

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

17 MAY 2016

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

Co-opted Members: Patricia Arlotte (Roman Catholic representative), Carol Cobert (Church in Wales representative) and Hayley Smith (Parent Governor Representative)

94 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Heather Joyce and Councillor Derrick Morgan.

95 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairperson reminded Members of their responsibility under Part 3 of the Members' Code of Conduct. Councillor Boyle declared a personal interest in item 8. His family has benefitted in the past from outreach services supplied by Meadowbank School.

96 : MINUTES

The minutes of the 19 April were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairperson.

97 : CARE & SOCIAL SERVICES INSPECTORATE WALES - INSPECTION OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

The Chairperson welcomed Pam Clutton, Lead Inspector CSSIW, Councillor Sue Lent (Cabinet Member for Early Years, Children & Families and Deputy Leader) and Tony Young (Director, Social Services) to the meeting.

Pam Clutton, on behalf of the Care & Social Services Inspectorate Wales ('CSSIW') presented the report, a copy of which was published (pages 13 – 39) with the agenda.

The inspection by CSSIW took place in January 2016, the purpose of which was to look at the access arrangements for children and young people and their families who were either referred for care and support or where information was received about children's well-being.

The inspection focussed on five themes:

- Providing direction;
- Delivering Social Services;

- Shaping Services;
- Access Arrangements; and
- Assessment Care Management.

The Committee were advised that as a result of the inspection it was clear that there were a number of positives, although there were, as the report detailed, a number of areas for improvement. The implementation of the recommendations would be monitored, and unless any thematic issues were identified there would be no need for a re-inspection.

The Committee was invited to comment, raise questions or seek clarification on the information received. Those discussions are summarised as follows:

- The Committee felt that the positive theme of the report was encouraging and should be conveyed to staff.
- Members queried whether Social Workers and the Police had enough information about the high level of incidents of domestic violence and abuse and that Social Workers were sufficiently aware of the various voluntary groups and support agencies above to support families in the early stage of their relationships. The Committee were advised that some services previously available are no longer available – there is a gap not just in this area but nationally.
- Members were advised that it appears that the difficulties in recruitment of social workers seems to be decreasing. Local authorities have become less competitive. Staff feel that the right support is important, for example managers who understand the pressures of workloads, who are able to give guidance and respond when concerns are raised. It is clear that staff just want to do a good job.
- Members noted concerns that the remodelling of the ‘front door’ services pose a risk to performance which will have to be monitored. Staff had mixed feelings about how priorities were to be decided and that common thresholds would be helpful. There needs to be better engagement with families, that engagement is key.
- Members were advised that whilst it was clear that there was a high level of confidence in the leadership of Director of Social Services staff felt that some of their knowledge and expertise could have been used in preparation for the implementation of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and the preventative strategy.
- Members sought clarification as to whether it was the Inspectors or staff who were unclear as to how the demand for crucial support services was being met, with particular reference to families experiencing domestic violence and primary mental health care. Members were advised that primary mental health care is a national issue; staff are aware of the demand and believe that if they are going to be able to deescalate the risk and intervene at an early stage there is a need for strong partnership working and further resources need to be identified.

- Members queried in what manner the feedback was obtained and were advised that it was made clear that information concerning personal circumstances was not required and that any information provided will not influence any outcome.
- Members expressed concern that evidence that families signposted to support services as they were assessed as not meeting the threshold for a statutory service were frequently being re-referred to children's services and that this was duplicating work for Social Workers with an already heavy workload. Officers advised that with the introduction of the Early Help Strategy, the introduction of MASH and Families First the aim is for there to be a seamless transition between early help and intervention.
- Members discussed agile and mobile working, Officers indicated that staff are enthusiastic about both agile working and a move to County Hall where a lot of work has been undertaken to create a pleasant working environment, although concerns have been expressed about current car parking regulations at County Hall.

AGREED: That the Chairperson writes on the Committee's behalf to the Cabinet Member and to CSSIW to convey their comments and observations.

98 : CHILDREN'S SERVICES QUARTER 4 PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Sue Lent (Cabinet Member for Early Years, Children and Families, and Deputy Leader) and Kim Brown (Service Manager, Policy and Performance) to the meeting.

Members were provided with an overview of the Quarter 4 performance and were advised that whilst there had been some continued progress there had been slippage in some areas in the context of increasing referrals and overall caseload numbers,

The Committee was invited to comment, raise questions or seek clarification on the information received. Those discussions are summarised as follows:

- Officers confirmed that at this point it was just the premises that had been secured for the Adult Resources Centre.
- Members expressed concern that, despite having received a positive report, on the whole performance indicator targets were not being achieved. Members were advised that the figures do not always capture or reflect how well the service is performing. There will be new performance indicators from April, they will include some of the old indicators and therefore the next year will be a base line year.
- Members queried the budget figures in relation to externally purchased placements with high support ratios. Officers advised that there has been an increase in the proportion of children presenting with extremely complex challenges. Officers advised that this trend is likely to continue.

