised that going forward there will be more a more flexible approach; consideration will be given to a range of services being offered as opposed to a specific care and support plan.
- Officers were asked whether the act gives the authority scope to commission services and reduced rates and advised that there is nothing to stop that although there would have to be a business case for that. The focus of the act is to move from provision to prevention to encourage services to stretch the boundaries. It is about co-producing services.

- Members queried the evidence upon which a reduction in the number of Looked After Children is based and were advised that it anticipated that there will be a 5% reduction in the figure, although at the present time the figure is higher than it has ever been.
- The Committee expressed concern about the future of Families First when funding ceases and were advised that the authority has already started a dialogue with the lead providers. Welsh Government want to align anti-poverty initiatives, for example Families First and Flying Start although confirmation is still awaited from the Minister.
- Officers advised that the recommissioning process cannot be started as yet. The current funding ceases in March 2017 however there is provision to extend by 2 years but there are some financial risks in extending contracts.
- Members were advised that any underspend of the Families First funding had previously been returned to Welsh Government. Members expressed concern that they had not been made aware of the underspend and queried the reason for its return.
- Members queried as to whether or not the information sharing protocols were operating successfully and whilst being advised that information sharing is a complex issue that certainly with the launch of MASH, based at Cardiff Bay Police Station, information sharing at ground level is working and the protocols are also working. That is being driven forward by the Project Manager. The MHub also links various databases.
- Members queried whether the Early Help Pathway approach will provide single point of contact. Officers advised that it relies on agencies working together and can support other professionals, for example offering advice and guidance to a teacher expressing concern about a child or young person at school.
- Members were advised that the Joint Assessment Family Framework (JAFF) tool is used to help identify families in need of early help. The engagement in the assessment alone can help the family overcome the difficulty.
- Members welcomed the Early Help Planning & Assessment Pathway, but felt that some of the wording needs to be clearer and more precise, for example 'someone should act as the lead worker' should more clearly set out what needs to happen and by whom.
- The Committee were concerned to know what the position was in relation to Young carers and were advised that historically there was a young carers strategy however, the Early Help Strategy is now inclusive of young carers. JAFF will help with the identification of young carers. Young carers do not always want to need Social Worker support.

15 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee is Tuesday 27 September 2016 at 4.30 pm.

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