

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16 APRIL 2024

Present: Councillor Bridgeman (Chairperson),
Councillors, Davies, Ferguson-Thorne, Hopkins, Melbourne and
Moultrie

Co-opted Members: Bridgid Corr (Parent Governor Representative),
Celeste Lewis (Parent Governor Representative), Carol Cobert (Church
in Wales Representative) and Patricia Arlotte (Roman Catholic Church
Representative).

64 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllrs Saleh Ahmed, Elaine Simmons and Emily Gao (Youth Council Representative).

65 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

66 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairperson.

67 : ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE - INTRODUCTORY BRIEFING

Members were advised that this item would allow them to receive an introductory briefing on this topic from a range of Service Areas, which the Committee raised as a priority topic during work programming last year.

Members were reminded that the session was an introduction to the topic, and not a 'hold to account' session. Given the tight timescale Members were working with the Chairperson requested that Members keep questioning to a minimum at the meeting – only seeking points of clarification if required. Further scrutiny of this topic could be discussed in the way forward.

Members were informed that after Cabinet Member statements, the Committee would receive a presentation from the Child Friendly City Team; Children's Services; Youth Services; Cardiff Commitment and School Organisation Planning Teams; and Community Safety. Individual teams would have around ten minutes each to present their part of the presentation and take any points of clarification from Members.

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Sarah Merry (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Education); Councillor Ash Lister (Cabinet Member for Children's Services) and; Councillor Peter Bradbury (Cabinet Member for Tackling Poverty and Supporting Young People) who had joined the meeting online. Councillor Thorne (Cabinet Member for People and Communities) was also in attendance and welcomed to the meeting.

Councillors Merry, Lister and Bradbury were invited to make an opening statement. Members were informed that a range of council officers would provide them with information which would enable them to explore the scope, approach, impact and the challenges of involving children and young people in the work of the Council. Councillor Merry asked Members to keep in mind the collective responsibility and statutory duty to not only hear but also actively consider the needs and views of babies, children and young people as set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Councillor Merry stated that Cardiff's achievement as the first UNICEF Accredited Child Friendly City in the UK underscored the Council's dedication but also reminded the Council of the journey ahead to ensure that every baby, child and young person felt valued, heard and engaged. The Child Friendly City accreditation was largely based around the engagement that had been carried out with children and young people. The importance of hearing children and young people's voices and feedback in shaping future services was emphasised to Members.

Child Friendly City Team

The Chairperson welcomed Mel Godfrey, Director of Education & Lifelong Learning; and Lee Patterson, Child Friendly City Programme Co-ordinator to the meeting.

Members received a presentation from Lee Patterson who outlined the scope, approach impact and challenges of the Child Friendly City Programme which had a responsibility for the overarching strategic, participation and engagement of children in Cardiff.

The Chairperson invited Members to ask questions and make comments; the discussion is summarised as follows:

Members asked for details on the Children and Young People Place Plan. Officers responded that it had been developed through a series of focused structured workshops in the community involving primary, secondary and the local youth forum in partnership with academics from the school of Geography and Planning at Cardiff University. A toolkit had been developed and was being implemented across the city. Members were advised that the toolkit enabled children and young people to interact in informal structured sessions where they could build things, have a say, highlight the issues that they would like to do whether it was positive or negative in the community in Grangetown. Academics and adults then refined the data and formulated a plan of exactly what the children had said. The Plan had been published and council officers and any key stakeholders were invited to discuss implementing it in a community setting which resulted in a number of actions. The Plan's outcomes were short, medium and long term with the aim being to work with children and young people to ensure a number of quick wins - a series of recommendations from children and young people to implement as and when the funding opportunities arose.

Members asked for clarification on the scope and opportunity to replicate community mapping work in other wards in the Cardiff. Officers responded that a similar process had taken place in Llanishen. The Youth Service was also undertaking some mapping. It was agreed that the scope and scale had to be manageable and realistic. There were expectations on schools but the aim was to build it into the school curriculum. Officers could not answer whether it was scalable as yet but were

considering the most appropriate ways of implementing the plan in partnership with schools and community groups.

Children's Services

The Chairperson welcomed Matt Osborne, Operational Manager, Children's Services who explained that the service's core business involved talking to children and young people on a daily basis and a large-scale participation survey of all the young people involved in the service had recently been carried out. He outlined the scope and impact of the service which included advocacy and getting voices heard; consultation and engagement; NYAS quarterly reports; groups and clubs for Cardiff's children; including children in plans and children and young person led work.

