

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

1 MARCH 2022

Present: Councillor Bridgeman (Chairperson),
Councillors Cunnah, Hopkins, Joyce, Melbourne, Molik and Singh

Co-opted Members: Karen Dell'Armi (Parent Governor
Representative)

Mia John (Cardiff Council Representative)

119 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Patricia Arlotte (RC Church Representative). Carol Cobert (CIW Church representative) advised that she would have to leave at 6.00 due to another commitment.

The Chair made a statement in relation to a WalesOnline article referring to comments made in a previous meeting regarding the Welsh Government policy of removing profit from the children's care sector. The Chair stated that comments made by him and the Director of Children's Services had been taken out of context and that neither were against the proposal, however it is a complex and sensitive issue that requires careful planning.

The Chair and Members sent their thoughts and prayers to the people and nation of Ukraine.

120 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

121 : NATIONAL ADOPTION SERVICE FOR WALES - HOSTING ARRANGEMENTS

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Graham Hinchey (Cabinet Member for Families and Children), Sarah McGill (Corporate Director, People and Communities) and Deborah Driffield (Director, Children's Services) to the meeting.

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

The Committee was informed that it is proposed that Cardiff continue with hosting arrangements, and all 21 other LAs have confirmed that they support Cardiff continuing in the hosting role. All 22 authorities have been asked to consider whether they wish to take part in the joint committee, although it may not be created until after the Local Government Elections.

Cardiff has performed the hosting role since 2014 but due to the joint committee arrangements it is important that it is more formal. The Monitoring Officer will have a role and it is important that all necessary requirements are completed.

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

Members sought clarification on the cost of the hosting arrangements. Members were advised that a cost recovery model was used. The principle is that Cardiff will neither bear the cost nor derive any profit from providing the service. An annual review process has been implemented, in particular around finances, and Cardiff will be able to take any overspend or underspend to the Joint Committee.

RESOLVED:

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

122 : YOUTH JUSTICE SERVICE UPDATE

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Graham Hinchey (Cabinet Member for Families and Children), Sarah McGill (Corporate Director, People and Communities), Deborah Driffield (Director, Children's Services), Graham Robb (Independent Chair of the Youth Justice Board) and Angharad Thomas (Operational Manager, Youth Justice Service) to the meeting.

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

Graham Robb (Independent Chair of the Youth Justice Board) was invited to make a statement during which he updated the Committee on the HMIP process. There have been briefings with staff, board and partners, surveys of staff, young people and volunteers. There is to be an Advocacy Panel Meeting within the next few weeks, the case analysis will start on 21 March; 28 March is offsite review week; 29 March is a Board Focus Session; during the week of the 4 April there will be a meeting with the Board with the Chair and the Chief Executive. The publication date will be in July, with the Board HMPI action plan being released towards the end of that month.

The Chair invited questions from Members.

- Members sought clarification around the first time entrants figures and whether the reduction is a sustainable decrease or a blip because of Covid. Officers advise that there is an acceptance that Covid has affected all young people; the reason for the decrease however is due to the Bureau, it has kept running throughout the pandemic. It has allowed a more co-ordinated approach in dealing with young people before become first time entrants. It will not be sustainable, but we do not yet know the emotional impact that Covid has had and whether that has affected their involvement.

- Members reference the growth of child sexual and child criminal exploitation and how can all partners work to get those figures down. Members were referred to the Safeguarding Adolescents from Exploitation presentation, which is a partnership wide approach in dealing with the growth of that exploitation. Education; the Youth Service; and the Police, together with other partners are all part of that puzzle. Work is still ongoing; there is an optional group with sub-groups feeding into it. In relation to younger targeted intervention; whilst the age of responsibility is 10 it has to be recognised that behaviours start at a younger level. In Cardiff intervention does not start until 10 but if a young person is showing certain kinds of behaviours consideration can be given to getting the right piece of work done with those children. It is hoped that as Covid lifts the team can provide some targeted workshops in primary schools. It has to be partnership approach.
- Members discussed diversity and disproportionality and referred to the figures in respect of case loads; 83% white and 87% male and how to get those youngsters back and engaged. Officers advised the importance of have a real understanding of the young people; why they are not in school and how to get them back into school. The service needs to be as diverse as the young people involved in the system.
- Members looked at the number of offences committed when young people are re-offending, and queried whether there are any distinctions or any insight into that. Members were advised that whilst the amount of children reoffending is increasing there is less offending. There is a small amount continuing to reoffend. Members note that some of them offended and re-offended within such a short space of time that it was not possible to do any work with those children in the intervening period. There is certainly more work to be done in that area.
- Members stressed the importance of the service working with all partners and were advised that the SAFE model is not one service, it is all partners.
- Members sought clarification in respect of the serious calculation. Officers explained that the Police gravity scoring goes from 1 – 8 but Youth Justice scoring goes from 1 – 4. A 4 would be significant, for example a murder, whereas a 2 or 3 captures the majority of offences – assaults to grievous bodily harm charges as well.

