

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

15 SEPTEMBER 2020

Present: Councillor Bridgeman(Chairperson)
Councillors Cunnah, Hopkins, Joyce, Melbourne, Molik, Phillips
and Mia Rees

23 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Singh and Mia John (Youth Council Representative).

24 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received in accordance with the Members Code of Conduct.

25 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 18 February, 10 March and 30 July 2020 were approved by the Committee and signed by the Chairperson.

The Chairperson and Committee thanked Karen Dell'Armi for her invaluable commitment and contribution to the work of the Committee as her tenure as a Parent Governor is coming to an end. The Committee wished her the best for the future.

26 : LOCAL AUTHORITY SOCIAL SERVICES REPORT 2019/2020

Members were provided with the Local Authority Social Services Annual Report 2019/20 together with the Care Inspectorate Wales Annual Review letter. The purpose of report was to set out the Local Authority's improvement journey in providing services to people in their area, those who access information, advice and assistance, and those individuals and carers in receipt of care and support. The report should also demonstrates how local authorities have promoted well-being and accounted for the delivery of well-being standards.

The Chair welcomed Councillor Graham Hinchey (Cabinet Member for Children & Families), Claire Marchant (Director, Social Services) and Deborah Driffield (Assistant Director, Children's' Services) to the meeting.

The Chair and Committee thanked Claire Marchant for her commitment and contribution to the Committee in her role as Director of Social Services and wished her well for the future and in her new role with Bridgend Council.

Members were provided with a presentation by the Director. It was explained that these were unusual and unique times to be presenting an annual report and that it was important to remember that it is a retrospective report and is later than usual due to the pandemic.

The Chairperson invited questions and comments from Members.

- Members expressed concern about shortcomings referred to by the CIW as a result of the performance review and queried whether there is confidence in the service's capacity to address those shortcomings and to ensure that Children's Services do not suffer the same outcome as the Youth Justice Service. It was noted that the CIW letter related to April 2019 – March 2020.

The Director advised that it is right to say that some of the findings recorded reflects the findings in the Youth Justice inspection, that CIW were part of that investigation and that would be expected. The major transformation changes and the changes to the operating model have not been risk free. There has to be a balance. There has been a period of uncertainty involving middle management staff. Likewise, some of the people at team level have also been on a journey, and there was some further work to be done to get everybody on board with the changes. The service is now at a very different place, particularly bearing in mind the pandemic. People have come together; a great deal of work has been done to ensure that staff are involved; and the permanent management structure now in place has helped further strengthen the relationships. The Director believes that she can leave Cardiff confident that the right steps and measures are in place.

- Members referred to their disappointment in the number of responses to the survey for children, recorded as being 12% and 6% for parents; members were concerned that it implied that parents and children are not engaging and sought information as to how the survey was carried out, the time scales and what measures would be adopted to ensure positive engagement in the future. Members were advised that:
 - There are now better relationships with Action For Children, NYAS, Voices from Care Cymru.
 - The Mind of My Own app is being developed which enables young people to communicate their likes, dislikes, wants and needs more effectively. The app linked with the IT system which will help to undertake a needs analysis, for example.
 - There needs to be a better approach to hearing the voices of children and young people; recently during the interview stage for an OM post, young people also set up their own panel; they too scored the applicants and designed their own questions and gave feedback. Some of the questions were extremely thought provoking and will be used at further interviews in due course.
 - Eclipse is a new IT system, which comes with really good functionality which will be used more and more, and includes video clips and digital stories.
 - Working remotely has proved to be quite successful. Parents have found it liberating that, when attending child

protection conferences, someone is available to support prior to meeting, at the virtual meeting and any further meeting afterwards. Most young people have been happy to undertake their meetings with social workers remotely, and social workers have been quite innovative when dealing with young people, for example via a virtual cookery class.

- Feedback and the voice of the child should be central to all that we do. The information should be collated every day rather than just once.
- Members queried the implementation date of the Corporate Parenting Strategy and noted that the overall Strategy is a 3 year strategy and will be fully implemented by 2023 with milestones and goals along the way.

Members were advised that Welsh Government are currently reviewing the statutory position regarding corporate parenting and will take a view about whether other statutory partners will have statutory duties, at the moment it is only the local authority. The Health Service and Police will be signing up to what they will do, as will other departments across the Council. The delay has been important, as it is felt that it has to be written by children themselves. It will be how they will hold the Council and partners to account in terms of delivery.

- Members referred to the figures provided; 40% of parents felt that they were not involved in the decisions that were being made and queried how that is being improved. Members were advised that it is a really difficult area. Reference was made to the CIW qualitative review; and whilst only a small number of parents were spoken to, they were quite diverse cases and they all spoke positively. It was noted however that there is still significantly more to do in respect of the participation and involvement of parents.

It was noted that positive feedback also comes from the Courts, Judiciary and Children's Guardians. Even if parents have not liked the outcome or the assessment, it has been recognised that it is sometimes difficult for parents to engage because they find the whole process just too painful.