Members were advised about next steps which included finalising the draft Participation Strategy in collaboration with young people; further development of a cohort of young people who could be consulted with on key decisions; expanding young person's panels to participate in interviews on a regular basis; engaging and awareness raising about children's services in schools; realigning the front door making it easier for children to self-refer and enhancing the Children's Services offer to children and young people to be involved.

Youth Services

The Chairperson welcomed back Mel Godfrey, Director of Education & Lifelong Learning; and James Healan, Principal Youth Officer.

Members were provided with information on the scope, the approach to participation and the impact of the service which included increased social action; improved volunteering opportunities; young people involved in provision; collaboration and partnership; young leaders programme; tackling loneliness and isolation; contributing to digital inclusivity and inclusion of diverse groups. The challenges were also highlighted which included keeping young people interested; resources for diverse cohorts; parity of access, embedding rights-based access and engaging with the 'usual suspects'.

The Chairperson invited Members to ask questions and make comments; the discussion is summarised as follows:

Members asked for clarification on the reasons for increases in isolation and loneliness amongst young people. Officers responded that COVID had resulted in many young people becoming isolated. There had also been evidence of growing anxiety amongst young people anxious to engage in work-based learning in post 16 destinations. Attempts had been made by the Youth Service to provide online space for capacity building and to include some face-to-face contact after the online sessions.

Members asked what community-based support the Service offered to those young people transitioning from primary to secondary education. Officers responded that the Youth Service reached out to primary year 6 young people to bring them together in youth centres. It was appreciated that transitions from year 6 to year 7 could be daunting for many young people and that their first example of that could be engagement with the youth service. Members were advised that transition work took

place during the summer. The Youth Service were involved with the transition at year 11 for young people and identified, tracked and supported young people in post 16 destinations. It was recognised that those periods of transition in young people's lives were really important and the Youth Service tried to reach out and support young people where it could.

Education Service

Joining Mel Godfrey, the Chairperson welcomed Carly Davies from Cardiff Commitment and Michele Duddridge-Friedl from the School Organisation Planning (SOP) who provided Members with presentations on Cardiff Commitment and SOP.

The Chairperson invited Members to ask questions and make comments; the discussion is summarised as follows:

In respect of Cardiff Commitment, Members asked what methods were being used for face-to-face engagement in this area, given that there had been increased face-to-face engagement. Officers responded that it was a balance between virtual and face-to-face engagement, looking at innovations and solutions and the best use of time. Members were encouraged to visit some of the Spring event experiences that were being held.

Members asked officers about SOP and the methods used to engage with young people on high level strategic documents, such as the WESP. Officers responded that it was difficult to ensure that the content was at a level for all ages to interact with. Officers provided an example of the 'Big Conversation' where children had recorded videos, introduced the session, the key questions, the key actions, key headings and main points. Officers ensured information provided was focused on the key priorities.

A request was made on whether contractors building new buildings or major refurbishments could "build in" funds for engaging with young people.

Community Safety

The Chairperson welcomed Jenny Rogers, Community Safety Manager, who provided Members with a presentation on the Service's engagement with children & young people in terms of scope, approach, impact and challenges.

The Chairperson invited Members to ask questions and make comments; the discussion is summarised as follows:

Members referred to violence amongst young people and that presumably community safety was not able to respond on its own and asked about the nature of involvement from other key partners. Officers responded that other partners in the Community Safety Partnership had a specified role to contribute to the strategy and delivery plan.

Members were heartened to see the widespread work being carried out by the different departments involved in the engagement and participation of young people and looked forward to receiving further updates in the future.

RESOLVED: That the Chairperson writes to the Cabinet Member on behalf of the Committee expressing their comments and observations captured during the way forward.

68 : YOUTH JUSTICE SERVICE UPDATE

Members were advised that this item would allow Members to receive the quarterly update of the Youth Justice Service (YJS).

Joining Cllr Lister, the Chairperson welcomed Angharad Thomas, Operational Manager, Youth Justice Service; and he also extended a very warm welcome to Sue Thomas, Independent Chair of the Cardiff Youth Justice Board to her first meeting of the Committee. He thanked her for attending and Members looked forward to working with her in the future.

