

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

15 DECEMBER 2020

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

Co-opted Members: Carol Cobert (Church in Wales Representative),
Karen Dell'Armi (Parent Governor Representative) and
Matthew Richards (Parent Governor Representative)

40 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Heather Joyce and Patricia Arlotte (Roman Catholic Church Representative).

41 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Declarations of Interest in accordance with the Members Code of Conduct were received as follows:

Committee Member	Item	Nature of Interest
Matthew Richards (Parent Governor Representative)	4 – VVC Regional Adoption Service Annual Report	Personal Interest – currently involved in adoption proceedings
Councillor Molik	5 – SOP proposals – Cathays High School	Personal Interest – children attending High Schools as part of Band B arrangements.

42 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 October 2020 were approved as a correct record of the meeting.

43 : VALE, VALLEYS & CARDIFF REGIONAL ADOPTION SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20

The Committee received a copy of the Vale, Valleys & Cardiff (VVC) Regional Adoption Collaborative Annual Report 2019/2020 which covers the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020. The report brings together into one document a review and analysis of the activities of the Collaborative, together with a number of performance measures which monitor performance in relation to the key stages in the adoption process for children, with particular emphasis upon the overall timeliness of the process. The report also provides the annual review of the service as required by Regulation 22 of the Local Authority Adoption Service (Wales) Regulations 2007 and section 15 (c) of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales) Direction 2015.

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Graham Hinchey (Cabinet Member for Children & Families), Angela Harris (Regional Adoption Manager) and Deborah Driffield (Assistant Director, Children's Services) to the meeting.

Councillor Hinchey made a statement in which he confirmed it was the VVC 5th Annual Report. There are positives but there are also ongoing challenges within the service to meet the ever increasing demands for adoption services.

Members were invited to comment, seek clarification, or raise questions on the information received. Those discussions are summarised as follows:

- Members discussed the down ward trend in referrals against a rising number of children looked after. They noted that that trend was part of the national trend and whilst there was a decrease in the making of Placement Orders it is not necessarily to do with a reduction in the number of Children Looked After, it is about authorities considering other alternatives such as Kinship or Special Guardianship Orders.
- Members queried the reasoning behind the choice to attend the various different engagement events. Members were advised that the benefits of the VVC having its own Marketing Officer are now being realised. The reasons for contact and for not progressing any applications are collated and being used to inform the recruitment practise and marketing. The various events attended have now ceased due to the pandemic, however, digital platforms are now being used, an area which is being developed and there is a greater knowledge base as to where prospective adopters come from the areas that need to be targeted. There is also a national campaign ongoing; there was a recent news item about single adopters which was very informative.

Members also discussed the age profile of prospective adopters and whether there is a role for real grass roots involvement in the advertising campaign. Whilst every effort is made to attract local adopters the current pandemic has made grass root involvement much more difficult. The idea is to keep as many children as possible in the region.

- Members discussed the additional pressures on the team as a result of the pandemic and how they were coping. Members were advised that staff have been working virtually since March 2020. In terms of placement of children NAS developed a national risk assessment process. Initially, no placements were undertaken, but once the process was established the placement process was resumed. It is a lengthy process and requires a lot of cooperation from all parties. In terms of the recruitment process a risk assessment was developed; partly virtually and partly face to face. The service is also involved in Adoption Support, there was a spike in referrals in Quarter 2 – after lockdown and when children returned to school. Staff have adapted well to the new ways of working, services, training and support groups have taken place

online; the service has found that families have participated more because they can attend virtual meetings. In relation to adopters, the team are due to approve 49 adopters by the end of Quarter 3.

- Members asked, as Cardiff is part of the VVC collaboration, whether Cardiff had any specific characteristics or whether the same issues and patterns were shared. Members were advised that VVC is the largest collaboration in Wales with two of the largest authorities; Cardiff and RCT and two of the smallest. There are differences but in terms of practice there is a lot of consistency. Cardiff provides the most work, it has a very diverse population, both in the children and the adopters coming forward. One of the difficulties is that it is not always possible to place children in Cardiff, so we try and encourage placements from further afield but within the region.

Members were advised that one of the services provided by the Regional Adoption Service is that they service Cardiff's Adoption Panel. There is no longer a legal requirement for there to be an Adoption Panel, however, it was decided that the Panel would continue, there is an agency decision maker (Chair), agency advisor, a legal advisor, social workers and managers. The whole Panel makes the decision, it is right and proper that that Panel remains even though it is no longer a requirement. It is a heavy decision to make.

Members also noted that the Assistant Director and the Regional Adoption Manager are the decision makers in terms of the matching process during Covid. Every situation is risk assessed to ensure the children are safe, their birth parents are safe, the prospective adopters are safe and the foster carers are safe. It is a very complicated process and a good example of collaborative working.