- Members queried what work has been undertaken to attract more diverse foster carers, and were advised that it had been hoped to arrange meetings with BAME councillors but there has been a delay in progressing this because of the pandemic. There is far more work to be done which needs to be done delicately. It should be noted that there has been considerable progress in recruiting from BAME groups in adoption. There has been a huge increase in the numbers coming forward over the last 12 months.
- Members discussed the length of time that children remained on

the Child Protection Register, bearing in mind the figures indicate that it has increased. Members were advised that each situation is different. . To have a Child Protection Plan, signed up by multi agencies for a significant period of time, is what is needed and what is required. It is a wrap around for that child. 6 months is a short period of time to turn around difficulties in a family that are endemic. There has been an increase in registrations during Covid, but they have then deregistered within 3 months. There will be a whole period when performance is out of kilter because of the Covid situation. The concern is when a child is re-registered regularly, 3 times and also quite quickly. A piece is of work is being done in relation to that which will hopefully provide information in relation to re-registration. When children are on the At Risk Register there is huge wrap around support and monitoring. When they come off the register it is felt that the support takes a shift down. It is also a decision for partners, and some are less able to hold and manage risks at this time. Because of increasing demand and pressure, those on the At Risk Register are always allocated straight away. Those on Care and Support Plans do not. It is about prioritisation.

Members were referred to an interesting Case Study which illustrates the conversation we are having. It is currently available on the BBC website.

- Members referred to the considerable disruption to Children's education during the last 6 months and whether there is any evidence about whether young carers have been disproportionately disrupted; what part the new service will play; and about the proportion of care leavers who are not in education, employment or training and after 24 and 12 months. With unemployment now rising they have become a very vulnerable group in the immediate to mid-term. The Cabinet Member advised that Members would be helped by a presentation from the Into Work Team which would provide information about the growing opportunities in Cardiff and the companies coming forward to offer opportunities. That service having been provided throughout the pandemic. Daily meetings involving education and social services have taken place around vulnerable learners. It has really strengthened the relationships between the teams on how to fully support those very vulnerable learners. Some of those already flagged are young carers, who are trying to cope with the stress and pressures on them during this period.

Members also raised the doubling of numbers of those becoming NEET after 24 months and asked for an explanation of the increase in those figures. The Assistant Director accepted that it is worrying and it should be considered. It has been a trend that has been there for a long time. People probably wrap around very early on and then things start to drift and people do not come back in or young people then vote with their feet. It is difficult to

engage, but it has to be considered.

- Members asked about transitioning between children and adult services and the work being undertaken to improve the transition. Members were referred to Disability Futures which is a regional programme. There have been improvements and the arrangements are multi-agency. They include Health, Education and Social Services. They focus on children with disabilities. Children without disabilities are not always getting that same strength of multi-agency support. There has been real challenge during the Covid period around the stresses and strains on families and there have been some services that have closed down and children have returned home. There needs to be a far more joined up approach across agencies and integrated care planning assessments. Work is ongoing to share the burden of budgets with health, particularly when considering those at Ty-Storrie.

Parental capacity is also something that needs to be considered. Some young people are not eligible for adult services so it is something that needs to be addressed. There have also been extended entitlements for care leavers which will have budget implications. The PA service will be expanded to help towards adulthood, tenancy support does not stop at 18 but continues.

- Members asked for further information about the homeless statistics. Members were informed that it is a big issue at the moment. The service concentrating on trying to move young people through to independent living with support. There about 50 people waiting at the Gateway at the moment but there is not accommodation with support for them. There is a bigger issue about finding, funding or commissioning accommodation and accommodation with support. Cardiff has a robust system in terms of the Gateway and the facilities we have got, but there has been a huge increase in the number of children accommodated which will mean a huge increase in care leavers. Demand is outstripping supply at the moment.

The Cabinet Member would ask Members for a commitment to support step out accommodation. There needs to be a spread across Cardiff.

RESOLVED – That the Chairperson writes to the Cabinet Member on behalf of the Committee expressing their comments and observations during the Way Forward.

At this juncture, the Chair took the opportunity to thank Nick Batchelor, the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning for his service to the Committee and to the Education Directorate at Cardiff Council.

Alison Jones, Principal Scrutiny Officer presented the Draft Annual Report 2019/2020. The Report outlines the Committee's activities from June 2019 through to March 2020 and provides examples of the various types of scrutiny undertaken.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted and be laid before Council at its October meeting.

28 : WORK PROGRAMME 2020/2021

Members discussed the need for a Work Programme to be constructed for 2020/21 and agreed that a work programming forum should be arranged during the next month.

29 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

There were no urgent items tabled at the meeting.

30 : WAY FORWARD

Members discussed the information received and identified a number of issues which the Chairman agreed would be included in the letters that would be sent, on behalf of the Committee, to the relevant Cabinet Members and Officers.

31 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting is to be confirmed after the Council meeting in September and will take place via MS Teams.

The meeting terminated at 12.39 pm