

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

18 JANUARY 2022

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

Co-opted Members: Patricia Arlotte (Roman Catholic representative),
Carol Cobert (Church in Wales Representative) and Karen Dell'Armi
(Parent Governor Representative)

Mia John (Cardiff Youth Council Representative)

103 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Heather Joyce

104 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declaration of interests were received for this meeting.

105 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting on the 9 December 2021 were approved as a correct record of the meeting.

106 : CHILDCARE SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY

Members were advised that this item enables pre-decision scrutiny of the Cardiff Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2022-2027 which seeks Cabinet endorsement to enable the Local Authority to fulfil its statutory responsibility to prepare and publish a local Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA) by the 30th of June 2022.

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Graham Hinchey, Cabinet Member for Families and Children, Helen Evans, Assistant Director for Housing and Communities, Avril Hooper, Operational Manager - Early Help, and Andy Senior, Senior Childcare Business Support Officer – Early Help.

The Chairperson invited Cllr Hinchey to make a statement, during which he outlined some of the data contained within the report.

Members were advised that initial findings indicate that childcare across Cardiff is broadly sufficient to meet the needs of parents, but there is some unmet demand and concerns regarding recruitment and retention of childcare staff, and further work required to promote financial support to pay for childcare.

Members were asked to comment or raise questions on the information received. Those discussions are summarised as follows:

- Members wished to be updated on the success of the Council's efforts to increase the recruitment of staff into the sector and whether any targets had

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been set. Members were advised that the challenge was that the employers were a wide range of private businesses. The Council contributes to developments at a wider national level and in relation to local initiatives such as Into Work and the Cardiff Commitment to make sure childcare is available as a potential career option for young people.

- Members were further advised that there was an issue around sustainability of funding, much of which comes from Welsh Government grants. Grants are sometimes delayed which has consequences for predictability of employment and retention of staff. Representations have been made to Welsh Government for a medium-term solution.
- Officers advised that work is being carried out with Welsh Government on the barriers to people pursuing childcare as a career, in particular the difficulty of gaining the necessary workplace training required for qualification. Discussions are underway to adjust qualification requirements to allow more young people to get work placements. The Council works with partners to offer professional development to the childcare sector, including the qualifications for childminders. The Workforce Development and Accreditation Centre recently gained accredited status with City and Guilds to deliver the qualifying training for childminders. Some parents who have come through Flying Start have gone on to train as childminders. The challenge will be to scale up.
- Members were advised of a proposal for an Early Help Academy to further assist in the expansion of the childcare workforce.
- Members discussed the level of qualifications required in childcare settings and the problems of recruitment and retention in the Welsh medium sector. Officers advised that the terms and conditions and opportunities for progress for Welsh speakers employed as TAs are more structured than for Welsh speakers employed by a Cylch Meithrin managed by a private management committee. There is a disparity in the rewards and recognition for the two careers which it was beyond the power of the Council to address.
- Members discussed the expansion of free childcare to 2-year-olds. Members were advised that the post-consultation phase of the report would incorporate the latest information from Welsh Government on the new policy. The Council was still waiting for details from Welsh Government on the proposal.
- Members were further advised that the inability of teachers to assume a lead role in a childcare setting because they did not have the right qualifications was a long-standing issue. There had previously been a bridging qualification allowing movement from one sector to another, but that capacity had been removed. The Council would wish to raise the issue as part of discussions around the CSA and the expansion of free childcare to 2-year-olds.
- Officers advised that training offered by the Council to childcare providers in Cardiff is offered on a no-cost or highly subsidised basis to make it accessible and includes the opportunity to undertake Welsh language starter courses.
- Members discussed the affordability of childcare and the lack of awareness among families about the availability of financial support. Officers advised that

Family Support will provide information about financial support if requested by parents. Parents acquire information about financial support by word of mouth and from childcare providers. It is unclear from the data whether families remain unaware of the existence of financial support or how to access it.

- Members sought clarification on whether there was a requirement on childcare providers to liaise with Family Support. Officers advised that it was down to individual providers. The Council was looking to promote tax-free childcare, which saves parents 20% of their costs without reducing the amount received by providers.
- Members were concerned about whether the rise in the cost of living would affect families' ability to afford childcare. Officers advised that a utilities grant for providers had been established to contribute to offsetting their energy bills in year. It is hoped that by reducing their outgoings, their inclination to increase fees may be reduced. Members were also provided with information in relation to the rate rebates available to providers.
- Members were advised that in terms of financial support the funding for those accessing Flying Start was geographic and depends on the area; the childcare offer is dependent upon working hours and income of both parents and for those in receipt of universal credit can claim up to 85% of their childcare costs, although those costs have to be met 'up front'. The average daily cost for childcare is approximately £60 which equates to £6 per hour, play groups and child minders is around £5 per hour.
- In relation to ALN provision there are funding streams within Flying Start, the Childcare and Play programme and the Childcare offer to meet the child's needs. Flying Start deals with very young children, a lot of training is undertaken to raise staff awareness in relation to the identification of needs. The situation is not always the same in non council funded child care; their engagement with training is optional and mixed. It is anticipated that ALNet will help in promoting greater engagement and update of ALN training.
- Members were interested to learn how it was proposed to improve the robustness of the data to help with decision making. Officers were advised that work would be ongoing with officers from other authorities, CSIW, and Welsh Government, looking at ways to improve the legislation that sits behind the CSA and provide guidance to go with the questions. There does have to be an annual update. Members were advised that the level of complexity of the data has increased over time; which has provided some difficulties in interpretation. Members suggested that some audio information may be of some benefit.
- Members sought information as to what obstacles there may have been in relation to the delivery of training due to the pandemic. Officers advised that there was a rapid shift in the way training for providers was delivered. It was safely delivered online; some could not be done in an online format and that has been restarted now with smaller numbers. Interest has been high, particularly in relation to the critical functions, for example First Aid - the Care Standards Inspectorate legislative requirements. In respect of professional development interest is less than in previous years, it is believed to be

understandable bearing in mind the pressure the sector has been under throughout the pandemic. It is gradually increasing and further data could be provided.

- Members likened the last two years, because of the pandemic, to an experiment and queried whether officers felt that the next two years would also be akin to an experiment, bearing in mind the change in working patterns, and work life balance, for example as employees are more likely to remain at home working; there being less need for childcare places. Officers advised that, when considering hybrid working and the financial implications, there is bound to be an impact on child care, there may be a drop in after school care because of a greater flexibility with working hours which could have a knock on effect on holiday care.

RESOLVED:

That the Chairperson writes to the Cabinet Member on behalf of the Committee expressing their comments and observations captured during the way forward.

107 : 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.

108 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

No urgent items were tabled.

109 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee is the budget meeting on Tuesday 22 February 2022 at 10.30 am via Microsoft Teams.

The meeting terminated at 6.05 pm