

These minutes are draft and are subject to approval as an accurate record at the next meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee to be held on 14 July 2015

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

9 JUNE 2015

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

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

1 : CHAIRPERSON

The Annual Council at its meeting on 21 May 2015 appointed Councillor Richard Cook as Chairperson of this Committee.

2 : APPOINTMENT OF COMMITTEE AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Annual Council at its meeting on 21 May 2015 appointed the following Members to this Committee:

Councillor Richard Cook (Chairperson);
Councillors Boyle, Chaundy, Gordon, Govier, Derrick Morgan, Murphy, Rees and Thorne.

Mrs P Arlotte (Roman Catholic representative); Ms Catrin Lewis (Parent Governor representatives), Hayley Smith (Parent Governor Representative) and Carol Cobert (Church in Wales Representative)

RESOLVED: To agree the Terms of Reference for the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee.

3 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Morgan, Mrs P. Arlotte (Roman Catholic Representative) and Hayley Smith (Parent Governor Representative)

4 : 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. The following declaration was made:

Councillor Gordon
Item 7 Schools Performance Monitoring – NEETs

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Personal Interest - Councillor Gordon has an interest in the Grassroots Youth Project

5 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings of 12 May 2015 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairperson.

6 : EDUCATION DELIVERY PLAN 2015-17 AND CENTRAL SOUTH EDUCATION CONSORTIUM BUSINESS PLAN 2015-16

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Sarah Merry (Cabinet Member for Education and Skills), Nick Batchelar (Director of Education and Lifelong Learning) and Hannah Woodhouse (Managing Director, Central South Education Consortium), Carol Jones (Assistant Director of Education and Lifelong Learning), Suzanne Scarlett (Performance Manager, Education and Lifelong Learning).

The purpose of this report was to enable Members to gain an overview of the Education and Lifelong Learning Directorate (which falls within the responsibilities of this Committee) and its contributions to the Council's Corporate Plan, its key achievements during the previous year and an outline of the future challenges facing the Directorate.

The Chairperson invited the Cabinet Member to make a statement. Councillor Merry stated that it was unfortunate that Councillor Magill had not been able to continue in her role as Cabinet Member for Education and Skills and that this had been a great loss. Cardiff is now showing signs of improvement on all measures. Standards have been raised, but there is still a lot to do. Every child, regardless of background, should receive a good education. If the local authority does not meet the challenge, not only will it be failing the children but such a failure would also be detrimental to the city, both economically and socially.

The Committee was advised that one challenge is to better manage performance and improvement on performance. This is a specific area of interest for Estyn and the Wales Audit Office. Getting effective planning in place and executing plans effectively is crucial. This year the aim is to strengthen the 'golden thread' – the link between corporate and partnership plan, directorate plan and team plans. The Director's view is that the delivery plan does have coherence.

The Chairperson invited questions from the Committee.

The Committee noted that one recommendation is that the Consortium engages more with diocese schools and asked what is being done to address that. The Committee was advised that one way the Consortium is doing this is by looking at it can support the dioceses' schools planning

The Committee commented that those from ethnic and minority communities dislike the fact that they are 'singled out' when data is collected and published. Many from those communities are second and third generation residents of the city. It was suggested that when reports are to give information about the performance of

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children from the various ethnic groups a better way of differentiating between and within those groups needs to be found. The Committee suggested that rather than ethnicity the first language of pupils should be used for pupil categorisation. Officers agreed to look at this for future data analysis.

The Committee pointed out that Estyn inspectors have observed that there is not enough understanding by schools of the local authority's long-term plan for improvement. The Committee was advised that the current strategy is to recalibrate the relationship between the local authority and schools and to increase the accountability of schools. There is a need to shift the emphasis on to schools; they are responsible for improvement. Previously expectations were too low and schools have to be robustly challenged when standards are too low. There is a need to continue to look at long-term strategy and this is why Robert Hill has been invited to work with the local authority, to raise standards and arrive at a schools-led strategy.