Cllr Lister was invited to make an opening statement in which he drew attention to the fact that first time entrants remained relatively low, with no young person going to custody in the last quarter. He also mentioned the complexity of re-offending which was high. Within the team there were still challenges around vacancy and recruitment but there was a commitment for improvement.

Sue Thomas advised Members that she was about to start the planning cycle for the Youth justice Plan which governed and directed what the service did for the following year. The team was going from strength to strength with some recent appointments.

The Chairperson invited Members to ask questions and make comments; the discussion is summarised as follows:

Members noted that the progress on first time entrants was commendable and asked for clarification on the reasons behind the decrease and whether it was due to national or local factors or a mixture of both. Officers responded that it was about the commitment to continually looking at the needs of children who came to the attention of the of YJS and avoiding, where appropriate, criminalisation. Members were advised that the reason was down to the prevention service and the work the service carried out on diversion and being diligent to maintain the low level of first-time entrants.

Officers referred to the Crossroads Programme which had been relaunched along with the prevention/diversion focus. Members were advised that the YJS had worked with referrers to advise on who should be referred to the service. It was noted that there had been an increase in referrals but that the young people the YJS was working with were the right individuals. Members were advised that they were complex young people but preventative work had been put in place to support them and their families to reintegrate back into their local communities. It was emphasised that there was a child first focus throughout so even when a young person did come to the YJS the intervention was under a non-criminal umbrella as much possible which was also reflected nationally. Locally the YJS was working with a large cohort of young people and it had been evidenced that by working the right way the numbers could be reduced.

Members referred to the December case load and highlighted that there were 18 cases of young people aged under 13s included. Officers were asked what activity

the young people were engaging in to bring them to the attention of the YJS. Officers responded that nationally there was concern around criminal exploitation, early identification of factors contributing to exploitation and individuals were being referred to the service at a younger age. Members were advised that the YJS Speech and Language Therapist was engaging with anyone aged 12 and under to identify any additional learning needs (ALN) to identify different ways of engaging with them. There had been a group girls aged 12 and 13 who were involved in fights which can skew the figures. Members were informed that the reason the age of those referred was going down was partly through offending and partly through earlier identification.

Members noted the change of how family dynamics were working where children were living 50% at home at 50% with their stepdads and in alternate local authorities. Officers were asked how this was managed. Officers responded that there were protocols across YJS in Wales. Depending on how a young person entered the system - if the young person was arrested and Cardiff managed Cardiff YJS would case manage, write the reports and liaise with the areas where the young person spent most of their time. If children moved further afield Cardiff YJS had the relevant conversations regarding case transfer. Everybody works same way. If there were different family units the service ensured that both families were brought on board with the case review process.

Members asked how central prevention was and if the service was getting support from other partners. Officers responded that prevention was key and nationally there was a large movement to focus on prevention. Most of the children were under the Prevention strand but they were still able to access other areas of the service whilst in Prevention. Members were informed that when Crossroads was relaunched it allowed the service to work in partnership with other agencies, particularly with regards police custody. Officers noted that good partners were in place on panels and the YJS Management Board. It was also pleasing to see YJS high on other partner's agendas also. Secondees were in place in the YJS from the Police, Probation and Education with an Education officer based in YJS, substance misuse workers and the third sector - St Giles.

Members asked if the YJS felt it had sufficient resources to continue and extend its work. Officers responded that the service was nearly fully staffed but the issue was the reliance on grants from Welsh Government and Police & Crime Commissioner for example. If grants were reduced the service would struggle with resource.

Members asked for clarification on what overarching issues were emerging from supervision over the last 6 months. Officers responded that the way supervisions were carried out had changed. 1-1s were still carried out but also group supervision sessions which involved sharing solutions to issues. Staff were saying they wanted to progress and ways of supported that were being investigated. A new action plan was being developed where involvement of the staff in the service was key in the creation of the plan.

Members asked for an update on vacancies in the service. Officers responded that there were two vacancies within the whole service. A Case Management Practitioner was being advertised within the next couple of weeks and one Senior Practitioner. The Practice Manager post had been filled with the post holder starting in July 2024.

Members were reassured that despite the vacancies the work quality had not been affected. The vacancies had been managed carefully using the YJS Diversion Manager to pick up work. There was no waiting list, and no cases were unallocated and good feedback had been received from Court.

