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CORRESPONDENCE FOLLOWING THE COMMITTEE MEETING

Committee CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date and Time of Meeting THURSDAY, 9 DECEMBER 2021, 4.30 PM

Please find below correspondence send by the Committee Chair following the meeting, together with any responses received.

For any further details, please contact scrutinyviewpoints@cardiff.gov.uk

Correspondence following the meeting (*Pages 3 - 14*)

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Date: 17 December 2021

My Ref: SS/CYP/VVCAR20_21



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Councillor Graham Hinchey
Cabinet Member for Children & Families
County Hall
Atlantic Wharf
CARDIFF
CF10 4UW

Dear Graham,

**CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 9 DECEMBER 2021 –
VALLEYS, VALE & CARDIFF ADOPTION COLLABORATIVE ANNUAL REPORT
2020/21**

Please accept my thanks for attending the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee to facilitate the consideration of the VVC Annual Report 2020/21. Please also pass on our thanks to Angela Harris, Sarah McGill and Deborah Driffield. The comments, observations and recommendations below were captured during the Committee's discussion at the Way Forward.

We welcomed the sixth Annual Report for 2020/21 and would like to commend the level of detail set out in the report and range of improvements within it, the work of the team and the response and adaptations made to address the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

Harder to place Children & Young People

Members asked questions around the profile of harder to place children and young people (CYP) and asked whether there were links to those children looked after, and those on the child protection register. Angela responded that there was a very close link between them. Angela also went on to tell us that in terms of the current position, there were also CYP who were 4+, sibling groups, those with complex medical needs, differing ethnic backgrounds classed as harder to place. We were satisfied that this was being addressed at quarterly meetings at National level, and the Committee will also monitor this locally too.

Post-Adoption Support

When asked what further developments and challenges were being faced by the VVC, Members were told that post-adoption support was a significant issue across the Collaborative. We heard that the needs of adopted children were more complex, and this often led to a “hidden and critical cost” for the local authority in terms of therapy and support. We would echo your call for this to be an issue considered and agreed on nationally and would support any developments in this area.

Funding

Members asked questions around the funding of services, and the sustainability of grant funding from Welsh Government. It was stated that funding of adoption services is now on the national agenda, and we would welcome any updates on this issue, including any solutions to further challenges such as post-adoption support, as highlighted above.

Data, Information and Benchmarking

Members asked questions around the data and graphs set out in the Annual Report. They asked (in relation to CYP on the register for 6 months) what “other” referred to and were told that this was something that needed some further clarification. We would therefore request that future annual reports drill down into this, and report on accordingly.

Due to the unique profile of Cardiff in Wales, Members also asked whether any comparison or benchmarking work had been undertaken with similar sized cities, such as the Core Cities. Angela responded that she would explore this, and we would welcome an update on this in the next annual report. In addition, any work with Core Cities should also study BME children and young people to see if there was anything Cardiff and the wider Collaborative could learn from these areas to improve the numbers of BME children matched within the area, and not adopted outside of the region and Wales.

Angela also mentioned the potential of including anonymised stories and case studies in future reporting. This Committee would strongly support this and would suggest that this be included in future annual reports.

To recap, the Committee **is requesting** that the VVC Adoption Collaborative consider the following:

1. Update Scrutiny Committees within the Collaborative on any developments in relation to establishing any further sustainable funding for the VVC and local authorities. This should also include post-adoption support, which has been cited as a particular challenge for CYP in Cardiff.
2. Explore the potential of undertaking further comparison and/or benchmarking work with the Core Cities, and this be included in the next Annual Report. This should include a study of BME children and young people to establish whether there was anything Cardiff and the wider Collaborative could learn to improve the numbers of BME children matched within the area, and not adopted outside of the region and Wales.
3. Anonymised stories and case studies be included in future annual reports, as well as further details in relation to “other” categories in the report.

There are no formal recommendations arising from this letter.

Once again, on behalf of the Committee, please pass my sincere thanks to all who attended Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee. I look forward to a response.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. BRIDGEMAN', written over a light grey rectangular background.

COUNCILLOR LEE BRIDGEMAN

Chairperson – Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

CC: CYPSC Members
Angela Harris, Regional Adoption Manager, VVC
Sarah McGill, Corporate Director, People and Communities
Deborah Driffield, Director of Children’s Services
Gary Jones, Head of Democratic Services
Alison Taylor, Cabinet Support Office
Liz Williams/Debra Willis, PAs to the Corporate Director
Kim Thorpe, PA to the Director of Children’s Services
Tim Gordon/ Jeremy Rhys - Media and Comms

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Councillor Graham Hinchey
Cabinet Member for Children & Families
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Dear Graham,

**CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – YJS UPDATE;
CHILDREN’S SERVICES UPDATE AND Q2 PERFORMANCE – 9TH DECEMBER
2021**

Please accept my thanks for attending the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee to update the Committee on YJS; Children’s Services and Q2 Performance. Please also pass on our thanks to Sarah McGill, Graham Robb, Deborah Driffield and Angharad Thomas. The comments, observations and recommendations below were captured during the Committee’s discussion at the Way Forward.

