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CORRESPONDENCE FOLLOWING THE COMMITTEE MEETING

Committee CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date and Time of Meeting TUESDAY, 18 JANUARY 2022, 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 - 10*)

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Date: 20 January 2022

My Ref: SS/CYP/CSA/Jan22



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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 – CARDIFF
CHILDCARE SUFFICIENCY ASSESSMENT 2022-2027 – 18th JANUARY 2022**

Please accept my thanks for attending the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee to present the Cardiff Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2022-2027. Please also pass on our thanks to Helen Evans, Avril Hooper and Andy Senior. The comments, observations and recommendations below were captured during the Committee's discussion at the Way Forward.

We commend the report to Cabinet for consideration.

The Committee collectively stated that they welcomed the open and honest discussion at the meeting and would thank you and officers for this. As we have stated in previous letters to you on other issues, we are committed to supporting you and act as a critical friend, and if there is anything we can assist with in terms of ongoing discussions on sustainable funding, improving the robustness of data etc. we are happy to do so. We would like to remain updated on key milestones in the process to assist you in this, so if you are able to provide key dates and milestones to the Committee, it would be appreciated.

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

Recruitment and Retention of staff

When asked about workforce planning, Members noted the challenges that the Service faces in terms of many of the childcare providers being private businesses and the resulting limitations this presents in influencing change.

Members noted the limitations the Council faces in relation to this but welcomed the commitment to contributing to wider initiatives and ensuring that Into Work and Cardiff Commitment are aligned to offer childcare as a career option.

Members welcomed the news of increasing the Council offer by the Workforce Accreditation and Development Centre (City and Guilds) for childminders but noted that funding remains uncertain and that there is a need to “scale up”. Members supported ideas coming forward in relation to proposals for an Early Help Academy to provide taster days; apprenticeships; work placements etc.

Members appreciated the Service Area’s commitment on discussing recruitment and retention issues with Welsh Government, particularly the new commitment in the co-operative agreement to include childcare for 2-year-olds and the impact of this. Members stated that the cooperation agreement was not reflected in the report, and the reasons given for this, but were assured that this would be reflected in the post-consultation version.

In addition, Members noted the work with Welsh Government to address the barriers to entering the profession, particularly in relation to getting work placements to obtain the experience and qualifications needed. Members asked about the impact of the types of qualifications needed for different settings and aligning this. Members recognised the challenge faced and the lobbying undertaken over a number of years on this. The Committee would wish to lend its support to these discussions, including the reintroduction of bridging qualifications to ensure a seamless transition between childcare and education.

In discussions on encouraging more Welsh speakers into childcare, Members also support further discussions on the Welsh medium sector with Welsh Government on the levelling up of career progress and opportunities within childcare, including pay, social recognition and framework of employment. We agreed that unless this is brought into line with professions such as learning support assistants in education, Welsh speakers will be more attracted to education, and not consider a career in childcare.

In relation to training on additional learning needs (ALN) Members noted the responses that private providers’ uptake has been “mixed” and would welcome an update when appropriate on whether ALNet has been successful in promoting engagement and take-up of ALN training.

Members shared your concerns about ensuring there is more sustainable funding available across early help and agreed that more medium to long term funding and planning is required. The Committee would also wish to lend its support on these discussions.

Members asked questions on how training had been impacted by the pandemic, and officers stated that they could provide more information on take-up of training, particularly in relation to professional development opportunities. We would therefore request a briefing note on this.

Improving the quality of data

Members were reassured by the responses received in relation to the quality of the data in the CSA and the need for this to improve. Members welcomed the news that the Service will be working with Welsh Government on this, including reviewing the current processes, legislation and guidance in place.

Members suggested that, as well as written materials, audio materials/instructions should also be made available to assist childcare providers in completing the SASS and therefore improving the quality of the data that is submitted, particularly as the complexity of data has increased.

Improving access to information for parents and families

Members highlighted their thoughts on the flow of information between the Service, private providers, and information for parents and families. We asked a number of questions on this issue including whether parents and families knew where to access information on what childcare is available and the financial help available to them (the survey suggested that 50% did not). In addition, some private providers may not be aware of the financial aid available to them.

We were particularly interested in issues around affordability and how access to easy, effective information could better inform parents/family decisions in taking up childcare.

Based on our questioning, we would recommend that the Service Area (with partners), develop the following:

Parents/Families

- Develop a range of materials, in an easily understandable format, to include:
 - Range of childcare available, including Welsh medium and ALN
 - Information on what financial help is available
 - Guidance on thresholds to help families choose what help best suits their needs
 - Information on any costs that may be required “up front” – for example, for those on Universal Credit
 - Advice on when their child moves from childcare to education – particularly those whose child may have ALN.
 - Publicise CFAS as a one stop-shop for advice and assistance

Providers

- Up to date news on grants, relief and rebates that may be available
- Incentives for additional funding, training and development opportunities – for example if providers sign up to CFAS
- Peer support and case studies on good practice providers
- Publicise CFAS as a one stop-shop for advice and assistance

Improved consultation and Focussed Plan

Members noted the 28-day statutory consultation in relation to the CSA. Members shared concerns that the 406 responses received to date was not robust. In light of this, Members would request a response on the following:

- What is the baseline information the Service is working with – how many “families” will be consulted on?
- What methodologies will be put in place to encourage an improved response rate?
- How is the Service planning to advertise and publicise the consultation?
- How is the Service going to ensure that the consultation is more reflective and will inform developments and improvements?