Members asked whether the seconded Probation Officer was short- or long-term position. Officers responded that the secondment was a long-term position by agreement with the Probation Service.

Members commented on the Sickness records for the YJS at the end of last year which were quite high and asked if there had been any improvement. Officers responded that no officer was currently on sick leave.

RESOLVED: That the Chairperson writes to the Cabinet Member on behalf of the Committee expressing their comments and observations captured during the way forward.

69 : CHILDREN'S SERVICES QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE 2023/24

Members were advised that this item would allow them to receive the 2023/24 Quarter 3 performance results for Children's Services. This covered the period September to December 2023.

Joining Cllr Lister, the Chairperson welcomed Sarah Skuse, Operational Manager, Locality Children's Services.

Cllr Lister made an opening statement. He commented on the continuing high demand and that the outturn was expected to be higher than in previous years. Despite that he noted the very good work being done with babies, children and young people and families across the city. Members were informed that the Accommodation Strategy was progressing well with three properties brought online at the end of the last quarter and one early on in quarter 4. The areas being focussed on by Children's Services included the timeliness of reports and visits but in addition additional capacity at the front door.

The Chairperson invited Members to ask questions and make comments; the discussion is summarised as follows:

Members referred to the Service moving from unregistered placements and asked for an update. Officers responded that due to capacity, in the marketplace with the Council's independent providers and internally, Children's Services had been in a position where it was not able to find a placement that met a child's needs. Where this was the case, arrangements had been put in place at short notice using a property in the rental sector with a commissioned group of care providers. It had been recognised that the practice put the local authority at high risk. Also, the service was not satisfied about the quality of care provided to the young people. The local authority was reliant on the landlord to rent that property and if rented at short notice and someone was already moving into the property the child had to move out. There had been cases of children moving several times which was not acceptable. Providers were not providing the right quality of staff and the Service was unhappy with the arrangement and had to find an alternative. Members were advised that Clive Lodge allowed the service to have a maximum of 5 units. It had been possible

to avoid unregistered arrangements and to enter a contracted arrangement with the care providers. Residential services had a high level of oversight and over time the service would introduce its own permanent staff with a phased transition from agency to permanent staff.

Members asked about the frequency of unregistered placements happening. Officers responded that the maximum number of unregistered placements was 10 in 2023. There were still a few with one young person who had a high level of need who required secure placement and the service was reliant on what was available nationally. Clive Lodge allows Children's Services to have a short-term immediate placement for a young person and provided a chance to plan and find the right placement for them.

Members asked if the Care Inspectorate Wales or Estyn had the power to inspect where children were placed in unregistered placements as this was not the case in England where Ofsted did not have the power to inspect if the young person was an unregistered placement provided by a private provider. Officers responded that they had to report weekly on each individual unregistered placement. Officers emphasised that they would not place a young person in an unregistered placement provided by a private provider. Children's Services always tried, wherever possible, to place a young person in Cardiff but that was not always possible. There was close liaison with the Commissioning Team in Children's Services and Social Workers regularly attended to carry out checks on food hygiene and safety. Members were advised that daily meetings with providers took place, if required. There was also close scrutiny by the Care Inspectorate Wales and Welsh Government regarding unregistered placements. The Cabinet Member added that he received regular briefings from the Director of Children's Services in the case of any unregistered placements.

Members noted the good progress in some areas in relation to the timeliness of meetings and reviews such as Child Protection Conferences and Children Looked After Reviews but that there were still a relatively low number of meetings held on time. Members asked if that was due to the need for contribution from other partners. Officers responded that the practical need to bring everyone together was meaning the meetings were not hitting their timescales. However, as Children's Services there was a recognition of the need to take responsibility and to manage the process effectively. Additional resources had been introduced with a project team to help Social Workers to manage the meetings and make sure they were recorded. Officers were advised that the project team has been in place since Q4 and data was currently being collated to assess the impact of the intervention. The Cabinet Member added that whilst Children's Services took the lead there should also be an expectation for partners to support that in addition to providing their own interventions to support children, young people and families.

Members asked for the reasons why there were currently 17 young people unallocated to Personal Advisor (PA). Officers responded that some of the challenges in allocating PAs were that some of the young people came in very late. Some of 17 unallocated individuals would be unaccompanied asylum seekers and by the time they were age assessed they might be over 18 but the Service could

not be certain and then the young person had to quickly transition to PA support and leaving care.