Overall, the Committee collectively agreed that the open and transparent discussion at the meeting was refreshing, honest and very sobering. As a Scrutiny Committee, elected Members and corporate parents, it is crucial for us to ensure that we support you, officers and partners in ensuring that the ongoing work across Children’s Services is recognised. We support the need to invest in social care at a local, regional and national level.

We agreed and have already championed the message that the issues faced across the Service and beyond are everyone’s concern and is a wider issue. We will do everything we can to ensure that we assist on ensuring that work to improve the Service strategically and operationally is done so as smoothly as possible, and that it is not used as a political football.

Whilst we were concerned about there being a system failure across all partners, we also recognise that this will present opportunities, and we will aim to support you with

this, within the context of the demands (and volatility of this), pressures, complexities of the issues, sustainable funding and the need to turn around changes very quickly.

We asked you and officers what this Committee can do to support you, and we remain committed to be a sounding board and challenge to you. We will aim to assist in understanding this very complex issue and support in finding solutions.

We feel our role will be to undertake careful analysis of what the Service is doing in identifying its future resource needs, alongside a clear commitment to improving practice so it has a more positive impact on outcomes in the medium – long term. Our role being to hold you to account for that.

The Committee voiced its strong support for the critical approach the service is doing in challenging itself in relation to the issues it is dealing with and to its forward planning, and we will continue to encourage more of that.

In relation to specific issues, Members would like to comment on the following:

Youth Justice Services Update

Members welcomed the update from the YJS, including ongoing developments in the Service, a review and refresh of the YJ Board; gearing up for the next Inspection in Spring 2022; and the “All Our Futures” Strategy refresh in the New Year.

We appreciated the news of the new Operational Manager being tasked with examining **prevention and partnerships**, looking at a wider framework and being instrumental in developing an overarching Prevention Strategy. We would welcome a progress briefing on this in due course.

In relation to **partnerships**, we asked you about what you would like to see from partners, and we particularly asked you about the roles that Education, Youth Service, Police, EOTAS, Community Safety, Housing, Early Help, Probation, Health and others play in the service. To this end, the Committee agreed that it would hold a session early in the new municipal year which will be dedicated to speaking directly to partners within and outside the Council to look at challenges within these organisations and how they are working together. As the YJS moves forward into the next stage, it will help us understand how partners are going to be more prominent in it, and how this can help inform and develop that element of the strategy. We would welcome a collaborative approach with you on this.

Members also welcomed the citing of Crimestoppers (Fearless), the Starting Well Project, Bright Futures and Cardiff Commitment and it was suggested that a presentation on the Starting Well Project could be given on this, which would be welcomed.

We welcome the Resettlement Tracker which will identify whether the right services are provided when leaving the YJS and whether all the right players are involved. Angharad stated that a Policy on this was currently being developed, with ownership across a range of services, not just YJS. We would like to receive an update when available.

We support the intention to look further into what factors are behind the offence being committed, as we feel that prevention and intervention is limited unless the causes are known. We look forward to receiving further information on this.

Members discussed with you the impact of CSE and criminal exploitation within cases in the YJS and we would request more detail on this issue is sought, particularly in relation to short term measures. During discussions, Members were told about peer review work and the introduction of the SAFE Project and Model. Members were also informed of the NRM Pilot in Cardiff and learned of the Bureau process. Members also heard of the role of Barnardo's, the Independent Child Trafficking Guardians, and the deep dive Cardiff Police were undertaking over the next four months. Members would welcome further information on this and be kept updated with progress.

Members asked questions around Mental Health and were informed that this was a significant element, particularly around emotional needs, low literacy levels, speech and language issues and other ALN. Members were informed of the UHB Health Needs Assessment and that this was now being tracked at Board level to identify what actions need to be taken – Members of this Committee would welcome some further information on the output of this Assessment and how it is informing developments.

Members welcomed the progress of a report card with Education around hours offered to young people excluded or on reduced hours; hours attended; behaviours; and what is being done to address that. Members would welcome further information on this.

Members raised the issue of the impact of sexual harassment in schools and heard that this has been raised at Regional Partnership Board, Welsh Government and Safeguarding Board level. Updates and developments of this concerning issue would be welcomed by this Committee.

Members also heard about locality assessments around young people and their communities, including mapping of individuals. Progress on this would be welcomed by the Committee.

Overall, the Committee agreed that YJS was in a totally different position to 2 years ago and commend the work of yourself and the wider Cabinet, Graham and officers in getting the culture right; work progressed; recruitment undertaken; and preparations for the next 2 year strategy. We understand that there are still complex issues and pressures on the service, but there is a confidence there that further progress will be made. We would welcome continued input into this.

You mentioned that the latest letter to the YJB had agreed to be shared with us, so we look forward to receiving this. Please send to Alison, who will forward to the whole Committee.