RESOLVED:

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

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Graham Hinchey (Cabinet Member for Families and Children), Sarah McGill (Corporate Director, People and Communities) and Deborah Driffield (Director, Children's Services) to the meeting.

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

The Committee was informed that efforts were being made to improve the timeliness of assessments and visits. Candidates for a new Senior OM post are being interviewed. The new postholder is expected to provide robustness in understanding and monitoring the timeliness of assessments. The timeliness of CLA reviews and Child Protection conferences has improved.

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

Members wondered whether there was any cause for concern regarding the budget efficiency saving target and whether there were any plans to mitigate those concerns in the short term. Officers advised that there was always concern because some factors were out of the Council's control. A portion of the uplift has been earmarked for building capacity within contract monitoring and quality assurance systems. An OM has been identified who will oversee contract monitoring and progression planning for children in regulated placements.

Members wished to know whether capacity pressures were easing. Officers advised that the pressure was still intense. A system review has been commissioned to investigate ways to increase efficiency. The additional capacity will improve planning and oversight. Officers expressed confidence that pressures will ease.

Members were concerned that the return to face-to-face working might lead to the loss of staff and of some of the efficiencies from remote working. Officers advised that it was important to retain efficiencies from reductions in time spent travelling to face-to-face meetings. Equally it is important for newly qualified social workers to have face-to-face meetings with families and teams for the sake of learning. A balance needs to be struck with blended working. Remote reviewing has been carried out by staff living in London or the north of England. Some agency staff have been unwilling to conduct face-to-face meetings and have been let go. Flexible working is offered but it is not possible for social workers to always work remotely.

Members discussed the correlation of vacancies with retention rates. Officers referred to a graph on page 51 of the agenda pack which indicated the net result of social workers starting and leaving the service. Workforce data indicating how long social workers have been with the service will be presented at the forthcoming meeting of the Committee.

Members referred to the data presented on page 39 of the agenda pack indicating the percentage of children reoffending within 6 months of their previous offence, and expressed a desire to see similar data for 12 month and 24 month intervals.

Members expressed a view that the KPIs in the report did not demonstrate how children are benefiting from decisions being taken. Officers recognised the importance of measuring the differences made to children and families but advised that they are hard to report on as they are qualitative. Officers will investigate whether there are ways to do it but they would not be KPIs and would not be reported nationally.

Members questioned why the SW vacancies target was set at 24% and not zero. Members were advised that it was felt that the service was setting itself up to fail by setting the target too low and that a more realistic target was suggested. The target had at one time been 33% and while it was right to set a challenge it had to be realistic. The situation is volatile and zero would be unrealistic. There would always be a need for agency staff. Feedback from staff indicated an improvement in morale which was a credit to the changed culture created by officers. The vacancy target for next year has been reduced but it is important targets are realistic for budget setting purposes. Agency staff are required for their resilience and experience. Some agency staff have been with the service for a long time.

Members sought information on why sickness absence was increasing. Officers expressed satisfaction that the service was within target. There has been a slight increase due to taking back direct service provision. Staff cannot come into work if they are unwell, and there has been a difference due to Covid. Sickness is closely monitored.

Members sought clarification on the time frame within which assessments should be done and questioned why the target was not 100% instead of 75%. Officers advised that the time frame was 42 days. The target was a realistic one but was being achieved. Officers are considering transferring the responsibility for assessments to localities.

Members sought an explanation of the figures for children being registered and deregistered and wished to know what the impact on the children was. Officers advised that during Covid children could not be visited and were not attending school or being seen by health visitors. Consequently there had been an increase in the number being registered due to concerns over their safety. There had then been a review which enabled many to be stepped down. Officers expressed the hope that being registered had had a positive impact on the children.

Members sought clarification of the figure of 41% of children being registered for emotional abuse and wished to know how the decision for registration was made. Officers advised that there had been a change in emphasis with a concentration on the impact on children of domestic abuse without physical injury. Work has been and is being done on being trauma informed and the harm that ongoing trauma through for example emotional neglect does to children. Behaviours that indicate emotional harm would be picked up in early referrals and assessments, through schools and health visitors, and then investigated by SWs. The decision to register or not is made at Child Protection Conference.

Members noted that external placements were decreasing while remaining with kinship was increasing. Officers advised that there has been ongoing work in regard to the decrease in regulated placements compared to children staying with family members. There was a very large rise in kinship care in recent years. Significant change is required across the board.

Members wished to know whether more could be done before registering children for emotional abuse. Officers advised that Children's Services cannot prevent emotional abuse. However, work can be done around the whole school approach, early intervention and children and infants' mental health. There are initiatives around parenting that will have a major impact on children's emotional wellbeing.

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

124 : 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.

125 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

No urgent items were tabled.

126 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting of the Committee is on Tuesday 8 March 2022 at 4.30 pm via MS Teams.

The meeting terminated at 6.30 pm