

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

10 OCTOBER 2017

Present: Councillor Bridgeman (Chairperson), Councillors De'Ath, Philippa Hill-John, Joyce, Murphy, Phillips, Taylor and Singh

Co-opted Members: Patricia Arlotte (Roman Catholic representative), Carol Cobert (Church in Wales representative) and Crump (Parent Governor Representative)

19 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence have been received from Karen Dell'Armi and Councillor Linda Morgan.

20 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received

21 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting on the 19 July 2017 were agreed as a correct record; the minutes of the meeting on the 12 September 2017 were agreed as a correct record subject to the inclusion of Rebecca Crump's (Parent Governor Representative) being added. The minutes' were signed by the Chairperson.

22 : VALE, VALLEYS AND CARDIFF REGIONAL ADOPTION SERVICE - ANNUAL REPORT

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Graham Hinchey (Cabinet Member Children and Families), Rachel Evans (Head of Children's Services, Vale of Glamorgan County Council), Angela Harris (Regional Adoption Manager), Tony Young (Director Social Services) and Irfan Alam (Assistant Director, Children's Services) to the meeting to present the report, which the Committee indicated had been read and considered.

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

- It is clear that collaboration in this instance is working well, however, it is clear that it is an area which is struggling particularly with staff shortages and funding. It is not clear if the purpose of the review is to recommend extra resources or restructure to mitigate some of the problems. Members were advised that it was a combination of both. The Service is making the case for increased staffing levels but have been told that a business case needs to be made evidencing the resources required and how the resources are to be deployed.
- Members noted that the review is still ongoing, but is likely to be concluded and a draft prepared by mid-November.

- Members requested an update on the improvements and priorities for implementation referred to in the 2015-16 report and were advised that the aim for this report was to provide a shorter report and weave some of the findings into that report:
 - the service has moved towards a more specialised way of working and are required to allocate work across the board if there is a need in a particular area;
 - training has taken place on the new tablets however there have been some technical issues and it is anticipated they will be going live in the next few months;
 - the website is now up and running having gone live in July of this year and it has been a useful tool for adopters to find out about the service;
 - Ongoing work is being done to try and streamline the family finding process and work on a 12 week cycle once the referral comes in;
 - Whilst a number of the processes were now being conducted in Welsh, letters were sent in Welsh if a preference has been notified and the website is bilingual, it is accepted that there is still more to be done going forward; and
 - The development of opportunities for engaging and obtaining feedback from services users is continuing, it is a large piece of work.
- Members expressed concern at the low update of counselling by Birth Parents and were advised that Cardiff is not unique, the figures show that update is low across Wales, and that often parents, at that early stage, do not want to engage.
- Members raised a query concerning the central list of Panel Members and the membership of the joint regional panel bearing in mind the difficulties with recruitment. Members were advised that the independent chairs, of which there are 2 have to have some background in adoptions and that there are currently 4 vice chairs.

The independent members are made up of foster carers, adopter parents and people with a connection to adopters. Social Workers also sit on the panel, they have to have a background in adoption, childcare or fostering. Because it is such a huge time commitment recruiting social workers is difficult and more Social Workers are needed. It is very rarely that meetings are cancelled; there are 4 panel meetings a month.

- Members requested information about the number of adoption breakdowns and were advised that a review has taken place internally over the last 4 years; it has provided some evidence and some anecdotal information surrounding adoption. Whilst it revealed a low percentage of breakdowns, it was still too many and that it is vital that adoption support is effective and needs to be full resourced.
- Members sought clarification as to why there has been an increase in the number of children being placed for adoption. Officers advised that there is an increase in the number of children being referred and then placed nationally and there has also been a change in the Judicial approach;

adoption has to be and is the last resort. The Authority is now better equipped to recognise and assess the situation involving the child earlier.

- Members requested information about Activity Days and were advised that they are normally run by a private company, potential adopters can access a directory and look for prospective children. It is an activity that has been around for some time. There has been some resistance to it, but the children have found it to be a fun day which they enjoy. Both children and adopters who attend activity days are prepared for the day fun is the main focus of the day. Children are prepared on the basis that they are meeting potential Mummies and Daddies, it is usually used for the harder to place children.
- Members sought clarification of the support received to ensure that the adoption does not breakdown and were advised that all children have to have a support plan which the adopters have in their possession. There is support provided throughout the placement through to the Adoption Order, however, if further support is required post Adoption Order than can be provided. The placing Authority is responsible for 3 years after the Order.