Q2/ Children's Services Review

On consideration of Q2 and the Service Review, Members heard about the issues and challenges faced by the Service, and our response to some of the issues is highlighted earlier in this letter.

Members commend the range of initiatives that the Service is working on despite the pressures it is facing and the "system failure" in the wider partnership. We understand and support the need for the Service to operate by the Business Continuity model. We agree that staff should be protected as much as they can – we note the extreme pressures they are under, and we acknowledge the invaluable roles they undertake. We would wish for our thanks to be passed to them – we really appreciate what they are doing.

We also considered the following:

Achievements despite pressures – continuing work on shifting the balance; improved recruitment; keeping children and young people with families or family care; keeping sickness levels within target; moving staff to take the pressure off some areas; removing 100 children and young people safely from the CPR; improving links with housing regarding accommodation and offering support for families; and improvements in transitions with Adult Services.

Remodelling - The Service's commitment to getting the whole service working more effectively, with better outcomes and reduced costs. We acclaim the Service's approach to understanding the picture, what opportunities could be developed, undertaking a realistic assessment on demand, working with Resources regarding

financial remodelling; and bringing this together to understand the facts to inform decision making.

The potential impact of the tragic death of **Arthur Labinjo-Hughes** on demand, and welcome the proactive steps taken by the Service in providing communication and support for managers and staff, as well as a commencing a local review of processes with partners in light of this.

We would welcome being kept posted with developments concerning the steps taken by Cardiff to lobby Welsh Government about **future funding** arising from the additional grants via the Recovery funding, hardship funding and winter pressures funding. Arising from this, we suggested a briefing to all Members which will enable an opportunity to have a better understanding of the context; provide more nuanced details; enable a much richer conversation; and a translation of funds and what this means on the ground; as well as demonstrating that the resources would be used effectively.

Members were also informed of a number of reviews taking place or due to take place, including the Front Door Review – with partners to review thresholds and screening; the commissioned system review of operational processes and procedures; and the audit of adolescent services by the Advocacy Panel. We would welcome the outputs from these reviews and how they will inform strategic and operational decision making going forward.

Contained within the papers for this Committee meeting, Members were also asked whether they would wish to undertake some collaborative task & finish work with yourselves regarding the review and development of the Children's Services Strategy. Members agreed they would welcome this.

To recap, the Committee **is requesting:**

Youth Justice Service:

- i. A briefing on the draft YJS Prevention Strategy in due course
- ii. Support for a collaborative session early in the new municipal year which will be dedicated to speaking directly to partners within and outside the Council to look at challenges within these organisations and how they are working together.
- iii. Provide a briefing or presentation on Starting Well Project
- iv. An update on outputs from work around the Resettlement Tracker at a future YJS Update

- v. Further information on the impact of CSE and criminal exploitation within cases in the YJS, particularly in relation to short term measures being developed to address this.
- vi. A briefing on the SAFE Project and Model
- vii. Outputs and developments arising from the NRM Pilot in Cardiff when available
- viii. Output from the deep dive by Cardiff Police are undertaking over the next four months with regard to CSE and criminal exploitation
- ix. Outputs from the UHB Health Needs Assessment
- x. Further information on the report card with Education around young people on reduced timetables etc.
- xi. Updates on developments in relation to sexual harassment in schools as raised at Regional Partnership Board, Welsh Government and Safeguarding Board.
- xii. Updates on locality assessments around young people and their communities, including mapping of individuals
- xiii. A copy of the latest letter to the YJB be shared with this Committee via Alison Jones.

Q2/Review of Service

- xiv. Further information, updates or issues on discussions in relation to future funding with Welsh Government.
- xv. Receive outputs arising from the Front Door Review; the Commissioned system review; and the audit of adolescent services by the Advocacy Panel.
- xvi. Agree to work with us in a task & finish setting for the review and development of the Children's Services Strategy.

Recommendations to be monitored following this scrutiny

To summarise, the Scrutiny Committee made one formal recommendation which is set out below. As part of the response to this letter we would be grateful if you could, for the recommendation, state whether the recommendation is accepted, partially accepted or not accepted and summarise the Cabinet's response. If the

recommendation is accepted or partially accepted, I would also be grateful if you could identify the responsible officer and provide an action date. This will ensure that progress can be monitored as part of the approach agreed by Cabinet in December 2020.

Recommendation	Accepted, Partially Accepted or Not Accepted	Cabinet Response	Responsible Officer	Implementation Date
1. A briefing to all Members be developed and delivered regarding the need to invest in Children's Services, which will enable an opportunity for ALL Members to have a better understanding of the landscape within the Service; a translation of funds and what this means on the ground; as well as demonstrating that the resources would be used effectively.				

Once again, on behalf of the Committee, please pass my sincere thanks to all who attended Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee. I look forward to a response.

Yours sincerely,



COUNCILLOR LEE BRIDGEMAN

Chairperson – Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

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