

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

12 OCTOBER 2020

Present:

Councillor Phillips (Vice Chairperson),
Councillors Cunnah, Hopkins, Melbourne, Molik, Phillips,
Mia Rees, Singh and John

Co-opted Members:
Mia John (Youth Council Representative)

32 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for Absence had been received from the Chairperson – Councillor Lee Bridgeman, therefore the Vice-Chairperson – Councillor Mike Phillips chaired the meeting.

33 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Molik declared a personal interest in Item 4 as she has children in a school referred to as being impacted by Covid.

34 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 15th September 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

This was proposed by Karen Dell'Armi and seconded by Councillor Mia Rees.

35 : SERVICES UPDATES

The Chairperson advised that this item enabled Members to consider service updates from Children's Services and Education & Lifelong Learning, including performance information, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on services, and how services are responding to challenges arising from the pandemic.

This item would be considered in two parts. Part 1 would be Children's Services; Part 2 would be Education and Lifelong Learning.

Children's Services

The Chairperson welcomed Cllr Graham Hinchey, Cabinet Member for Children and Families; Sarah McGill, Corporate Director, People and Communities; Deborah Driffield, Assistant Director of Children's Services; and Kim Brown, Service Manager, Policy & Performance to the meeting.

The Chairperson invited Cllr Hinchey to make a statement in which he said that he was pleased to introduce the Children's Services Performance Report, detailing performance through Quarter 1 and one of our most challenging times ever. He asked that Members of CYP allow him some time to provide everyone with a more up

to date position on performance and other important areas, particularly given the changing position with Covid-19 restrictions.

Cllr Hinchey stated that the commitment of our social care workforce during this incredibly difficult time, adapting to new ways of working, whilst safeguarding our children and working with families must be commended.

The report shows that following lockdown, the number of referrals to MASH fell initially, before gradually increasing back to previous levels. It is anticipated that the return of children to school will lead to a further increase.

The number of children on the Child Protection Register (CPR) has increased over the period. Initial Conferences were being prioritised and the majority were held on time.

After an initial decrease in the numbers of looked after children following lockdown, there has been a steady increase to 983 looked after children as at 21st September. This is being closely monitored.

We will also provide members with the CLA position of other Wales LAs to provide some context and pressures being experienced in terms of meeting WG "reduction expectations" whilst managing ongoing Covid-19 pressures.

Recruitment has been ongoing and successful during the period, with 33 new social workers starting during the year to date.

The report advises that a survey of children and families was undertaken to understand the impact of changes made as a result of Covid-19 and to inform recovery planning. 70% of families were positive about the virtual experience and as a result a hybrid model is being developed for review meetings.

Members were provided with a presentation after which the Chairperson invited questions and comments.

Members were concerned about the number of children on the Child Protection Register and asked if there were any specific reasons for this and whether there are some categories that are more difficult to intervene in. Officers advised that there had been a shift in the balance and it needed to happen. There were now more Children on Care and support, protection plans, more living at home on protection plans rather than being a Looked After Child. With regards to categories, Officers explained the challenges with neglect and criminal exploitation but were concerned they were not picking up on cases on child sexual abuse. They explained this was a National issue and there was a National work stream taking place to train up specialist social workers; Cardiff was engaged in this and would be a pilot City.

Concern was expressed over the length of time Children's Services were taking to get back to schools on issues raised, and Officers were asked if Covid was having an impact on this. Officers were not aware of this issue and asked that they be contacted outside of the meeting with the specific information. The Cabinet Member stated that MASH can act very rapidly when notified of issues and if the matter was critical then the school could ring 999.

With regards to MASH, Members asked about categories of referrals into it and whether there have been any delays or any missed. Officers were not aware of any delays on initial response but would look into it. The Cabinet Member added that almost half of the referrals into MASH were from the Police; MASH had now been

operating for 3 years so it may a good time to carry out a review to see how things have changed in that time.