AGREED: That the Chairperson writes on the Committee's behalf to the Cabinet Member to convey their comments and observations.

99 : ESTYN MONITORING VISIT LETTER

The Chairperson welcomed Clive Phillips, Assistant Director Estyn, Councillor Sarah Merry (Cabinet Member for Education) and Nick Batchelar (Director, Education and Lifelong Learning) and Angela Kent (Head of Achievement and Inclusion) to the meeting.

Clive Phillips presented the Committee with the findings of the final Estyn Monitoring visit which took place in January 2016. As a result of that visit Estyn have advised that the authority is no longer in need of significant improvement and has been removed from follow up activity although there are some areas that still require attention.

The Committee was invited to comment, raise questions or seek clarification on the information received. Those discussions are summarised as follows:

- Members advised that they were aware of a number of unofficial schools in the area. They were informed that Estyn had carried out inspections on 3 out of 4 of those schools and were monitoring the situation.
- It was explained that the variation in performance in the wider capped point score could be attributed to a number of factors: courses that do not meet needs; how well schools engaged with pupils; the range of qualifications; and whether classes are enjoyed by pupils.
- Members queried the gap in performance between girls and boys and the reasons for that. Members were advised that there were wide variations across Wales. The performance of girls is lower than the Wales average. Aspiration is not the same in lower performing schools and the authority needs to look at individual schools.
- Members expressed concern to the reference that pupils most at risk of exclusion often have speech and language difficulties, but were advised that whilst restorative approaches are beginning to have a positive impact it is a growing problem. It is not behaviour that is such an issue, it is that provision/aspirations are not being met and it is being demonstrated by behaviour and poor attendance. However, it is clear that there are now strategies in place to address the issues.

Councillor Merry made a brief statement thanking the Estyn team and officers but stated that there were still improvements to be made, this sentiment being echoed by officers.

AGREED: That the Chairperson writes on the Committee's behalf to the Cabinet Member and to Estyn to convey their comments and observations.

100 : EDUCATION QUARTER 4 PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Sarah Merry (Cabinet Member for Education) and Nick Batchelar (Director, Education and Lifelong Learning) and Angela Kent (Head of Achievement and Inclusion) to the meeting. The report was introduced by Nick Batchelar. Members specific attention was drawn to the sickness absence figures, the PPDR data and the NEET data.

The Committee was invited to comment, raise questions or seek clarification on the information received. Those discussions are summarised as follows:

- Members queried the school admission process as a number of applications from parents living in the catchment area are being refused. Officers advised there is a need to consult on the proposed changes to the admissions policy bearing in mind the intention to have a coordinated admissions process.
- Members asked whether information could be provided as to the reasons why so many young people across Cardiff were at risk of becoming NEET. Officers indicated that there were differing reasons for that, however, the vulnerability assessment profile has been used which has identified where additional support is required.
- Members queried provision in main stream schools for those young people with speech and language difficulties and were advised by Officers that there has been improved intervention in main stream schools as a result of more effective joint working.
- Members highlighted that the screening for speech and language needs in schools is not consistent. Officers indicated that it has only recently been introduced in secondary schools, the aim is to make it consistent with a view to improving communication skills and access support to modify behaviour.
- Members queried the effect the recent hearing involving a parent taking a child out of school may have. Officers advised that a precedent could be set however legal guidance is currently awaited.
- Members queried the increase in the NEET figures at Eastern High School and the comment from the Head teacher that some of those children should not be in main stream education. Officers advised that the Accelerated Improvement Board is having regular meetings, the picture is now markedly different. Schools must make arrangements for assessments to be carried out if they feel that a young person is inappropriately placed in main stream education.
- There have been changes in figures at other schools, they are being challenged as to why there has been an increase in the number of young people who become NEET.
- Schools are finding alternatives to exclusion, in primary a school behaviour is managed 1:1 however young people become disengaged after the transition to secondary school.

- Officers advised that the reliance on statements to support children is being reduced and will be phased out and they will be replaced by a PEP. There will be a transitional period and at the present time statements are still being processed.

AGREED: That the Chairperson writes on the Committee's behalf to the Cabinet Member to convey their comments and observations.

101 : SPECIALIST PROVISION FOR PRIMARY AGED PUPILS WITH SPEECH AND LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES, AND WITH BEHAVIOURAL, EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL DIFFICULTIES

The Committee were provided with the opportunity to hear the views from a number of citizens and a Councillor who have expressed their comments and concerns at the current proposals for the proposed closure of Meadowbank School.