Adoption is a specialist area of work, there was a degree of trepidation when the collaborative work began. However, it has proved to be invaluable.

- Members asked about the additional support provided and consultation with young people during Covid. Members were referred to Connected, run by Adoption UK. As part of investment monies provided by Welsh Government to improve adoption support, regions were required to recruit a children and young people co-ordinator who supports young people within the regions and inputs into those groups. Prior to lockdown the co-ordinator was attending 3 groups a month. Now the groups are run online. The aim of the service is to reach more young people who might benefit from such support and the Co-ordinator's key role is to promote the service across the region. Engagement with children and young people has increased because of social media and online meetings, the meetings are less scary.

- Members discussed the information provided in relation to the average expenditure per child being greater in the Vale of Glamorgan and whether that was a positive or negative. It was noted that the graphs relate to adoption support packages because the VVC does not have a budget of its own. The VVC carries out the assessment and then the assessment and referral go to the individual authority to make the decision about support. The varying amounts relate to the type of support required; some can be quite costly.

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.

44 : SCHOOL ORGANISATION PLAN PROPOSALS

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Sarah Merry (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Education, Employment and Skills), Michele Duddridge-Friedl (Operational manager, Planning & Provision); and Richard Portas (Programme Director, School's Organisation Planning) to the meeting.

The Chairperson also welcomed Melanie Godfrey to her first meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee as Director of Education and Lifelong Learning. The Director outlined the real need for there to be a cultural shift away from what is high stakes accountability. As a Committee it will mean that part of the work in terms of scrutiny will be to monitor education and drive forward improvements.

Cathays High School

This item provided Members with the opportunity to carry out pre-decision scrutiny of the proposals and the recommendation to Cabinet to hold a public consultation on the proposals for the expansion and redevelopment of Cathays High School in line with Band B 21st Century Schools priority schemes.

Councillor Merry made a statement in which she referred to the recommendation to expand Cathays High School to 8 forms of entry and to replace the school with new building accommodation on the Maindy Centre site adjacent to Crown Way and North Road. There are also plans to expand the SRB from 16 – 50 spaces and upgrade community facilities at the existing site.

Richard Portas advised that the lease with GLL would be reworked on the Maindy site. There is also a MIM proposal to design and build the school with Meridiam Investments.

Members were invited to comment, seek clarification, or raise questions on the information received. Those discussions are summarised as follows:

- Members discussed the sustainability of expansion of Cathays High School, the travel implications and the potential increase in demand for secondary Welsh Medium Education. Members were advised that a review has been conducted; there is a clear

case that the school will be increased to the right size. Cathays is the pressure valve for the city and provides flexibility. Working with developers to north and west of the city and that is expected to support the case for the school. There will be significant demand. Travel in to the city is a one route option. A school in that location is required, it provides future proofing both in the short term and long term.

In terms of travel, Active Travel is critical; there will be reduction of travel to Heath Park – the sporting facilities will be onsite and local. Catchment areas will have to be considered in due course, but provision needs to be in place.

A Welsh education strategic plan will be brought forward next year. There is growing pressure and there are plans in place for temporary provision where required at this time.

- Members asked for clarification as to what the envelope for the MIM model does not cover, it is limited to the school estate itself however the project will impact on the cycle track. Members were advised that the cycle track is not unfunded, it will be considered as part of the overall programme. MIM only covers certain elements and the other elements are funded like any other project. Budgets change as time goes on, for example Fitzalan and will be need to be updated. Any lead in costs will be met from the capital programme, including the cycle track which will be in the International Sports Village, it will not compromise any other Band B projects.

Members went on to express concern about the cycle track being moved bearing in mind its current location; is there certainty of investment; will it be like for like, i.e. an open air track; and is there a commitment that it will be in place before the current facility is lost. Members were advised that the relocation of the cycle track is seen as an exciting opportunity; there is to be a Cabinet Paper going forward in the new year in relation to the International Sports Village. There is an area allocated for the track. The benefit will be that it will link in with the other sports in the area. The minimum commitment is like for like, but there will be additional benefit as well. It was noted that the track will be in place before the school.

- Members asked for outline plans of the site, but were advised that as yet there are no designs; still looking at due diligence.
- Members asked why Cathays High School was being prioritised as opposed to others schools where demand for places is high. It was explained that there are a number of considerations; the condition of the buildings; catchment areas; and demand. In a programme of this scale resources have to be prioritised. Cathays is not the next school in line, there is a huge scheme in the Fairwater area at the present time. Other schools were

prioritised before Cathays.

