

SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Chair's Quote (Chair's Perspective Page)

2023/24 proved to be another busy and testing year for my committee, with unprecedented risks and challenges for both Children's Services and Schools. This has included increases in demand for services; continued budgetary constraints; and the increased complexity and vulnerability of some of our children and young people across both areas.

We have maintained being very active in considering a number of multi-million-pound School Organisation Planning Proposals; monitoring the continuing implications in relation to post-Covid-19 Recovery in schools; the introduction of the new Curriculum; the Children's Services "Right Place" Model; and continued to monitor improvements in the Youth Justice Service and Children's Services performance. We also played a key role in the scrutiny of the Council's Corporate Plan, 2024/25 Budget proposals and Replacement Local Development Plan.

Looking forward, the Committee will continue to work through its priorities, particularly around engagement and consultation with children & young people; ensuring young people have equality of opportunity in sport; youth services; and looking at the effectiveness of a number of innovations in Children's Services.

We will continue to build relationships with Cabinet Members, Officers, children and young people (and their carers/families) and partners in ensuring that we provide the very best services for them and ensuring that our most vulnerable achieve better outcomes and life chances. It is my belief that scrutiny is at its most valuable in working together to achieve this.

With this in mind, I would call for continued support and recognition of the role of scrutiny committees. It's a wonderful opportunity for Members to bring their knowledge and expertise to the table; be the voice of citizens; and play a key role in informing change and improvement.

Councillor Lee Bridgeman, Chair, Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee

Photos will be sourced from online official photos

Membership: Councillor Lee Bridgeman (Chair)

Councillors Ahmed, Boes, Davies, Ferguson-Thorne, Hopkins, Joyce, Melbourne and Simmons

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

Youth Council: Emily Gao

Our Purpose

- We work to improve the Council's services and policies in the area of children and young people, which includes Schools; Children's Social Services; Youth Services and Justice; and relevant support services (Education and Schools support services etc.)
- We monitor the effectiveness of who the Council works with in this area, including how resources are spent;
- We ensure that key Council Policies in this area such as Cardiff 2030 Vision for Education & Learning; Century Schools Programme; Social Care Commissioning Strategy; and Corporate Parenting Strategy are developed and put in place; and
- We make recommendations to the Council's decision-makers to enhance performance and service delivery.

Our Achievements

During the past year, the Committee focussed on understanding the continued pressures faced by all services under its terms of reference; and the impact of the introduction of new/additional legislation affecting services and wider partners. Across all services, Members looked at capacity and demand on services; the changes required to meet legislation around areas such as ALN Reform and Removal of Profit from Care; the significant financial challenges faced by services; and the increasing complexity of the landscape. Members were resolute in understanding the pressures faced by staff (particularly those on the front line) and supporting Cabinet Members and senior managers in mitigating the risks around this – particularly mental health; emotional wellbeing; and “burn out” faced by many. This will continue to be a focus going forward, through regular dialogue with school leaders in relation to post pandemic recovery, and monitoring performance in Children's Services. The effectiveness of the range of innovative measures introduced in Children's Services will also be scrutinised early in the 2024/25 municipal year.

The importance of the Youth Service was also a focal point for 2023/24, where the Committee undertook a deep dive into proposals for the development of the Service at its meeting in November 2023. The Committee emphasised strongly to Cabinet colleagues about the critical and key role Youth Services play – not only as a service in its own right, but also in supporting other services which deal with some of the most

vulnerable and marginalised young people in Cardiff. At this time, the Committee called for the Youth Service budget be retained and recommended this again when considering the 2024/25 budget in February 2024. In light of this, the budget was protected from cuts. The Committee will continue to focus on developments in this area in 2024/25.

During 2023/24 the Committee and the SOP Task & Finish Group has undertaken pre-decision scrutiny of a number of Cabinet reports relating to school organisational planning proposals. This included the Fairwater Campus; Primary School Places to serve Cathays and parts of Gabalfa, Heath, Llandaff North and Plasnewydd; School Admissions Policy; and Provision for Children and Young People with Additional Learning Needs (ALN). School Organisation Planning will continue to dominate this Committee's agendas going forward.

Linked to the above, during 2023/24 the Committee also heard from a group of young people, known as The Cardiff Influencers, who are key stakeholders in the development of school organisation planning proposals. The Committee were extremely impressed with them all and have sought agreement that (other pressures pending) they be included wherever possible in key developments considered by the Committee, to further support the already crucial input of the Cardiff Youth Council at Committee meetings.

During 2023/24, the Committee also considered reports from the Youth Justice Services (quarterly); Virtual Head Teacher; the Local Authority Social Services Annual Report; the Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Consortium Annual Report; and the Corporate Parenting Strategy.

On a quarterly basis, the Committee monitors the performance of Children's Services for children who are looked after, children in need, the youth justice service and staffing. The Committee regularly seeks clarification on areas of concern and expectations for improvement, which are always responded to.

Young People who are educated other than at School (EOTAS) and what factors could lead to them becoming vulnerable to criminal exploitation Inquiry – due to a number of national reviews currently being undertaken in this area, the Chair requested that this be put on hold during 2023/24. It will resume later in 2024/25.

Sport for all. Ensuring equality of opportunity for all Cardiff children & young people -

Session 1 – Football – the Chair has proposed that a deep dive be undertaken in early 2024/25 on this issue. The aim of the deep dive will be to investigate the range of footballing opportunities on offer in Cardiff; examine the governance and accountability structures of those organisations; identify what types of opportunities are available, including costs, financial support etc; and map out how these organisations work together. Ultimately, the deep dive will produce an evidence-based investigation relating to footballing opportunities in Cardiff; identify the most effective routes and opportunities for children and young people in Cardiff; make recommendations to Cabinet on how to support these routes and opportunities and ensure that ALL children and young people in Cardiff have equal opportunities to participate and progress in football. The proposal will be considered by the Committee in April 2024. Other sports will be considered in separate sessions later in the year.

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Looking Forward

Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee

- Continuing to focus on Schools Organisation Planning, particularly the move towards the “Community Based Schools Programme”, and a Catchment Area Review
- Monitoring Children’s Services performance, particularly capacity, performance, and demand for services
- Continue to support improvements in Youth Services in Cardiff
- Scrutinise the effectiveness of Innovations in Children’s Services, such as the FDAC Pilot; The “Right Place” Model; Accommodation Strategy; and Innovations and Reviewing Hubs
- Carry out a piece of work looking at the correlation between children looked after who may also have additional learning needs.
- Continue to look at the impact of ALN reform on Schools, including ensuring that capacity can meet demand in this area.
- Continuing to monitor Recovery in Schools, particularly in relation to budgets; attendance and attainment; and Mental Health and Well-being across Services and beyond.
- Undertake mapping and scrutiny of Engagement and Participation of Children and Young People
- Embark on a deep dive into ensuring that all children and young people have equal access to sport. The first session will be focused on football.
- Continue to link up with partner organisations and stakeholders, such as the Central South Education Consortium; Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee; and the Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Collaborative. We will also be making closer links with the wider Cardiff Capital Region and Corporate Joint Committees, when required.