Members referred to the 14 social workers that had left and asked if there was any more information around this. Officers explained that 6 months ago people were leaving to the level of work load; in the last 3 months only 3 people have left and all of them were relocating so there has been a change in the reasons. The Cabinet Member added that the introduction of the Market Supplement has also helped with retention.

Members asked what consideration had been given to high risk staff and whether there had been any positive cases among social care staff. Officers were not aware of any staff testing positive but there had been family members of staff who had tested positive. With regards to high risk staff, some staff had been shielding, all staff had been risk assessed. After some time, some staff members stated that homeworking was impacting their mental health, so they were invited to attend touch down Hubs, to remote coffee morning and to take part in quizzes etc. There were a very very small minority of staff who were concerned about making home visits but the majority were keen to carry on with them.

Members asked about the numbers of Children entering the care system later due to Covid and whether this had been reviewed in terms of impact. Officers stated that the numbers may look high but this was more of a legacy issue, however they noted that it had taken too long in some cases.

Members referred to the Market Supplement and that it seems to be working well for retention. Members asked if this would be kept under review. The Cabinet Member explained it was a year on year rolling review. There had been 33 new staff recruited but this was not enough, it was important to keep numbers up and caseloads down as Cardiff cases are complex. It was important that social workers have a recognised rate of pay, this was also important to maintain the culture in the organisation.

Members asked for more information on the Citadel. Officers explained it had been developed for a while, it was purpose built and was a wraparound for young people where care has broken down; it provides support to get them through a tough few years.

Members asked about the percentage of Children who are 16+ years of age in residential care and whether this was an increasing trend. Officers agreed that there had been a significant rise in numbers, some new cases and some where care placements have broken down. Officers considered there should be a different offer for this age group and they were looking at wraparound support, linking young people to activities that interest them, this would prove challenging during Covid though. Move on support for 16-24 year olds was something that was discussed and considered every week.

Members discussed the shift in balance with children in regulated placements in Cardiff and the likely impact of reducing out of county placements and impacts on targets and timescales. It was noted that there are new providers in Cardiff for 16+ years of age, not all of which are regulated but they don't need to be. It was important to work with partners such as Llamau. The Cabinet Member added that it was important that everyone does the right thing whatever the cost including having residential care properties in all wards across the City.

Members discussed the percentage of vacant posts at 38.7% and noted this was now improving but asked how much of a threat the Covid second wave would be. Members also asked about the grant funding. Officers explained that the slides look like the numbers haven't improved but they have. Officers explained that there were 9 agency staff posts that were grant funded. Officers further explained that sometimes they increase the number of posts when they have temporary funding. The Intermediate Care Fund that comes from the Regional Partnership Board is on a year on year basis which makes it difficult to plan long term. However under that funding there are various work streams such as Unification where they have brought in staff and provided training as its very resource intensive; and Intake and Assessment where the work undertaken there would mean a cost neutral move of some agency staff to permanent staff. The Cabinet Member added that they are always looking for funding even if temporary to make a difference in Children's services.

Education & Lifelong Learning

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Sarah Merry, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Education, Employment & Skills; Mike Tate, Assistant Director of Education & Lifelong Learning; and Suzanne Scarlett, Partnerships & Performance Manager.

Members were provided with a presentation after which the Chairperson invited questions and comments.

Members noted the difficulties and challenges that schools have faced during the pandemic and asked if there was any evidence of transmissions in schools as it seemed to be mostly single cases in schools. Officers agreed that it was important to draw the differences between positive cases and outbreaks/incidents. Officers added that at present there were 53 schools with a positive case; some schools have had a number of cases in a bubble; there have been 2 incidents but no outbreaks. Officers were not seeing transmission across bubbles. Schools are relatively safe due to the measures in place such as one-way systems, masks, bubbles, low movement and staggered start and finish times. However, officers added that after school some people are mixing more freely so the number of community based transmissions are increasing.

Members asked if the Council was monitoring the continuity and quality of home learning. Officers stated that there has been some inconsistencies not only in home learning but in the guidance provided. Schools had to be ready overnight so it was challenging. Now however they are sharing best practice across the City. There has been discussion between Head Teachers and the Consortium around utilising staff in schools to develop a bank of digital learners.

Members discussed exams and were advised that the first series were scheduled in November and Welsh Government consider it to be achievable. These would usually be smaller subject exams or re-sits at this time of year so social distancing would be easier to adhere to. There is an update meeting schedule for next week with Qualifications Wales to look at what exams will look like next summer. Officers considered some form of exam period baked up with centre assessment for final marks to be the best case scenario.

Members asked about School based counselling, how it is accessed and distributed to schools. Officers agreed to obtain this information and get back to Members.

Members were concerned about losing professionals and teachers and about staff well-being. Officers advised that Principal Improvement Partners are undertaking work on sustainability; groups of schools work together to look at appropriate backfill, support needed etc. There are virtual well-being meetings for staff. Head Teachers are able to call the Education department and decisions can be taken quickly if needed. There was local community testing available for Head Teachers and symptomatic pupils, also on weekends. Wellbeing is critical, Officers agreed that Head Teachers and staff are feeling down, Covid is not going away so there was a need for strategic thinking.

Members asked about vulnerable learners and whether their attendance was monitored and whether there was work undertaken with families for those vulnerable learners who were not engaging. Officers advised that there were no fines currently being issued for non-attendance. There has been an increase in elective home education and this was being monitored. Officers have identified most vulnerable learners and they are tracked and supported through the Education Welfare Service. Numbers are currently fluctuating and there is lower attendance so the reasons for this are being looked at so that they can build confidence back into the system and get the message out that schools are safe due to the mitigation factors taken in schools.

Members discussed positive cases in schools and when more rigorous interventions would take place. Officers reiterated the current mitigating factors that schools take and added that in general around 30 pupils are affected by one positive case; this was being drilled down further to try and reduce the numbers impacted. If needed there would be an emergency meeting with the School, Head Teacher, Health and Safety, Public Health Wales and the management team; they would look at all elements and see if anything more could be done; all cases are different and they are learning lessons from each one.

Members asked about blended learning and the level of engagement with parents and pupils when looking at best practice. Officers explained that they engage with Pupil Voice; they have a team in the Youth Service; they work towards Child Friendly City Status; they have ongoing contact with schools and pupils with PIP's.

Members asked about engagement with vulnerable learners and officers advised that vulnerable learners are often the most difficult to engage with but digitalisation has helped with that.

Members asked about Pupils mental health and wellbeing and Officers said this was at the fore front of what pupils will be doing going forward; the school building are the same but the experience is alien, schools are doing all they can to keep as much of it as normal as possible. There is counselling support in schools and there will be a focus in the curriculum.

Members asked if there was any data on cases by Ward or postcode. Officers advised this was an area to focus on and revisit.

Members asked whether there was a tipping point for schools when they may have to lock down. Officers advised that Welsh Government wanted to avoid school closures/lockdown at all costs and for the sake of wellbeing and the local economy this would be a final measure. A tipping point would be the sustainability of staffing

and leadership and whether this could be mitigated; each school would be looked at on an individual basis.

Members asked if consideration had been given to setting up direct groups with learners rather than engaging via i.e. Child Friendly Cities. Officers explained that is how they engage, they do liaise with the Youth Council and all policy decisions etc. have feedback from pupil representatives.

AGREED: that the Chairperson, on behalf of the Committee, writes to the Cabinet Member conveying the observations of the Committee when discussing the way forward.

36 : WORK PROGRAMME 2020/2021

Noted.

37 : COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Noted.

38 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

None received.

39 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Monday 9th November 2020 at 4.30pm

The meeting terminated at 7.00 pm