

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

15 MARCH 2021

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), Karen Dell'Armi
(Parent Governor Representative) and Matthew Richards (Parent
Governor Representative)

Mia John (Youth Council Representative)

18 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Heather Joyce, Councillor Mike Philips had indicated that he would be late in attending the meeting and Councillor Mia Rees advised that she would have to leave the meeting at 6.00 pm.

19 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Molik declared a personal interest in Item 4 in accordance with the Members Code of Conduct on the basis that she has children attending school who are and will be subject to the schools admission criteria.

20 : MINUTES

The approval of the minutes of the meeting on 23 February 2021 was deferred until the next meeting of the committee on 11 May 2021.

21 : SCHOOL ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS 2022-2023

The Chairperson advised that this item enabled Members to carry out pre-decision scrutiny of the School Admission arrangements prior to its consideration by Cabinet on 18th March 2021.

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Sarah Merry (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Education, Employment and Skills); Melanie Godfrey (Director of Education and Lifelong Learning); Michelle Dudridge-Friedl (Operational Manager, Planning & Provision); and Richard Portas (Programme Director, Schools Organisation Programme) to the meeting.

The Chairperson invited questions and comments from Members, summarised as follows:

- Members discussed the secondary school admission data which had been published during the course of the last week and the likely data for primary school admissions. Concerns were raised in relation to the over-subscription levels; the length of residency and the risk of indirect discrimination bearing in mind the

additional homes being built in various areas; and the distance children have to travel to other schools which seems to undermine the Active Travel policy. It was noted that a substantial overview of the admissions policy and over subscription criteria had been undertaken in anticipation of the extra pressure on secondary school places by WIZERD. Length of residence, catchment schools; and issues of poverty, for example children who received free school meals (FSM) were all considered. It was felt that the length of residence could discriminate against particular groups of people, in particular those that are more mobile. One of the duties of the Authority is to remove or minimise suffering by persons who have rare or protected characteristics; examples of which would be gypsy traveller children; asylum seekers; and refugees.

It is anticipated that secondary numbers will continue to rise for a number of years, but primary numbers are now dropping significantly but there will always be specific areas which are highly sought after from within catchment or outside. It is expected that the overall population will reduce over the coming years.

Members were advised that the supply of places is constantly monitored. The amount of the drop in primary school places was not expected or predicted and the effect that the pandemic will have on those figures is very much an unknown. Catchment changes will be considered after Band B.

- A Member queried why, based on the oversubscription figures, Cardiff High did not figure more predominantly in the Band B school building programme, particularly bearing in mind children's welfare and active travel when children are travelling greater distances. The Cabinet Member does not agree that Cardiff High is the main issue when discussing the over subscription criteria; it is not about groups of children, it relates to every child across the city. In relation to schools such as Fitzalan, Willows and Cantonian they were all category D condition schools. In terms of Cathays there are already children in temporary buildings because of school numbers.
- Members requested information in relation to the how the predictions of figures for the future are worked out and referred to the oversubscription at Eastern High School, the new estate being planned for the Llanrumney site in 2024 and the development now on the old Rumney High School site. Members were advised that in terms of projections officers consider the Pupil Level Annual Census which provides details of children on roll in Cardiff. The data for that is submitted in January and usually verified in the June. There is also the information provide on the numbers on roll which does fluctuate. They allow for consideration of the number of children, the types of school and how historically choices and preferences have

been made. There is a 3 year weighted average that gives you an idea of where children will go through into the secondary system. When looking at those going into the primary system GP registrations data is also considered which give details of how many children have been born. Take up 3 year weighted averages are also considered.

In terms of new build sites the catchment area is considered together with the neighbouring location, the trends with regards to English/Welsh medium and faith, where additional places are likely to be needed and whether there are places available already. When planning permission is applied for the applicant has to set out the make-up of the housing they expect to deliver; there is supplementary planning guidance which is aligned with the LDP; it is currently being reviewed but it will tell you how many pupils would need to be yielded from an estate and what size school and number of places would be required to accommodate them.

It is a complex picture. The strategic response to the situation in Llanrumney, the decision was to invest in one school, Eastern High, which was larger than one of the schools but not as big as both schools it replaced. It did achieve a balance when it was opened. It has been successful, but there is places in that area.

- Members discussed school provision moving forward and expressed concern that a primary school had to request planning permission for demountables. It is a school with a large over subscription number. Members were advised that modulars are being considered as permanent accommodation, Ty Gwyn is an excellent example of this. It is important to have flexibility across the school system. Additional accommodation has been put into Cathays High School which is a good stepping stone towards their new build. Officers added that they were not aware of any school that has had to put own planning permission in; it would have been picked up.
- Members sought confirmation that requirements in relation to active travel and safe routes are met before asking children to change schools or use different routes to school.

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

22 : SCHOOLS/EDUCATION PANDEMIC RECOVER UPDATE

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Sarah Merry (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Education, Employment and Skills); Melanie Godfrey (Director of Education and Lifelong Learning); Mike Tate (Assistant Director of Education & Lifelong Learning), Neil Hardee (Head of Services to Schools); and Suzanne Scarlett (Operational Manager, Partnerships and Performance to the meeting.

Councillor Merry was invited to make a statement during which she confirmed that there was a shared commitment to ensure that the return to school is positive, it is based on re-engagement and wellbeing with support that can be relied on. Further, whilst we are concerned about the impact of the last year on children, it is important that we do not use language that suggests that they have lost out and that will stay with them. They should not become the Covid generation.

The Chairperson invited questions and comments from Members.

- Members asked that references to Looked After Children in the documentation is amended to Children Looked After.
- Members were pleased to note that over 20,000 digital devices have been issued and that those involved in education other than at school (EOTAS) have become more engaged. The Assistant Director advised that the intention is to move towards a one to one device led approach to the foundation phase and above. It will help with the blended learning approach and a change in the pedagogy that has been seen in the second lockdown phase. In relation to the EOSTAS pupils, not only has there been real engagement through the use of technology but also with engagement with youth services and out of school provision. They are all opportunities on which to build in the future.
- Members referred to the enhanced level of specialist support services and queried whether they are currently able to cope with the pressure on those services and how will they be developed in the future. Members were advised that through use of technology and the different ways of working better use can be made of the specialist support services. There has to be focus on the wellbeing and confidence of children and young people when returning to school. It is important to allow Teachers and Head teachers to teach whilst we put that wrap around support in place for them to be able to use for mental health, wellbeing etc. Linked to that is the summer engagement piece which will help in moving us towards the September full time engagement.
- Members referred to examination year groups returning to school this week and that certain schools have announced that exams and assessments will start next month. Members queried whether all schools are on board with the wellbeing plans in the circumstances. The Cabinet Member advised that she hoped and believed all schools were on board with the well-being agenda, it is something that they should be thinking about now. School Governors can also help push that agenda. The Assistant Director advised that in terms of exams prior to Christmas they were to be cancelled but it has only been in the last few weeks that the process of determining grades has come out to schools. There will be some exams; they will be class room based which is far better for wellbeing. They are also one part of the teacher determined grades. There will be coursework

pieces and prior assessments so that a rounded picture can be obtained to give the grade.

- Members sought information about the number of Covid cases at present in schools and the number of teachers who have received vaccinations. The Assistant Director advised that certainly before Christmas there was up to 60 cases a day. There continues to be cases with schools being open for vulnerable and key worker pupils. All primary schools are open from today. Numbers will rise, there is no doubt. Cases are recorded and are reported daily, we will continue to provide information about schools in your wards also. Vaccinations will build confidence; staff in special schools have been prioritised. It should be noted that, due to the age profile of staff across Cardiff, within a matter of weeks almost 60% will have had an offer of a vaccination. Schools also are offering staff lateral flow device tests (LFT's), twice a week on a voluntary basis. In just over a week 6,500 tests have been taken; there have been two positive cases and 14 void cases, where the device has not registered a reading. The two positive LFTs have resulted in positive cases. LFT's will also be available for pupils year 10 and above, they can be collected from school and take them home.

We will have them available for pupils year 10 and above – they can collect from school and take them at home. LFT's are used when pupils are asymptomatic. All contact details are sent through to track and trace.

- Members asked when engagement will take place with School Leaders in respect of long term strategic planning and whether there be will plans to respond to concerns about attendance where they may occur. Officers advised that the new curriculum and ALN reform bill are still on the horizon and that the response in respect of well-being sits well with the new curriculum, further, improvement partners will continue to focus on that when they are looking at the school development plans. Several focus groups are looking at a peer driven long term recovery approach. In terms of attendance, whilst it still does not need to be reported it is critical to work on it. There have been issues with online attendance, issues with the inability to engage over time and we have used the vulnerable learner panel to help reengage and to undertake welfare checks. It is important also to monitor non-attendance and non-engagement.
- Members discussed 17 – 18 year who are reported as feeling worried most of the time and becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training); whether there will be adequate provision; and how that can provision can be accessed by learners and families. The Assistant Director referred to the focus on school counselling and the support for our young children and how we continue to build a full package around schools. One of the opportunities that has arisen as a result of the pandemic is

the vulnerable learner panel, where those vulnerable learners have been identified across the city. Specific responses have been to the vulnerable learner panel for direct involvement with Children's Services and our own services. That has been particularly successful.

In relation to 16 year old transition into further education, Officers advised that the Youth Service have been working virtually and engaged those who have been previously disengaged. The level of NEET's this year has been one of its lowest ever but the level of support then has to be considered. There have been additional courses and provision to ensure that continues. In Cardiff there has been a broad range of support for young people.

Young people have indicated that they do feel they could benefit from school counselling, however, young people feel that it should be face to face rather than on screen. Those who need face to face engagement will be prioritised.

A school also needs to be considered within the community, it will be important to encourage continued parental engagement; to develop family learning; and to develop continued family and community support.