The Chairperson welcomed Janette Carr, Faye Dale (Parent of Pupil), Diana James (Teacher), Susanne Grover (Former Headteacher of Meadowbank School and Councillor Jane Cowan to the meeting, all of whom addressed the Committee.

Janette Carr provided Members with the following information:

- A brief outline of the ALN strategy
- Details of an Afasic Cymru questionnaire which was sent to all primary schools seeking information on a number of matters:
 - 75% of parents indicated that, as parents seeking support for speech and language needs, they were not offered a placement at a specialist speech and language provision as an option to consider and for those parents seeking specialist provision they were told there was no space.
 - 95% indicated that teachers in the school do not feel equipped to effectively teach children with severe speech and language needs.
- A placement at Meadowbank costs approximately £25,000 per year whereas a place in local primary school is approximately £3,600. It may cost considerably more for an out of county placement.
- Children with SLCN are at higher risk of exclusion from school and that 60-90% of young people in the youth justice system have SLCN, many of which not previously identified before offending.
- Concerns have been expressed that the Council will lose all of the expertise, knowledge and specialist staff with the closure of Meadowbank.

Diana James provided Members with the following information:

- She has been a teacher at MB Special School for the last 14 years and provided details of her qualifications.

- An outline of the role that Meadowbank plays in providing children with severe and profound speech and language impairments with their statutory education. Children with a specific language impairment (SLI), are at the end of the spectrum and require highly specialized knowledge, understanding and strategies to support their profound and complex needs.
- There are children at Meadowbank who have no speech what so ever, they make noises. They may make noises but they have to be taught how to do that; There are children who have learnt to say many distinct sounds but these sounds are all mixed up so they appear to be talking in a foreign language; and there are also children who can say lots of words clearly but when they put these words together in a sentence the words are disordered and jumbled which results in a message that doesn't make any sense. It was explained that the majority of these children with pure SLI are of average intelligence.
- Firm but fair behavioural strategies are used consistently As the child responds to a carefully planned intervention programme that dovetails both their behavioural and their communication needs they are able to experience success in both areas.

Faye Dale provided Members with the following information:

- The statementing process can take between 6-12 months parents being told that you cannot get a statement for speech & language as mainstream can offer support and without a statement you can't get into Meadowbank
- There is a delay in waiting to hear if statement is going to be accepted, the child is then isolated being left to struggle in mainstream where they are vulnerable and are unable to communicate
- Some parents have obtained private assessments costing in the region of £12,000.
- The authority does not appear to be telling parents about Meadowbank, or are told that there are no places at Meadowbank.
- Teaching assistants in mainstream work do not have enough experience. Often children can't follow lessons due to language difficulties, they fall further and further behind peers, they are vulnerable and become a target for bullying.

Councillor Cowan advised Members that whilst she was aware of the financial constraints she believed that the school should remain open and in fact be expanded.

The Committee was invited to comment, raise questions or seek clarification on the information received. Those discussions are summarised as follows:

- Suzanne Glover advised Members that she had been the headteacher at Meadowbank School for 23 years. If the school closed the children would suffer, they would struggle in mainstream education and the strategies required for these children will not be put into place and therefore there will be an increase in inappropriate placements. Mainstream schools will not be able

to cope and when that has become clear Meadowbank will have been closed and lost to those children who benefit from it.

- Members were advised that in 1967 there were 35 places at the school and 2 places were kept as assessment places, that was increased to 42 at one time. There was also a residential block at the school.
- She believes that the relationship between the authority and the school has broken down
- Members raised concerns about the apparent lack of consultation with the school.

AGREED: That the Chairperson writes on the Committee's behalf to the Cabinet Member to convey their comments and observations.

102 : DRAFT TASK & FINISH REPORT ON CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION IN CARDIFF

The Chairperson welcomed Alison Jones (Scrutiny Officer) to the meeting to present the report of the Task & Finish Group on Child Sexual Exploitation.

AGREED: To endorse the report for submission to Cabinet.

103 : DRAFT TASK GROUP'S REPORT ON VISIT TO SCHOOLS CAUSING CONCERN

Martyn Hutchings (Principal Scrutiny Officer) updated Members on the outcome of the latest series of visits to schools causing concern.

AGREED: To approve the report for submission to Cabinet

104 : COMMITTEE'S DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT 2015/2016

Martyn Hutchings (Principal Scrutiny Officer) presented the Annual Report.

AGREED: To approve the Annual Report.

105 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee is 27 September 2016 at 4.30 pm

The meeting terminated at 6.45 pm

This document is available in Welsh / Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg.