

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

7 APRIL 2015

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

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

Apologies: Councillors Boyle, Chaundy, Govier and Morgan, Mrs P Arlotte (Roman Catholic representative)

68 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Boyle, Chaundy, Govier and Morgan and from Mrs P. Arlotte (Roman Catholic Representative).

69 : 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.

70 : INTEGRATED FAMILY SUPPORT TEAM - ANNUAL REPORT

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Sue Lent (Cabinet Member for Early Years, Children and Families) and Cheryl Chapman (Service Manager, Family Intervention Support).

The purpose of this report was to provide the Committee with an opportunity to comment on the Integrated Family Support Team's third annual report. The report sets out the key achievements and outcomes, challenges and issues facing the Team, as well as the priorities for the next twelve months.

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

The Committee asked for clarification on the situation regarding funding for the IFST. The Committee was concerned about the impact that funding changes may have. Resources used to be allocated to Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan on the basis of need, which resulted in 2/3 of resources being awarded to Cardiff and 1/3 to the Vale. Funding is now to be allocated on 50/50 basis and the Committee was concerned about the impact this will have.

The Committee asked whether there is any indication of how much unmet need exists in the community. The Committee was advised that some work has been done

to try and get a snapshot of this. It was found that the biggest area of unmet need was in relation to domestic violence, where it was found that a large proportion of the cases looked at would have benefited from a referral to IFST.

The Committee noted that the initial service level agreement required the IFST to work with one hundred families throughout the year but that a decision had been made to work with only seventy families. The Committee was advised that IFST is quite a small team with vacant posts and has difficulty keeping up with the demand for its services.

The Committee asked how referrals come to be made to IFST; does this occur when there are children known to be at risk; what is the connection between IFST and the courts and Probation Service; does someone's release from prison trigger a referral? The Committee was advised that referrals to IFST come from a social worker, in most cases from a case responsible social worker in Children's Services. If the police refer directly to IFST, then IFST will broker the case back to Children's Services.

The Committee suggested that as outcomes are difficult to measure one way of doing this would be to look at a child's school behaviour before and after the IFST intervention had taken place. The Committee was advised that IFST outcomes are closely monitored by the Welsh Government (WG) and IFST already works closely with schools and behavioural specialists.

The Committee asked whether IFST, now that it has been running for three years, has gone back to look at the first cohort of families with which it worked, to see if they have continued to benefit from the work that was done with them. The Committee was advised that IFST would like to do that but the resources are not available. WG may be commissioning some research on this.

The Committee asked whether IFST works with male carers, including stepfathers who may have other families. The Committee was advised that IFST works with any significant male members of a family, including grandparents and absent fathers. IFST explores where the supportive systems are within a family. Grandparents are crucial to the support that can be given to children and families.

Members requested clarification of the outcome for the eighty-nine children that had been worked with during last year as the presentation only gave details for fifty-five of the children. The Service Manager agreed to provide this.

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.

71 : CHILDREN'S SERVICES - QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE MONITORING

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Sue Lent (Cabinet Member for Early Years, Children and Families), Angela Bourge (Operational Manager, Resources) and Kim Brown (Service Manager, Policy and Performance).

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 December 2014.

The Chairperson invited Councillor Lent to make a statement. Councillor Lent informed the Committee that the report indicates an improving picture. One figure where there has been a downturn is action on referrals, but the number of referrals has risen. This needs some consideration as the Managed Team that has been helping to clear the backlog of referrals is due to withdraw in April.

Angela Bourge presented the report and made the following points:

- The report should be seen in the context of a 5% increase in referrals to Children's Services.
- There was continued improvement in relation to the timeliness of initial assessments, with performance rising from 47% in Quarter 2 to 67% in Quarter 3
- Timeliness of initial child protection conferences increased from 86% in Quarter 2 to 93% in Quarter 3, in the context of a 40% increase in the number of required initial child protection conferences.
- Work to progress the Directorate's Improvement Plan has continued, including significant work the draft Prevention Strategy.

The Chairperson invited questions from the Committee.

The Committee asked how Children's Service will cope after the Managed Team departs. The Committee was advised that the plan is that a number of cases each week will be transferred back to the teams that originally held them, and a number of cases have been closed. It is challenging in terms of the number of cases that will have to be allocated. Caseloads are likely to rise again and it will be a matter of managing the risks. A new weekly Legal Surgery has been introduced as a measure to strengthen early intervention in order to ensure that planning for children is progressed in a timely way. The panel is made up of senior managers and representation from Legal Services. It will assist social workers to get cases 'unstuck' and move them on.

The Committee pointed out that Children's Services always knew that the Managed Team would only be in place for a specific time and was concerned that it did not seem as if there is actually a plan to manage the transition. Use of the Managed Team was meant to be more than just a stop gap. It was meant to be a way of moving forward, of using the time to get more social workers into permanent posts. The Committee was advised that one of the benefits of having the Managed Team has been that Children's Services has been able to learn from it, to re-think the way some things are done. Looking at the amount of time social workers have to spend using computers would be an example of this. Also, some of the Managed Team have expressed interest in working for the Council and have subsequently been recruited to permanent vacancies. Alongside this, good progress has been noted in respect of the Recruitment and Retention Strategy. Bringing in the Managed Team has been a positive thing. The exit strategy does involve some risk but Children's Services manages risk on a daily basis. The Managed Team has enabled other

teams, such as the Children in Need Teams, to focus more on direct work which has had positive outcomes and has enabled them to close significant numbers of cases. All is not perfect but recruitment has continued and the management team has been a stabilising factor. Nevertheless there are risks attached to their departure and the exit strategy had been developed around a robust risk assessment.

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.

72 : RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF SOCIAL WORKERS - UPDATE REPORT

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Sue Lent (Cabinet Member for Early Years, Children and Families), Debbie Martin-Jones (Operational Manager, LAC Services) and Sarah Woelk (Operational Manager, Intake and Assessment).

The purpose of this report was to provide the Committee with a copy of the progress Update Report Card on the recruitment and use of agency staff.

The Chairperson invited Councillor Lent to make a statement. Councillor Lent informed the Committee that recruitment initiatives have been ongoing and this has included strengthening of the links with universities and the re-branding of the service. Morale has improved and the re-organisation of teams has helped with this.

The Operational Manager presented the report. The Committee was advised that the benefit of having a recruitment strategy is that appointments to posts can now be processed more quickly. Children's Services has been working with the Recruit Team. The re-organisation of teams gave social workers the opportunity to choose the where they wanted to be, to choose the specialism that they wanted to focus on. Job ads are now tailored to the specific part of the service in which the post being advertised sits.

The Committee asked what the vacancy rate is now, whether the rate of staff turnover has increased or decreased and whether the timescales for making new appointments has changed. The Operational Manager advised the Committee that in her area of work they now have more applicants than vacant posts, which previously was not the case. There are now better links with Human Resources and Children's Services has its own People Partner. It takes about four months to recruit a new social worker into post. The notice periods that people have to give can vary.

The Committee was very concerned to hear that it can take up to four months to recruit a new social worker and suggested that this is bound to add to the pressure on existing staff members and cause them frustration.

The Committee noted that the spend on agency social workers is still very high. The Committee was advised that this needs to be viewed in the context of the situation for other local authorities. One approach that other authorities have tried is over-recruiting. This would perhaps not be an idea that would be welcomed but there is some evidence that it works and saves money in the long-run.

The Committee asked if the recruitment process begins as soon as a member of staff hands in their notice. The Committee was advised that receipt of notice does trigger the process. The post can be released the same day and would be advertised within two or three weeks. The background checks that have to be carried out, such as Disclosure and Barring Checks, do add to the delays that might occur.

The Committee asked officers what would be their ideal minimum period for recruitment to a new post, assuming the person appointed had to give only one months notice. Officers advised that about two months from resignation would be good. Cases have to be reallocated once someone leaves. Teams can manage those unallocated cases for a short time but three or four months is too long.

On current vacancies, the Committee noted that the percentage of social worker vacancies in Quarter 3 was 25.3% and asked if it is expected that that figure will drop drastically. The Committee was advised that the next round of reports the figures may show that vacancies in Intake and Assessment (I&A) are still high, but there should be improvement in other areas.

The Committee asked whether other local authorities have difficulties recruiting to their I&A teams and was advised that this problem is a national issue. In Cardiff, retention has improved and there is a good career progression path. The majority of team managers are people who have progressed to that grade whilst working for the Council. The Committee felt that there has to be an effort to try and understand the reasons for the problem recruiting to I&A, so that the situation can be improved.

The Committee asked what qualifications are accepted when recruiting social workers. The Committee was informed that all social workers have to have a degree in social work or equivalent. Students that are taking these courses and have work placements with the Council sometimes join Children's Services when they have completed their course. There is also the secondment programme, in which social work assistants and those working in Children's Services Business Support can apply to be seconded and supported while they complete their degree course. To be seconded they must already have the qualifications that would allow them to get a place on a degree course. Applications for social work posts are also accepted from those who hold the appropriate social work qualifications from the Open University.

The Committee asked whether the salary the Council offers to social workers is competitive and was advised that the Children's Services People Partner has done some work on this and found that salaries on a par with those offered by other local authorities.

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.

73 : CABINET RESPONSES - CHILD HEALTH AND DISABILITY, LISTENING EVENT AND TRANSITIONS TO INDEPENDENT LIVING

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Sue Lent (Cabinet Member for Early Years, Children and Families).

Transitions to Independent Living

The Committee agreed as part of its work programme to undertake an inquiry into Looked After Children's Transition to Independent Living. As a result the Committee agreed to set up Task and Finish Group Inquiry. The report was presented to Cabinet in November 2014 and a full response was agreed by Cabinet on 19 March 2015.

Councillor Lent informed the Committee that all recommendations had been accepted. The Cabinet was particularly pleased to be able to increase the Leaving Care Grant.

The Committee commented that it was unfortunate that there had been a long delay in the turnaround of the report and noted that there seems to have been a delay in the recruitment of Personal Advisors. The Committee was informed that these posts were being covered by agency staff but ads for the permanent posts will be going out soon.

Child Health and Disability (CHAD)

The Committee agreed as part of its work programme to undertake an inquiry into the Child health and Disability Team and as a result the Committee agreed to set up Task and Finish Group Inquiry. The report was presented to Cabinet on 9 December 2013, and a full response was agreed by Cabinet on 19 March 2015.

Councillor Lent advised the Committee that the response noted that the Vale of Glamorgan local authority has already had its disability index in place for some time. The report uncovered a number of causes for concern. It is hoped that the Council is now travelling in the right direction to address these issues. It would appear that there are a lot of children who are eligible for services.

The Chairperson advised Members that the Committee will be receiving an updated development plan in the near future.

Listening Event

The Committee agreed as part of its work programme to undertake a Listening Event with Looked after Children under the age of eleven. The event was based around three key themes:

- a) School and healthy living
- b) Visiting families and where you live
- c) Social Services

The report was presented to Cabinet on 17 July 2014, and a full response was agreed by Cabinet on 15 December 2015.

Councillor Lent informed the Committee that all recommendations were accepted by the Cabinet.

AGREED: That the Chairperson on behalf of the Committee writes to the Cabinet Member highlighting the issues raised during the Way Forward discussion.

74 : AUDIT COMMITTEE CORRESPONDENCE

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Sue Lent (Cabinet Member for Early Years, Children and Families) and Sarah Woelk (Operational Manager, Intake and Assessment).

The Chairperson of the Committee recently received a letter from the Chairperson of the Council's Audit Committee, Sir Jon Shortridge. The letter raised some concerns that the Audit Committee had expressed at its meeting on 19 January 2015. This report provided the Committee with a copy of this correspondence together with details of the actions undertaken since the receipt of the letter.

The Audit Committee asked that this issue be raised with the Chairperson of Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee to seek assurance that the Committee is aware of these matters and scrutinising and measuring the improvements in such areas within Children's Services Directorate.

The Operational Manager informed the Committee that a core group project has been commissioned. There are two independent Chairs and a minute-taker. The Operational Manager and Tony Young, Director of Children's Services were expecting to have to attend an Audit Committee meeting, but the Audit Committee were reassured by the progress that has been made in addressing this issues of concern and did not in the end require their attendance. The purpose of the core group is to formulate and review a multi-agency plan. Now, the case conference Chair identifies the person who will be the minute-taker. The All Wales Child Protection Procedure Regulations are clear. It is not the responsibility of the social worker to minute the meeting.

The Committee agreed that this item should be included in its Work Programme so that monitoring of the issue can continue.

The Chairperson thanked the Cabinet Member and officers for attending the meeting and for their presentation.

AGREED: That the Chairperson on behalf of the Committee writes to the Cabinet Member highlighting the issues raised during the Way Forward discussion.

75 : SCRUTINY IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

Martyn Hutchings (Principal Scrutiny Officer) presented this report.

The purpose of this report was to advise the Committee of the progress made to date in delivering the Council's Improving Scrutiny Project, and to seek views on the timing and next steps to bring the Project to conclusion.

The Committee was advised that as there is to be a general election on 7 May it might be preferable to delay arranging meetings to discuss the project until after the election has been concluded.

AGREED: That the project should not be delayed and that the Committee's response should be added to those given by the other scrutiny committees.

76 : 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.

77 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on 12 May 2015 at 2.30pm in Committee Room 4, County Hall

The meeting closed at 7.20pm.