Members would also recommend (if possible) for further questions to be added to the consultation, to gauge where families go for information about childcare and financial assistance; affordability; working patterns (to help with future capacity planning); and what information they would like to receive and by what methods.

Whilst Members recognised that the current CSA (Appendix 1 to the papers) needed to fit a template and meet requirements, they felt it was very long and lacking in focus. Members would recommend a shorter, slicker report with context added to it, not just a ream of tables and charts. This will be particularly important if used for the statutory consultation.

Members would also seek reassurance that further work would be undertaken post-consultation, particularly in relation to whether the proposed actions set out in the CSA will be more focussed and firmed up.

We would therefore recommend that (post-consultation) a further report be brought back to this Scrutiny Committee before the 30th June 2022 with details of the following:

- How the Service will develop further in light of the consultation;
- The actions its proposing to take;

- How it plans to address shortfalls in provision in certain areas of the city to ensure and even spread and avoid a postcode lottery;
- What changes (if any) have been agreed at national level in making the process easier to understand; any developments in relation to funding; and tackling the challenges public sector bodies face in working with private businesses.
- How the Service plans to tackle the recruitment and retention of staff – and address gaps already identified such as Welsh language sector and ALN provision; and
- Address other issues raised by this Scrutiny Committee in this letter such as improving the quality and robustness of data; and improving access to information by families and carers, particularly on affordability

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

1. Key dates and milestones on the CSA implementation and further review.
2. An update when appropriate on whether ALNet has been successful in promoting engagement and take-up of ALN training.
3. A briefing note on take-up of training, particularly in relation to professional development opportunities during the pandemic.
4. In relation to the statutory consultation, Members would request further information on the following:
 - What is the baseline information the Service is working with – how many “families” will be consulted on?
 - What methodologies will be put in place to encourage an improved response rate?
 - How is the Service planning to advertise and publicise the consultation?
 - How is the Service going to ensure that the consultation is more reflective and will inform developments and improvements?
5. Consultation - Members would also request that (if possible) additional questions be added to the consultation to gauge where families go for information about childcare and financial assistance; affordability; working patterns (to help with future capacity planning); and what information they would like to receive and by what methods.

Recommendations to be monitored following this scrutiny

To summarise, the Scrutiny Committee made three formal recommendations 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.

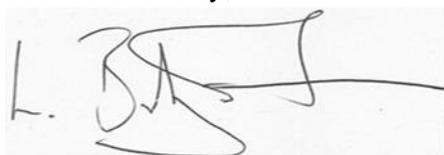
Recommendation	Accepted, Partially Accepted or Not Accepted	Cabinet Response	Responsible Officer	Implementation Date
<p>1. That the current CSA be reviewed and that a shorter, slicker report with context added to it, be developed as this will be particularly important if used for the statutory consultation. Members would also seek reassurance that further work would be undertaken post-consultation, particularly in relation to whether the proposed actions set out in the CSA will be more focussed and firmed up.</p>				
<p>2. A further report be brought back to this Scrutiny Committee before the 30th June 2022 with details of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How the Service will develop further in light of the consultation; • The actions its proposing to take; • How it plans to address shortfalls in provision in certain areas of the city to ensure and even spread and avoid a postcode lottery; • What changes (if any) have been agreed at national level in making the process easier to understand; 				

<p>any developments in relation to funding; and tackling the challenges public sector bodies face in working with private businesses;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How the Service plans to tackle the recruitment and retention of staff – and address gaps already identified such as Welsh language sector and ALN provision; and • Address other issues raised by this Scrutiny Committee in this letter such as improving the quality and robustness of data; and improving access to information by families and carers, particularly on affordability. 				
<p>3. The Service Area (with partners), develop the following to improve access to information for parents and families and providers</p> <p><u>Parents/Families</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a range of materials, in an easily understandable format, to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Range of childcare available, including Welsh medium and ALN ○ Information on what financial help is available ○ Guidance on thresholds to help families choose what help best suits their needs ○ Information on any costs that may be required “up front” – for example, for those on Universal Credit ○ Advice on when their child moves from childcare to education – particularly those whose child may have ALN. ○ Publicise CFAS as a one stop-shop for advice and assistance 				

<p><u>Providers</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Up to date news on grants, relief and rebates that may be available • Incentives for additional funding, training and development opportunities – for example if providers sign up to CFAS • Peer support and case studies on good practice providers • Publicise CFAS as a one stop-shop for advice and assistance 				
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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

CC: CYPSC Members
 Alison Taylor, Cabinet Support Office
 Helen Evans (Assistant Director - Housing & Communities)
 Avril Hooper (Operational Manager, Early Help)
 Andy Senior (Senior Childcare Business Support Officer, Early Help)
 Tim Gordon & Jeremy Rhys, Media and Comms
 Cllr Adrian Robson – Group Leader
 Cllr Rhys Taylor – Group Leader
 Cllr Keith Parry – Group Leader
 David Hugh Thomas – Chair Governance & Audit Committee
 Jo Watkins, Cabinet Support Office