

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

12 MAY 2015

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

: Co-opted Members: Mrs P Arlotte (Roman Catholic representative), Ms Catrin Lewis (Parent Governor Representative) and Mrs Hayley Smith (Parent Governor Representative)

78 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Govier, Morgan and Dianne Rees and from Carole Cobert (Church in Wales Representative).

79 : 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.

80 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings of 10 March 2015 and 7 April 2015 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairperson.

81 : LOCAL AUTHORITY ARRANGEMENTS TO SUPPORT SAFEGUARDING OF CHILDREN

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Sue Lent (Cabinet Member for Early Years, Children and Families), Tony Young (Director of Children's Services), Alison Davies (Operational Manager, Safeguarding) and Irfan Alam (Interim Assistant Director, Children's Services).

The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee is responsible for scrutinising the performance of Children's (Social) Services. This report provided the Committee with a copy of the Inspection Report resulting from an inspection undertaken between March 2014 and May 2014 by the Wales Audit Office (WAO).

The Operational Manager gave a presentation, after which the Chairperson invited questions from the Committee.

The report provided the Committee with information on a set of new arrangements that focus principally on corporate safeguarding governance. They will establish a new governance function, strengthen awareness and training and secure stronger

performance monitoring, audit and compliance. As part of these arrangements a Corporate Safeguarding Board (CSB) is to be created. The Committee asked whether the CSB has had its first meeting and was advised that it has now met three times, in order to get momentum, to establish its work programme and to respond to the WAO report. In future, the CSB will meet quarterly.

Members of the CSB will include the Director of Social Services, the Monitoring Officer, the Operational Manager for Safeguarding and Independent Review and an appropriate operational manager for each directorate. CSB members will be expected to send their senior nominee if they are unable to attend. The Committee asked whether Council employees have been made aware of who sits on the CSB. The Committee was advised that this has not happened yet but it is part of the action plan. A DVD has been produced as part of a training programme designed to make employees aware that everyone shares the responsibility for safeguarding children. The Committee asked why this type of training has not been given before and was advised that training has to be tailored to the needs of Cardiff Council. Employees have to be able to put information they are given into the context of their own work situation. The local authority takes its responsibility for safeguarding seriously, which is why it is important to take the time to get the training right. The WAO survey of staff found that workers in a number of directorates did not have the level of safeguarding awareness that should be expected.

The Committee was concerned that the provision in the CSB terms of reference that would allow CSB members to send their senior nominee might lead to officers with insufficient knowledge being sent to CSB meetings. The Director advised the Committee that he would not allow officers who were insufficiently informed to attend CSB meetings in his place. Although the Operational Manager for Safeguarding is to take the lead, the Director is not expecting to stand down from the CSB, although there may be times when he is unable to attend meetings. The Committee remained concerned about this wording and the Director agreed to amend it so that it was clear to CSB members that they are to have a regular nominee, rather than a succession of different people attending CSB meetings in their place.

The Committee was advised that as part of the Social Services & Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 a National Safeguarding Board is to be created.

The Committee noted that one performance monitoring action concerned the need to verify that all social workers working for the Council are registered with the Care Council of Wales and asked whether there are any circumstances in which a social worker might not be registered. The Committee was advised that all social workers must be registered and that it is illegal for them to practice if they are not. There are times when a social worker's registration might lapse, due to things like maternity leave, sabbaticals or long-term sickness. In such circumstances the Council would have to ensure that the registration has been renewed before the social worker began practicing again.

The Chairperson thanked the Cabinet Member and officer 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.

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

The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee is responsible for scrutinising the performance of Children's Services. The report set out performance data outlining progress against the objectives aligned to the social theme for the quarter ending 31 March 2015

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

The Committee welcomed the progress that is being made on the development of the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH). The Committee was informed that a draft plan has now been agreed and is to be signed off in May. A project manager is to be recruited and as soon as that person is in post the local authority can move ahead with the plan. The police have contributed about 50% of the set up costs, may accommodate the MASH at a police station and may have a mini-team to work with the MASH team.

The Committee noted that the percentage of social worker vacancies in Quarter 4 was 24.8% compared with 25.3% in Quarter 3. The Committee suggested that there has been little improvement in vacancy numbers and asked whether retention is an issue. The Committee also suggested that the Managed Team, which was brought in for a fixed period to clear a backlog of cases, does not seem to have had much of an impact in terms of reducing social workers' caseloads. The Committee was advised that the Managed Team has brought a number of benefits; the backlog was cleared and this has given social workers space to do constructive work with families; the team brought a fresh eye and different ways of working and the service has been able to learn from this; and three of the team have taken up permanent posts within the service. There have been some difficulties in recruiting to the Intake and Assessment team, but this has always been a challenge. The Children in Need Team is now in much better shape, agency spend has been reduced and there is an active recruitment campaign. Where there are vacant posts these are being covered by agency social workers because the service can not allow a situation in which cases that are often complex and risky remain unallocated. The Committee was also advised that as there have been some problems recruiting to Grade 8 social worker posts the service is expanding its recruitment pool to include social workers who are currently at Grade 7, with a view to developing them to Grade 8 level.

The Committee noted that the percentage sickness rate for Children's Services in Quarter 4 was 7.2% and suggested that even if all vacant posts were to be filled this rate of sickness would still present a problem. Posts have to be covered, perhaps by agency staff, and if they are not covered then this may put additional pressure on the team, which could then result in more workers taking sick leave. The Director advised the Committee that he would question whether the figure of 7.2% was correct as at a recent meeting of the Senior Management Team the service was given some praise for reducing its sickness levels. The Director agreed to check on the figure and provide the Committee with the information.

The Committee noted that in relation to the recording of decisions on referrals the overview of Quarter 4 performance the reports states that 'further improvement is required and work to achieve the target of 100% will be ongoing in 2015-16.' The Committee asked how this improvement is to be achieved and within what timescale. The Committee was advised that 100% is not really a target but more of a minimum standard. There should be no reason why these decisions can not be made on the same day. Targets are set to close the gap between the 100% and what is actually being achieved. It should be borne in mind that the service is getting three times the number of referrals from the police (in relation to children in homes where domestic violence is occurring) than would be expected for a city of Cardiff's size. The MASH should help to remove that demand, which will allow more time to be spent on other work.

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.

83 : EARLY HELP STRATEGY - DRAFT CABINET REPORT

The Chairperson welcomed Tony Young (Director of Children's Services), Irfan Alam (Interim Assistant Director, Children's Services) and Angela Bourge (Operational Manager, Resources)

The purpose of this report was to enable Members to assist in the development of the proposed Early Help Strategy, developed by the Early Intervention and Prevention Steering Group of the Cardiff Partnership.

The Operational Manager gave a presentation on the report, following which the Chairperson invited questions from the Committee.

The Committee noted that progress on the implementation of the Strategy is to be monitored by the Vulnerable Children and Families Board and asked which agencies are on it. The Committee was advised that member agencies include Health, the Police, Action for Children and Barnardos as well as representation from Education and Communities within the Council.

The Committee noted that in the presentation there was no mention of the role that play centres and the Youth Service might play in the Strategy and suggested that they should be included; the Council should cherish these services and recognise the good work that they do. The Committee was informed that these services are included. Not all services that will have a role in the Strategy have been listed, only those Welsh Government funded initiatives such as Families First, Flying Start, Communities First and IFSS, because of the particular importance of these initiatives having an appropriate interface with one another. However, it was acknowledged that the contribution that can be made by the Youth Service is key, in both universal and targeted services. The Committee suggested that as play and youth services are vulnerable to funding cuts at the moment this is all the more reason to make more widely known the valuable contribution they can make to things like the Strategy.

The Committee commented that parental courses in numeracy and literacy have been run by schools and attended by parents and their children, and that these have been very valuable in improving the skills of those children that have attended. However, it has been reported by some school governors that funding for these courses appears to have been cut. The Committee asked whether schools are included in the Early Years Strategy. The Committee was advised that schools are an important part of the Strategy. Some grant-funded initiatives are being rolled out for delivery via schools, such as the Strengthening Families Programme that seeks to prevent substance misuse amongst young people, but there are a lot of schools in Cardiff and it can be a challenge to get them on board. The Committee pointed out that children may be disadvantaged if they attend schools that can not afford to continue to run the parental courses.

The Committee was advised that the Strategy is to be signed off by the Vulnerable Children and Families Programme Board and support from formal partners will be sought. Some partners might find it more challenging to implement the key approach set out in the Strategy – particularly smaller organisations such as Home-Start, for instance, but support and training will be made available across the social care workforce to support this. Children's Services is recruiting to two new posts to lead on the implementation of the Strategy and remodelling of social work services. Reports will be provided to the Early Intervention and Preventative Group, which meets bi-monthly, and the Vulnerable Children and Families Programme Board, which meets quarterly. It is difficult to say how many people will need the help that will be provided as part of the Strategy. The local authority currently spends millions of pounds on looking after a relatively small number of children. If there had been earlier interventions for those children then costly interventions that had to be made at a later stage might have been avoided and more of that money could have been spent on earlier interventions for more children and families. The desired outcomes of the Strategy are a reduced number of Looked After Children (LAC) and fewer children being referred to Children's Services.

The Committee enquired about the timescale for implementation and whether there is any plan to involve neighbours or friends in the support plans for those receiving help. The Committee was advised that the Strategy is to go to Cabinet in July 2015. The two new posts are pivotal to the Strategy and it is anticipated that these will be filled over the next few months. It is hoped that the Strategy will be launched in September/October 2015. Regarding the involvement of friends and neighbours, the Committee was advised that identifying suitable friends and neighbours to assist in the provision of support to a family will be important. The Strategy promotes the use of Family Plans and a family group conference model that supports families to find their own solutions to the challenges they face, wherever it is appropriate for them to do so. Also, the action plan is already being implemented and one of the actions involves making sure that families are able to easily identify the services and sources of support that are available to them.

The Committee asked what links to Health are included in the Strategy, particularly to family planning services, as an additional child can put extra pressure on a family that is already struggling. The Committee was advised that GPs will be targeted in the awareness raising for the Strategy. Professionals in things like family planning and substance misuse will have to be supported by the approach being taken, and the Integrated Family Support Team already offers support to families dealing with

substance misuse problems. In helping to deliver the Strategy, a range of professionals, including teachers, will need some support and advice. To help families they may have to have some difficult conversations with them initially and might feel uneasy about this, but in the long-run it could make their jobs easier.

The Chairperson thanked the Director 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.

84 : ESTYN MONITORING VISIT LETTER

The Chairperson welcomed Clive Phillips (Assistant Director, Estyn) and Mark Campion (Inspector, Estyn).

The purpose of this report was to enable the Committee to be given a presentation on the content of the Estyn monitoring letter recently received by the Council following an Estyn significant Improvement monitoring visit undertaken between the 16 and 20 March 2015.

The Estyn officers briefed the Committee on Estyn's findings.

In January 2011 Estyn carried out its inspection and identified improvements that were needed. In June 2012 Estyn made a follow-up visit and felt that sufficient progress had not been made. The second follow-up visit was made in February 2014. Estyn concluded that outcomes were still not good enough and was of the opinion that the local authority was in need of significant improvement. Estyn made six recommendations and the monitoring visit letter outlines Estyn's latest opinion on the progress that has been made against recommendations 3, 5 and 6, which are as follows:

- Recommendation 3 - Make sure that the arrangements for delivering school improvement services challenge and support all schools effectively, *in order to improve standards for learners in all key stages*
- Recommendation 5 - Improve performance management processes to ensure a consistent approach in delivering objectives
- Recommendation 6 - Improve the scrutiny of local authority education services and partnership working

The Committee was advised that a major change has been the creation of the Central South Consortium Joint Education Service. There has been some improvement in performance at all of the key stages but a number of secondary schools are still a cause of concern. Estyn has been looking at the local authority's long-term strategy for improvement, rather than short-term interventions. The challenge advisers are critical and provide the local authority with vital information. Estyn noted that there are still not a lot of secondary schools in Cardiff that can be classed as excellent. There is a lot of high achievement for very capable pupils but Estyn is concerned about the attainment of pupils of lesser ability. On reporting,

Estyn is pleased that there is now more compliance on performance management for staff but it is important to look at the quality of performance management, not just at compliance. Estyn will expect to see the impact of improved performance management when it makes its final monitoring visit in spring 2016. The focus of that visit will be the progress that has been made against all six of Estyn's recommendations.

The Committee was advised that Estyn had recently undertaken a survey of the four consortia and that the report would be published on 3 June 2015. In addition the Wales Audit Office had also undertaken a review and the Committee was advised that the Council should take note of these surveys.

The Chairperson invited questions from the Committee.

The Committee noted that Estyn has found that in line with the rest of Wales there has been an improvement in the performance of children who receive free school meals (FSM). The Committee asked whether this has been due to an improvement on the part of those pupils or deterioration in the performance of those who do not receive FSM. The Committee was advised that there is a significant amount of work to be done across Wales to close the attainment gap between those who do receive FSM and those who do not.

The Committee noted that Estyn has found that there was not a clear enough shared understanding of the long term strategy for school improvement. The Committee was advised that in Cardiff 7% of pupils leave school without qualifications, which is more than twice the average for Wales (3%). Also, performance in relation to school leavers who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs) is not good enough. The local authority has to convince Estyn that it has a long-term strategy. Estyn has sensed that amongst headteachers in the city there is a better view of the direction of travel.

The Committee noted that Estyn has found that training for governors has not addressed sufficiently the challenges presented by new strategies for school improvement. The Committee was advised that in the Consortium every school is now in a school improvement group. A lot of governors did not understand what these were about and what they were trying to achieve. The Committee commented that often only one governor from a school will attend training sessions and then provide feedback to those who did not attend, and that it would be better if internal training sessions were held so that more governors could attend and gain an understanding.

The Chairperson thanked the Estyn 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.

85 : EDUCATION QUARTER 4 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Julia Magill (Cabinet Member for Education and Skills) and Nick Batchelar (Director of Education and Lifelong Learning).

The purpose of this report was to present the Corporate and Education and Lifelong Learning Directorate's performance report for Quarter 4 of 2014/15 prior to its consideration by the Cabinet on 28 May 2015.

The Cabinet Member advised the Committee that there is not too much difference between Quarter 3 and Quarter 4 performance. Some issues have carried over from one quarter to the other. When this year's exam results are known it will be easier to give an opinion on overall performance and Estyn will make another visit next spring to see the evidence that improvements have been made.

The Director gave a presentation, after which the Chairperson invited questions from the Committee.

The Committee noted the local authority has had to absorb cuts to grants that were given to support the learning of those from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities and asked what the effect of this has been on the education budget. The Committee was advised that these cuts hit Cardiff disproportionately and had had a significant impact. The authority is now looking at a different model for this support. Schools in Cardiff work with a very diverse population. There has been a clear policy shift away from having a large central team. More resources for this learning support will be put into schools and a smaller central team will remain to provide an advisory and support function.

The Committee asked how the wider strategy for school improvements is to be shared with the leaders of Cardiff's schools. The Committee was advised that discussions have already been held with a number of headteachers. There is clarity about the direction of travel. Some urgent action had to be taken to make improvements for children who are already going through the school system, but for the future there is a good strategy for school-to-school support. It is necessary to have a vision of where the education system in Cardiff will be in ten years time that can be clearly articulated and the local authority will be working on this with the Education Development Board.

The Committee was concerned that central support for parents may decrease, particularly in relation to the problems they encounter due to a lack of school places. The Committee was advised that the Welsh Government grant is increasing and this will help to improve the school estate. The population of Cardiff is rising rapidly and it will be necessary to invest in some new schools. The Local Development Plan (LDP) will lead to the creation of new primary and secondary schools in the city, so current issues regarding the availability of school places should reduce.

The Committee expressed some concerns about capacity, both in relation to central support teams based at County Hall and to the impact of high levels of staff sickness absence in schools. On sickness absence in schools the Committee was advised that the local authority is able to look at extended periods of sickness that are not being dealt with by the school. It is the responsibility of the local authority to support governing bodies in dealing with sickness absence problems. On central capacity the Committee was advised that the Directorate is under significant pressure and there has to be a clear focus on what is the core business. Diminishing resources have to be pushed to the front line where they will have the most impact and central support teams have to be reduced.

The Committee enquired about the safeguards that are in place to be used when there are concerns over school leadership. The Committee was advised that there are some schools that are just coasting and other schools that are under-performing. The number of schools in the latter category has reduced. There were interventions when schools were of particular concern and significant measures were taken to strengthen leadership and improve performance. The most important way in which challenge advisers can support a school is to be explicit about the standard of leadership in it, explicit with governing bodies, so that governing bodies can not say that they were not aware of poor leadership.

The Committee was concerned about the number of NEETs. The Committee was advised that tracking of NEETs is now much more rigorous. The Youth Service has been asked to provide the Education Development Board with some data that should help to identify where previous tracking measures worked and where they did not. Changes that are to be made to the Youth Service should help address the NEETs issue. A progress report is to be presented to the next meeting of the Committee. The work of the Youth Service is to be more integrated with that of Children's Services and the Youth Offending Service, which should help with the NEETs issue and benefit children more generally.

The Committee commented that when it comes to creating new schools the consultation periods can be very long and that over that time situations can change, the new school will have been designed to accommodate a certain number of pupils but by the time it is created it may not have enough places. The Committee was advised that a lot of consultation procedures are statutory. The increase in the size of Cardiff's population was not picked up a few years ago and the local authority knows from work done around the LDP that it will continue to rise. The Committee suggested that part of the problem is the amount of time it takes for analysis after the end of consultation and asked what the Council is doing to speed up that process. The Committee was advised that the Welsh Government has put in place powers that will allow local authorities to innovate, to do things differently and outside the statutory framework. The local authority is exploring that now.

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.

86 : CORRESPONDENCE REPORT

Martyn Hutchings (Principal Scrutiny Officer) presented this report.

Following most Committee meetings, the Chairperson writes a letter to the relevant Cabinet Member or Officer, summing up the Committee's comments and recommendations regarding the issues considered during that meeting. For information, the Committee received a report on this correspondence.

AGREED: That the report be noted.

87 : DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT

Martyn Hutchings (Principal Scrutiny Officer) presented this report.

The Council's Constitution requires all scrutiny committees to 'report annually to the Council on their workings and make recommendations for future work programmes and amended working methods if appropriate'.

The annual report is to go to Full Council in June. Members were invited to forward any comments they have on the current draft to Martyn Hutchings.

AGREED: That the report be noted.

88 : 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.

89 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on 9 June 2015 at 4.30pm in Committee Room 4, County Hall.

The meeting closed at 6.20pm.