Members asked what the barriers there were to accessing education, employment and training for the 40% of care leavers who were NEET and how those barriers were being addressed. Officers responded that many of the young people coming reaching the age of 18 had not been actively involved in training and education for long period of time. Members were advised it was not that the young people had disengaged but that they had already disengaged some time ago with poor attendance at school, many experiencing school moves for various reasons. Members were advised that the challenge of re-engagement increased from aged 18+.

Members referred to the Children Looked After placement types in 2023/24 and that there had been a shift from external fosters to kinship placements. Members asked for clarification of the comment in the report that this was driven down by a change of practice by the Courts and asked officers to elaborate. In addition to clarify what happened to external fostering numbers during that period. Officers responded that in South Wales, beyond Cardiff, even if the assessment was that the parents were able to offer good enough parenting (the threshold the LA has to meet) the Courts agreed that the children can go home but they issued the LA with a Care Order which requires the LA to be responsible for those children at home and to monitor them. A similar situation arose with Kinship Care. Members were advised that that practice did not happen in other parts of the UK. Once a care order had been issued it was difficult to return to court to get the Care Order discharged. In terms of external fostering officers nationally the number of foster carers had been dropping and as a group it was an ageing population. Officers commented that the drop in the number of foster carers had been a key factor in the increase in residential placements. It was recognised that there was a need for a very diverse mix of foster carers to support Cardiff's diverse population and steps were being taken by the LA to be more innovative in its approach to engaging people.

Members asked if the complex needs of some young people had changed or if they were constant in terms of what was required from care providers. Officers responded that the number of children presenting challenging behaviour to carers was increasing and at younger ages. Members were advised that the number of children under the age of 11 requiring residential care as their needs were complex was resulting in carer fatigue. This had been balanced by some resilience in the workplace - across the sector some providers offering 2/3 bed properties were now saying they could only offer a solo placement.

Members referred to the lower percentage of Wellbeing assessments carried out in 42 days in Q3 than in Q2 despite there being fewer cases and on average they were over 5 weeks overdue. Officers were asked if there were trends that helped identify where the demand would be. Officers responded that they were aware of the peaks and troughs, but the difficulty arose when there were additional referrals at the end of term when the workforce was naturally diminished. Additional social work resources had been placed into the front door of Children's Services to respond to this need.

RESOLVED: That the Chairperson writes to the Cabinet Member on behalf of the Committee expressing their comments and observations captured during the way

70 : COMMITTEE BUSINESS

The Chairperson invited Alison Jones, Scrutiny Officer, to introduce the item.

The report updated Members on a range of issues relating to the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee. This report set out the following:

- A correspondence update arising from recent scrutiny meetings.
- A proposal to commence the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee's work programming for 2024/25
- Appendix A - Draft text for inclusion in the Scrutiny Annual Report 2023/24, for Members consideration and agreement.
- An update on the EOTAS Task & Finish Group – comprising a number of national reviews and reports particularly around criminal exploitation. The Chair had requested that this be paused for the short term. In its place:
- Appendix B – a draft scoping document proposing a deep dive into “Sport for All - Ensuring equality of opportunity for all Cardiff children & young people - Session 1 – Football” for Members consideration and agreement:

The Chairperson invited Members to ask questions and make comments; the discussion is summarised as follows:

In relation to Appendix B Members suggested inserting the following wording in the Terms of Reference ‘identify any imbalance in provision and accessibility for children in Cardiff to ensure a good geographical spread for children in Cardiff’

Members noted that football would form the initial focus but asked if there were any conclusions that came out of the deep dive relating to any other sports they could be considered as the next step.

RESOLVED: that the Committee

1. Note the correspondence update arising from recent scrutiny meetings.
2. Agree the proposal to commence the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee's work programming for 2024/25
3. Consider and agree the draft text for inclusion in the Scrutiny Annual Report 2023/24, attached at Appendix A.
4. Agree to pause the EOTAS Task & Finish Group in the short-term

Agree the draft scoping document at Appendix B proposing a deep dive into “Sport for All - Ensuring equality of opportunity for all Cardiff children & young people - Session 1 – Football”

71 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

None.

72 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting of the Committee is Tuesday 7 May 2024 at 4.30 pm.

The meeting terminated at 7.40 pm