AGREED – That the Chairperson, on behalf of the Committee, writes to the Cabinet Member and the Head of Children’s Services in the Vale of Glamorgan, conveying the observations of the Committee when discussing the Way Forward.

23 : DEVELOPING THE SCHOOL ESTATE IN CARDIFF - DRAFT CABINET REPORT (TO FOLLOW)

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Sarah Merry (Cabinet Member Education, Employment & Skills), Nick Batchelar (Director, Education and Lifelong Learning) and Janine Nightingale (Head of Schools Organisation Access and Planning) to the meeting.

The Chairperson invited the Cabinet Member to make a statement in she made reference to the review of the school estate and the challenges that are currently been faced; the growing pressure on secondary schools; the need to develop provision to meet Additional Learning Needs; and the Local Development Plan and major housing sites.

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

- Members sought clarification as to whether or not there is to be a guaranteed maintenance plan in place for any newly built schools bearing in mind the maintenance difficulties faced in a number of schools and were advised that it will be addressed to some extent within the Band B funding. The maintenance of the school estate has to be a priority.
- Members were advised that the projected over subscription of secondary school places by September 2019 is currently being addressed – there are new schools being built, there may be capacity in different school areas and where schools are currently full temporary measures may need to be available.

- Members requested information as to the severity of the picture regarding schools places after September 2019 and were advised that whilst there had been big changes in the primary school cohort; whilst 3100 left high school this year and 4300 joined that figure has not changed since last year. Both high schools and primary schools are planned for the areas where there are new housing developments planned, for example the proposed development in the Radyr area will have a new high school and 5 new primary schools. The Director advised that one pupil is in the system the numbers can be tracked and projected however, Cardiff does have a high rate of in year admissions. It is anticipated that there will also be an additional 290 places for pupils with autism spectrum conditions, complex learning needs, and behaviour emotional and social needs required.
- Members were advised that a further report will be prepared for Cabinet once the funding arrangements have been finalised which will address the concerns about provision for those with additional learning needs and any adaptations to existing provision. The Director indicated that ALN provision is something which needs to be addressed as quickly as possible and certainly during this academic year.
- Members noted that the nature and amount of funding from Welsh Government is to be available by the end of this year
- Members sought information about the Mutual Investment Model (MIM) and were advised that it had been introduced by Welsh Government as an alternative means of funding Band B. Members were advised that the governance of that model would be key; it is an expensive way for the public sector to build new schools and that any school would have to be operating and virtually 100% capacity throughout the whole of the school's life. The preference for Cardiff would be the capital option bearing in mind the logistical concerns with MIM, particularly how quickly schools could be built.
- Members queried the prognosis for the 3 Cat D condition schools; Cantonian, Fitzalan and Willows High Schools and were advised that there is a commitment to remove all Cat D condition schools from Wales. However, there is a recognition that new schools will not be delivered until 2021 if funded by the Band B capital route. Therefore during that time the schools have to be compliant and safe. £5m has been spent on those schools ensuring that and there are now co-funded estate managers in the schools deemed at most risk. There will be an open dialogue and regular updates on the condition of those buildings. It is anticipated that more funding may be required. Members noted that the Cat D schools will be demolished eventually.
- The Director advised Members that until there is certainty about funding; the scale and funding route no decisions can be made about new schools for those areas.
- Members queried whether there is more scope to be more ambitious about Welsh language provision. The Director advised that there is a commitment to expand Welsh language provision and certainly there has been expansion through Band B. There is currently 86% occupancy in Welsh medium primary schools, which is higher than English medium schools.

- Interim measures are being considered going forward to address the issues with school places, Members queried how creative are those measures likely to be and whether MIM could address the maintenance issues. Members were advised that until such times as the funding position, both the type and amount, have been clarified no detailed plans for any interim can be formulated. MIM schemes will not attract companies unless they have ownership of the provision – it is a vehicle to deliver new buildings.
- Members asked Officers how they felt this Scrutiny could help support this journey and were advised that education is not a political football; there needs to be open and transparent debate particularly about the difficult investment decisions that need to be made going forward.

AGREED – That the Chairperson, on behalf of the Committee, writes to the Cabinet Member conveying the observations of the Committee when discussing the Way Forward.

24 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee is on Tuesday 14 November 2017 at 4.30 pm

This document is available in Welsh / Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg.