

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

10 MARCH 2020

Present: Councillor Bridgeman (Chairperson),
Councillors Cunnah, Naughton, Phillips, Mia Rees and Singh

Co-opted Members: Patricia Arlotte (Roman Catholic representative)
and Karen Dell'Armi (Parent Governor Representative)

7 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Joyce and Melbourne. Apologies had also been received from Carol Cobert and Matthew Richards.

8 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Naughton declared a personal interest in Item 3 as he has a family member who had worked on a Band A School.

9 : SOP - UPDATE REPORT - TO FOLLOW

The Chairperson advised that this report provides Committee with an opportunity to undertake per-decision scrutiny of the Schools Organisational Programme Update prior to Cabinet's consideration of the report on 19th of March.

The Chairperson welcomed Cllr Sarah Merry Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Education, Employment and Skills to the meeting and invited her to make a statement.

Cllr Merry explained that this was an overview of SOP at the present time. Members were reminded of the work undertaken since 2012. Moving forward there would be challenges in the future build programme such as demographic changes, climate emergency and increase in Welsh medium education among others. Members were asked to note the recommendation to establish/consolidate the Director of SOP as a permanent post, with the delegation to Director of ELL to move on with the programme. Nick Batchelor explained that this had not been in the report included in Members' report pack.

The Chairperson welcomed Nick Batchelar, Director of Education and Lifelong Learning and Richard Portas Programme Director to present the report to the Committee.

The Chairperson invited questions and comments from Members;

Members asked about schools that were in the category 'Urgent Need' and asked what was the process going forward to address these. The Cabinet Member advised that they look initially at the removal of decondition school buildings and then look at sufficiency of places; any schools left then go to Band C, the Welsh Government assess the condition and band them.

Members referred to the £25million of Capital Receipts and asked about plans in case the full amount is not raised. The Director stated this was an important area of the financing of the programme; with a programme of this size lots of things change and that was one reason for the update report. There are variables such as construction costs and interest, however there were no alarm bells with regard to capital receipt at the moment.

Members asked if there were enough staff and enough expertise to deliver the programme. The Director explained that the report to Cabinet entitled Capacity and Governance in 2018 looked at exit interviews and also the role of the Programme Director. The Programme director has been appointed to and he has reshaped roles and teams in education and economic development to develop a corporate landlord approach for the estate. There are some vacancies but the Director is confident the capacity is there.

Members asked for more information about the MIM model. It was explained that the Council is a partner in the scheme, potentially manageability could be increased and risks may need to be managed more. The Cabinet Member said she had been concerned about future flexibility and responsiveness to priorities; this may be more difficult to do in the MIM model with regards to community use etc.

Members referred to LDP schools and asked about a masterplan to look at catchments, dual schemes, etc and how it all links together. The Cabinet Member stated this was a difficult question and a complication of how developments happen and the s106 agreements. It was important not to destabilise existing schools close to developments with spaces; the medium also needs to be considered as does parental preference, so it was all open to flexibility and no solid masterplan as such. The Director added that with LDP schools, it was impossible to know who would move to the developments and what their preferences would be.

Members referred to population projections and asked if there were any concerns or whether planning was for continual growth in Cardiff. The Cabinet Members said there were still some deep dives needed and there would be further questions on education, LDP etc. The projection was for growth in Cardiff but slower, the rest of Wales projects a decrease in population.

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

10 : CHILDREN'S SERVICES QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE

The Chairperson advised that this report provides Committee with the performance information for the third quarter of 2019/20. Members may wish to question the Cabinet Member and officers on the performance, as well as the management actions to tackle any areas of poor performance.

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Graham Hinchey, Cabinet Member for Children and Families, to the meeting, and invited him to make a statement. Cllr Hinchey stated that he was please to introduce the report, noting that there had been improvements in a number of areas especially timeliness in child protection conferences and wellbeing assessments. Members' attention was drawn to the

increased number of Children Looked After being placed in Cardiff and a lower number of child protection registers issued to court. Pressures were outlined as staffing and placements.

The Chairperson welcomed, Claire Marchant, Director for Social Services and Deborah Driffield, Interim Assistant Director, Children's Services to present the performance report.

The Chairperson invited questions and comments from Members;

Members asked for the reasons behind placements in Swansea as this was beyond the 20miles. Officers explained it was cheaper property and there are regional providers based there; it was a significant id due for LA's and safeguarding our children.

Members asked why private foster companies do so well and officers advised that they operate as a business, they are commercially competent, good at marketing etc. Fostering has not been a LA core business until recently and LA's need to be competitive with the private sector.

Members referred to KPI's dropping in August and September and this was explained as the school year and the drop of referrals in; there is an increase in numbers at the end of July.

Members discussed costs, and the differential costs of inhouse/external residential, and whether there was sufficient differentials there to manage it more as a business plan going forward. Officers said it was more about quality and outcomes for residential, rather than costs. Officers explained the Community Strategy Approach adopted last November and the lead in time; purchasing properties; planning; staff; multi-agency; detailed assessment of young persons need – all on track for the assessment unit in the Autumn, which would help with step-down and less in residential care.

Members asked further on what could be done to be more competitive. Officers explained they are doing more now than previously, including; Increased fees; strong marketing campaign; use of social media and people in the community etc. There were now more foster carers coming through the assessment and these were being matched with specific young people.

Members sought further information on costs such as whether operational costs are also factored in. Officers agreed to provide this information after the meeting.

Members considered further performance data would be useful and were concerned about the vacancy levels and what could be done to address this. Officers explained they were happy to share performance data for agency and permanent staff. They considered that increased payments would be needed to address the vacancy issue. Officers would welcome further scrutiny on this as it has been an issue for years across the UK, a Task and Finish to establish best practice would be useful. The Cabinet Members added that it was important to attract young people into the sector.

Members asked why exit interviews aren't being conducted. Officers said that lots of people don't want to tell you why they are leaving but they are looking at peer interviews.

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

11 : OUT OF COUNTY PLACEMENTS - INQUIRY REPORT - PROGRESS BRIEFING

The Chairperson advised that this item enables Committee to review the Directorates progress on the implementation of accepted recommendations following the Committee's Out of County Placements inquiry which was submitted to Cabinet in July 2018.

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Graham Hinchey, Cabinet Member for Children and Families, for this item, and invited him to make a statement. Cllr Hinchey explained that there had been a lot of work over the past 3 years, there was now more understanding of Out of County placements and the issues related with them.

The Chairperson welcomed, Claire Marchant, Director for Social Services and Deborah Driffield, Interim Assistant Director, Children's Services to present the progress report.

The Chairperson invited questions and comments from Members;

Members referred to Recommendation 1 and asked why November had been a particularly good month's assessment. Officers explained this related to needs met by themselves, the young people would have had a discussion regarding needs/issues and identified their own resources. Officers were not sure why that month was so high percentage wise.

With reference to Recommendation 2, Members asked why the percentage target of 63% placements to be in Cardiff had been reduced to 60%. Officers explained it was reduced as they were so far away from it, there had been an increase in numbers in residential care and this impacts on the overall percentages.

Members asked about internal placements and the numbers of new homes and new beds. Members were advised that there would be 17 extra beds across 4 homes; with another 2 homes coming on board soon. It was also important to look at the assessment centre and how we can do more in-house fostering. Members discussed the differences across the City with planning permission for homes and objections from ward members; discussions were happening with Planning on these issues.

In relation to Recommendation 3, Members asked what outcomes were expected from the initiatives. Officers outlined a number of things including; focus on the process being efficient and more business-like; weekly meetings looking at recruitment and staff; working closely with marketing and communications; adding a market supplement; making it easier for students on placements to stay; growing our own through university courses and ensuring staff feel supported in their roles.

Members asked about stages/timeframes of the Team Managers development programme. Officers stressed this was a significant change with a fairly new management team. They knew they needed a development programme, it is underway but it also needs a wider development programme; this would be crucial for the relationship between Operational Managers and Staff. The Cabinet Member added that the team are very approachable, in an open plan office; there has been a significant increase in PPDR's and next was to improve the quality of them. Officers added that the OM tier has been restructured and the team managers would be next.

Members asked about the university places and what engagement there was with schools. Officers explained that HR have asked them to go into schools to engage. The university courses are not full, so the plan is to grow our own through secondment and support to qualification.

With regard to Recommendation 4, Members made reference to the chart colours; officers explained that they had to double up on some agency checks as people were not qualified or had been disciplined.

In relation to Recommendation 5, Members asked what our responsibility was. Officers explained that they need to inform Social Care Wales. It takes a lot of officer time to conduct the checks but they are being robust.

The Cabinet Member explained a briefing note in relation to Recommendation 6 had been sent out last week.

With regard to Recommendation 7, Members asked what support there was for the pinch point in the middle and if there was anything Committee could do to avoid it happening. The Cabinet Member said an Early Help update each month would be helpful outlining the Early interventions and preventions. Also to look at how any changes affect the quality of outcomes.

Members discussed Recommendation 8, it was noted that 'where it is safe to do so' was added in. It was noted that Looked after Children had not gone up as projected and that kinship care had increased. Members noted the drop in referrals in August and September and were advised this was due to referrals from school and teachers and the summer break.

In relation to Recommendation 10, Members said they had previously been advised that there has been some resistance from some staff and asked if this was still the case. Officers advised that there were still some issues, although they had moved on with team managers having a project plan, good practice and principles to measure against.

Members discussed Recommendation 13, Members noted that the Children's Commissioner for Wales was calling for profitable agencies to be moved out of the equation, looking at the Scottish model which was also now being used in parts of England. It was said that there are numerous third sector charities that work in foster care and there could be a possibility of an alliance with LA's, taking advantage of recruitment etc. and forcing the private sector out of the market. Officers agreed to look at the alliance suggestion and noted that the private sector had shown interest in piggy-backing with the Council.

With regard to Recommendation 16, the Cabinet Member noted that you can't stop demand, lots of work had been done realigning the budget and on top of this there was the market supplement and the assessment centre. Whilst currently in a better position, he could not guarantee on any overspend. Officers discussed controllable and uncontrollable budgets and the need to keep the children safe and provide the service. It was noted that the budget could easily be skewed by sibling groups and any workforce issues. Members considered there could be more invest to save work undertaken.

Members discussed Recommendation 19, the Cabinet Member recommended that Members read the Action plan. Members asked for the terminology used to be checked.

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

12 : FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The forward work programme was outline to Members and it was noted that there would be no Scrutiny Committee in April.

13 : 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.

14 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

None received.

15 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

12 May 2020.

The meeting terminated at 8.15 pm