A Member pointed out that minutes of a previous meeting of the Committee referred to how the local authority would challenge the performance of the Consortium if necessary. The Member informed officers that when considering the Estyn report he had looked particularly at comment on the performance of the Consortium. He asked officers whether in the light of Estyn's findings they are satisfied that the Consortium is delivering sufficient improvements in school performance for the £1.5 million it is receiving from the local authority. The Committee was advised that those comments are thematic comments that apply to all four consortiums. The fieldwork for that report was carried out last autumn. Estyn has noted that there is now a more robust relationship between the LEA and the Consortium. Review meetings are held regularly. The Director advised the Committee that things have moved on a lot and he is more satisfied than he was in June 2014. Hannah Woodhouse advised the Committee that it is the case that a number of things need to improve and the Consortium will be producing an action plan in response to those comments and meeting with Estyn. It is frustrating that the Consortium was looked at along with four others. The Consortium has produced improvements in outcome. Two of the five local authorities that it has been working with have come out of Estyn monitoring.

The Committee asked who has the strategy to get the system to a point where its performance can be judged by Estyn to be excellent and asked how long that would take. The Committee was advised that it has been of the utmost importance to tackle the manifest weaknesses in the system. Cardiff is a very dynamic city with the fastest growing population in Wales and therefore has increasing pupil numbers. Better performance in the education system is key for improvement in the city's economic prospects. Not just Education and the local authority are important in this, but the city's employers and universities are also key. Also Cardiff thrives in terms of the arts and sport. It has good organisations, venues and facilities in those fields. But when schools are in difficulties they need short-term objectives and when they come out of monitoring they are uniquely vulnerable in that the school support and inspection structure that they have had is no longer there. The local authority has to have a strategy that looks beyond just keeping Estyn happy.

The Committee asked what is being done to forge the necessary links with the city's universities and was advised that the aim is to develop partnerships. There are clear commitments on this in the delivery plan on developing these partnerships.

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Representatives from the universities are on the education partnership board and the Director has met with the universities. Where the local authority has looked to appoint additional governors, intervention governors, Cardiff University has been very active in this recruitment, as has the Cardiff Business Council.

A Member suggested that the system has become too complicated and inward-looking, with too many plans, organisations and external inspections. Business people are unlikely to want to become governors as is very time consuming. Also, they also may not want to be seen to be associated with failure in the event that the school's performance is deemed to be poor. Officers were asked whether the system is fit for purpose. The Committee was advised that schools and governors have to be challenged but at the end of the day governors are lay people. Many have become governors because they want to help their local school but find that the process they have become involved with feels very divorced from that. There is perhaps an issue with the way plans and reports are put together. They can sometimes seem opaque to those who are not education professionals. On the question of whether the system is fit for purpose, the Committee was advised that there have been two excellent and insightful reports in recent years, one of them by Robert Hill. This is just one reason why he has been asked to come to Cardiff to work with the local authority to improve performance.

The Committee asked what effect is the failure of schools stay within their budgets having on standards and whether school-by-school training is working. The Committee was advised that the out-turn for the end of last financial year shows an increase in the number of secondary schools going into deficit. Budget pressures on schools are getting more severe and will get worse even if the local authority maintains its level of protection. A high percentage of secondary schools are not operating within their budget and performance is low. The situation is very challenging. It is important that delegated budgets are used effectively. Regarding training, the Committee was advised that on some things, like safeguarding, central training is more effective; safeguarding is responsibility of all schools. In other instances bespoke training would be more appropriate and effective, with training held in schools.

The Committee asked what training is available for headteachers on working with their governing body, and what monitoring takes place on the completion of training and the spectrum of training that has been received. The Committee was advised that training on working with governing bodies is available. Good headteachers work well with their governing body, by providing good information and support and by holding the governing body to account. When governing bodies appoint headteachers, as part of the interview process candidates should be asked how they would work with the governing body.

On the building of new schools in Cardiff, the Committee commented that some local authorities have a 'template' for the building of a new school but Cardiff seems to have a different process for each new school it builds. This takes a long time and by the time the school is built the need may have changed. The Committee was advised that the local authority is moving from bespoke design to a more standardised design, which will be quicker and more cost effective.

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Regarding the Flying Start scheme the Committee commented that originally the intention was to expand the scheme but this didn't happen. The Committee suggested that as there is always a considerable need for childcare facilities consideration could be given to providing this through the play centres in the city, some of which may be about to close due to loss of funding. The Committee was advised that the local authority was not able to deliver the desired expansion because the Welsh Government controls funding for the scheme.

The Committee asked officers whether it is their view that the Consortium business plan will deliver what is needed to improve performance. The Committee was advised that this is the view that is held. The Consortium has been working with the local authority to achieve this. The business plan has just been sent out to all schools and a more detailed plan will be published. All groups in the governance structure have now met.