Members asked for details of schools conditions in line with the projections to enable the Committee to consider the reasons for making Cathays a priority project over other schools. Members were advised that at the start of the Band B project a large prioritisation exercise was carried out. That process was not just condition related, it also included sufficiency of places and other key criteria. Other schools were considered at that time, and the decision was made to move forward with the current programme. Further considerations may need to be addressed in the future.

- Members expressed concern about the sufficiency and sustainability of SRB and ALN provision. There is to be an increase from 16 places to 50. Bearing in mind how quickly diagnoses are being made is that increase sufficient and sustainable. Members noted that currently there is a detailed assessment ongoing to consider the demand and the need to ensure that we can model the changes that are happening. Currently the various options are being mapped and the implications associated with that. SRB's are a good way of integrating children in to mainstream education. It is something that has to be built on. It is not expected to meet all the need within the City but work will continue to achieve that.
- Members requested plans for the consultation process to outline the timings and also the nature of the stakeholder engagement planned as part of that process. Members were advised that the consultation will be coming forward in February. It is a process that has been developed over the years. Engagement at the present time is more difficult and the best way of communicating and integrating with the community is still being considered. Lessons have been learned from the Fitzalan planning consultation, they have to be considered. There are a whole host of options from Social Media through to more formal means. However, more detail is required before it can be presented.
- Members referred to the suggestion that Section 106 money was being earmarked; what that might amount to in cash terms; and when it would be available. Members were advised that there is some for the area, it is for playground projects and not for the main scheme.
- Members queried the reference to community facilities being upgraded and whether the plans would be brought back to Committee for further scrutiny and would that information be included in the consultation. Members noted that the Schools organisation process is difficult on the basis that there has to be proposals and a consultation before any designs are finalised. The information, when available, will form part of the planning consultation. That is a robust process.

Ysgol Mynydd Bychan

This item provided Members with the opportunity to carry out pre-decision scrutiny of the proposals and the recommendation to Cabinet to hold a public consultation on the proposals for primary school provision to service Cathays and parts of Gabalfa, Heath, Llandaff North and Plasnewydd.

Richard Portas, Programmed Director advised that the proposal has the following elements:

- Increase the capacity of Ysgol Mynydd Bychan from 0.9 Forms of Entry (FE) to 1.5 FE from September 2022. The places will initially be located at Allensbank Primary School;
- Allensbank Primary School will be consolidated at 1 FE from September 2022; and
- A temporary increase to the reception year admission number from 30 to 45 from September 2021 if required.

A consultation will be required on these proposals.

Members were invited to comment, seek clarification, or raise questions on the information received. Those discussions are summarised as follows:

- Members noted that in the shorter term the proposal is to move part of the school (Ysgol Mynydd Bychan) to the Allensbank Primary School site and asked how interim that arrangement to be. Members were advised that the location of school places at Allensbank will only be utilised if there is a need for September 2021. There is undoubtedly a need to look at a long term solution.
- Members referenced the forecasted 29% surplus of English Medium primary provision by 2023 – 2024 and whether, in due course, there will be a need for there to be more effective proposals for both Welsh and English medium provision. Members were advised that quite clearly there is a need to undertake a full engagement with the community in due course about what the long term proposals are.

The population figures are dropping across the city, it is not unique to this year and there is an unusual configuration of schools in that locality. Site sharing arrangements are complex. Demand is being stipulated in accordance with policy.

- Members expressed concerns about mixed aged year groups which a 1.5 FE will necessitate and whether the increase is not just a funding decision as it is very difficult for the schools leadership to manage. There were also concerns about the impact on school leadership and governance between the parents and supported school.

Members were advised that a key reason for bring forward the 0.5FE was partially to protect Ysgol Glan Ceubal. The idea is to grow the catchment rather take from another Welsh medium school. Consultation has taken place with the Head Teacher and Chair of Governors, not only from Ysgol Mynydd Bychan and Allensbank, but also from Ysgol Clan Ceubal in relation to any impact. Further work is to be undertaken. Both schools will need to be consulted as to which year group should be moved. This is a model that has been used previously to grow schools particularly Welsh Medium schools.

There is as advantage on the basis that will be in the Foundation Phase and therefore not age critical. It will depend on the numbers that present, but in normal practice you would have 2 smaller reception classes running. If Year 1 and 2 there would have to be further dialogue about how the children become immersed and their level of learning. Conversations have taken place in which there has been confirmation of the need to stimulate demand and not shift pupils from one school to another thereby compromising their viability of the new school.

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.

45 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

No urgent items were tabled.

46 : 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.

47 : COMMITTEE BUSINESS REPORT

RESOLVED – To note the Report.

48 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next remote meeting of the Committee is at 4.30pm on Tuesday 19 January 2021.

The meeting terminated at 7.00 pm