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.

7 : SCHOOLS PERFORMANCE MONITORING - NEETS

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Sarah Merry (Cabinet Member for Education and Skills), Nick Batchelar (Director of Education and Lifelong Learning), Carol Jones (Assistant Director of Education and Lifelong Learning), Suzanne Scarlett (Performance Manager, Education and Lifelong Learning) and Simon Morris (Senior Achievement Leader).

This report focussed on the performance information relating to young Cardiff people who were not in education, employment or training (NEETs).

The Chairperson invited the Cabinet Member to make a statement. Councillor Merry informed the Committee that it is of great concern to her that as at October 2014, Cardiff had the second highest percentage of NEETs from Year 11 school leavers in Wales. It is a particular tragedy when a young person is in this situation after leaving school.

The Director advised the Committee that the NEET figure has come down to 4.26% (151 young people). He added that it is important to remember that when we are talking about NEETs we are talking about identifiable young people. Only Newport has a higher NEET figure than Cardiff and it is a very high priority.

The Chairperson invited questions from the Committee.

The Committee asked whether the youth team has significant input on helping NEETs and was advised that it does. A vulnerability profile has been developed and an individual mentor is assigned to all those who have been identified as vulnerable

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to becoming NEET. So far, 173 young people have been identified as potentially NEET and additional support will be provided for them.

The Committee asked if there is any more that the local authority can do to provide employment or training for those who are NEET and was advised that there is a framework for that. There is a report on work done last year to bring some Looked After Children (LAC) who were NEET into work with the Council. That initiative had some success.

The Committee asked why there are some schools have no school leavers that become NEET, schools that have a cross-section of children, children from all backgrounds not just children who are disadvantaged or from deprived backgrounds. The Committee was advised that there is no correlation between deprivation and NEETs. It may be more to do with in-school factors. More schools are now using the vulnerability tool. In some schools the significantly lower achievement of a small number of pupils is masked by the overall good performance of the school. In some cases there is formal intervention where there is poor performance on NEETs and the Challenge Advisers have a role to play in this.

The Committee asked whether the budget for addressing the NEETs problem is held by the local authority or by schools and was advised that the resources sit with schools, which have a major part to play in helping to reduce the number of NEETs. Some young people who NEET or are at risk of becoming so may be long-term non-attenders.

The Committee asked whether the commitment to reduce the number of NEETs, made by the Leader of the Council in 2012, has become diluted and whether other priorities have taken the focus away from NEETs. The Committee was advised that the downward trajectory showing a significant reduction in the number of NEETs since 2010 is steep but there is still more to be done. The issue remains a priority, partly in order to address concerns that Estyn have. The Performance Manager advised the Committee that part of her role is to respond to Estyn's recommendations relating to NEETs. It is important to get a better understanding of young people's journey from the age of 16 to 18 and strengthen understanding of the data on those who are or might become NEET.

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.

8 : CHILDREN'S SERVICES DELIVERY PLAN 2015-17

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

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The purpose of this report was to enable Members to gain an overview of Children's Services, the work of which falls within the responsibilities of this Committee, and to scrutinise the Directorate's key achievements during the previous year, their contributions to the Council's Corporate Plan 2015/17, and the future challenges facing Children's Services.

The Chairperson invited the Cabinet Member to make a statement. Councillor Lent informed the Committee that the Plan follows on from 2014/15 plan, which was about stabilising and improvement, and takes things further on. It includes support for the disabled, data-gathering on sexual exploitation of children and the continued effort on the recruitment of social workers in order to reduce caseloads.

The Director advised the Committee that the Plan is to be integrated with the Health and Social Care plan. The business of Children's Services is integral to the Corporate Plan, on supporting vulnerable people and working with partners to improve and find new ways of delivering services. Children's Services can't do what it does without working with partners. The Director referred the Committee to the six points of the core business of Children's Services, which are enduring outcomes and guide the plan overall. The service has momentum and is delivering change, but there is still a lot to do. The first year was about stabilising the service, this year is about the period of transition.

The Chairperson invited questions from the Committee.

The Committee asked whether there are many cases of care proceedings going over twenty-six weeks, which is the time limit for care proceedings, and was advised that it is thought that Cardiff is one of the better performing local authorities when it comes to managing cases within that period.

The Committee noted that one of the priorities listed in the plan is the need reduce caseload averages and asked whether a reduction in caseloads can be sustained. The Committee was advised that the figure on caseloads has moved up and down marginally. The service can not control demand. It is a volatile situation but presently stable. The introduction of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) should help to reduce caseloads.

The Committee asked whether there has been any progress on enabling more mobile working for social workers and was advised that devices have been trialled, the IT platform has been purchased and the trials have to be reviewed.

The Committee asked what expectations are in terms of what may get worse and what may improve over the next twelve months, pointing out that Children's Services has been protected previously but that may not be possible in the present financial situation and asking if the 'mindset' of the service is ready for that. The Committee was advised that it is easy to see that the service is going to have to make a significant contribution to the savings that need to be made. There is some scope for de-layering, for looking at staff/manager ratios and restructuring social work teams. Also it should be remembered that work that is done with families is not just about the service area budget but also about work done through other agencies and funding sources. The service and the local authority have to get much smarter on prevention,

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in order to reduce the number of contacts and referrals that are received by the service.

The Committee enquired about progress on the reduction of social work vacancies. The Committee was advised that the service has made substantial inroads on recruitment; it has reduced the use of agency staff; there are now fewer social workers leaving; social workers from other local authorities are joining the service; there is a good relationship with the universities; and the service has students on placements, some of whom stay because they want to work for the local authority. Being a social worker in Children's Services is risky, in that there is always the risk that something could go seriously wrong with a case you have. Staff have to feel supported. Also, the figures are showing more vacancies because more posts have been created, so this has distorted the figures a little.

The Committee enquired about strategic thinking and asked officers whether when planning ahead they anticipate referrals being received for reasons other than those they might usually expect, asking if the service is always reacting rather than anticipating. The Committee was advised that a report has been commissioned which will be looking at what drives the numbers of children coming into the care system. It is expected that welfare reform and austerity will bring the numbers up but it is not always about deprivation. Sometimes it is about family breakdown, about drug and alcohol abuse.

The Committee asked whether a survey has been carried out to find out why social workers leave their jobs with the local authority. The Committee was advised that exit interviews are carried out and that the service is in touch with its staff and so has a good sense of why they might leave. The important thing to ensure retention is not so much about money as about staff feeling that they are supported and protected. Looking at child protection, for example, this is a field that it is not easy to work in for more than about two years. If a social worker stays in child protection for longer than that then they will probably continue to work in that field if they want to.

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.

9 : CHILDREN'S SERVICES - BRIEFING ON THE MULTI-AGENCY SAFEGUARDING HUB AND THE MANAGED TEAM

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

The Multi- Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

The Committee was given a presentation on the project to create a Multi- Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).

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The Committee was advised that one of the challenges has been to select the location for the MASH. There are two potential locations, one in a Council building and the other in the Cardiff Bay police station. Part of the decision on that centres on which of these can house the IT server that is needed. A MASH is not a panacea. It is as good as the system that is wrapped around it. The IT system has been purchased and is compatible with the system that has been purchased by the police. All agencies in the MASH will have their own part of the MASH ICT system, to which they can upload information from their own systems.

The Managed Team

This report was provided because the Committee had requested a briefing paper on the lessons learnt from the work undertaken by the Managed Team and the exit strategy to ensure that the social worker caseloads are not impacted by the loss of the team.

The Committee noted that forty-five cases have now transferred back to the main teams and asked how the service will be monitoring the effect of that. The Committee was advised that cases are being escalated and de-escalated consistently across the board. Staff in the service are very committed but there is a high volume of very complex work. It is a very difficult climate for social workers but there are good support structures and staff feel supported. There is a deficit at the moment on strong multi-agency work, and this is work that can reduce the number of referrals.

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.

10 : COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMMING

This report was presented by Martyn Hutchings (Principal Scrutiny Officer). The purpose of it was to invite Members to consider the approach they would like to take to setting the Committee's work programme for the municipal year 2015/16.

Martyn Hutchings advised the Committee that over the coming weeks a programme of work for the Committee will be developed, considering items for inclusion and assigning their priority. This could be done in several ways; through a full meeting of the Committee, a task and finish group or through a forum meeting.

AGREED: That the report be noted.

11 : WAY FORWARD

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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.

12 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on 14 July 2015 at 2.30pm in Committee Room 4, County Hall.

The meeting terminated at 7.30 pm