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

23 : CORPORATE PARENTING STRATEGY 2021 - 2024

The Chairperson advised that this item enabled Members to carry out pre-decision scrutiny of the Strategy prior to its consideration by Cabinet on 18th March 2021.

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Sarah Merry (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Education, Employment and Skills) in her capacity as Chair of the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee; Councillor Graham Hinchey (Cabinet Member for Children and Families); Deborah Driffield (Director, Children's Services); and Jade Harrison (Operational Manager for Service Improvement and Strategy in Social Services) to the meeting.

Councillor Hinchey was invited to make a statement in which introduced the updated strategy. It encourages Officers, Elected Members and Key Partners to work together to improve outcomes and life chances for Children Looked After and Care Leavers. Young people have informed us as to what has been working well, what has not been working well and what aspirations they have for the future.

The Chairperson invited questions and comments from Members.

- Members sought information in relation the number of foster carers who are not in house and in respect of Care Leavers 21% of whom may be facing homelessness and 93.7% in suitable accommodation and whether there are sufficient support

structures whilst they are in our care to address the homelessness issues and not being in education.

The Cabinet Member, in terms of suitable accommodation, the Right Home Right Support commissioning document outlines the various range of placements and support which will be required, including Stepping Down out of Care. Members were advised that temporary accommodation is deemed homeless, but it is suitable and appropriate but it can be effect the figures.

The Director indicated that there are 362 children and young people living with foster carers that are not in house with the local authority. The ratio is increasing although it is difficult to do simple ratio because things move about all the time.

- Members discussed their concerns about substance misuse becoming normalised in our society and amongst young people and whether substance misuse is an issue with children in our care. The Director advised that substance misuse would never be the sole reason. There has been a significant increase in parental substance misuse which impacts on whether children become accommodated and looked after. A preventative strategy is being considered for young people; one of the strands will be about substance misuse. It should also be linked with the Adolescent Strategy which will form part of the joint recovery plan with Education.
- Members queried the feedback from young people and whether the current data on improved recruitment has led to better relationships with young people. Members were advised that it has been common issue in relation to complaints bearing in mind the difficulties in establishing a stable work force. At the present time there are 52 agency social workers; there is far less turn over in permanent staff but a greater turnover in agency staff which means instability for a smaller number of young people. The problem does continue. Information about the number of changes of social worker can be provided.

If social workers to move on, a more robust handover arrangement has been implemented to ensure that next social worker that becomes involved in that case is totally familiar with the support plan going forward. This minimised the negative impact that the change will have.

- Members discussed the impact of the pandemic on vulnerable groups and whether young people placed out of area will not be disproportionately disadvantaged and any support for them will be as robust for them as it is for other groups. Members were advised that the plan is always to move young people back into area as soon as possible, but certainly when they are 16 as there is a robust support package that can be put in place in Cardiff. Regular monitoring of those out of the area takes place but

unfortunately, a minority of young people want to stay outside of the area; it is then far more difficult as we cannot control the approach other areas take.

- Members noted that 76% of Children Looked After have a Personal Education Plan and queried whether that is low; does it only apply in Cardiff or is it all Children who are Looked After. It does not appear to reach 100% and the significance of that. Members would be provided with that information in due course.

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

24 : YOUTH JUSTICE SERVICE UPDATE

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

Councillor Hinchey was invited to make a statement in which welcomed Angharad Thomas to the team and was pleased that Graham Robb will remain at Cardiff for another 12 months. The Inspectors were persuaded that there should be open letter to Members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committed in confidence about the progress. The feedback in December was positive and progress has been made and will continue.

Graham Robb outlined the following:

- since the report was written the strategic stocktake has been completed;
- we are now 6 months in to a 2 year programme;
- 3 workshops/sessions have taken place with staff and Councillors. It is important to keep a close eye on the priorities to ensure that Angharad Thomas has the chance to all the service development work she needs and wants to do;
- There is still more quality assurance work to be done and work force development;
- A lot of progress has been made on the health needs assessments; The sub-committee looking at this issue is to be far more about problem solving and getting better outcomes for young people;
- It is vital that we consider and be aware of the long term effect of Covid;
- There will be another full inspection between the end of June and Christmas. We will get some weeks' notice. It will be a 3 week process; and
- The YJS Board is beginning to look like business as usual now and a new Chair can be appointed this time next year.

The Chairperson invited questions and comments from Members.

- Members made reference to a Police and Crime Plan and the need for early, prompt and positive action to be taken. Members queried the reoffending rates and that the current average is 3.6 per individual in the first 6 months after the first offence and what

focus the service has on intervening with offenders who are reoffending, the nature of the intervention and whether those interventions are prompt enough. Members were advised that broadly speaking HMIP will consider 60 – 70 cases case in due course. They will meet the Case Officers and want to ensure that they know the children well and know what needs to be done and what will make the difference. The first priority has to be to look at children the system at the moment and be sure that a holistic view is being taken. This risks have to be clear; Good, clear, assessments of the children and the services playing in are a necessity. It is important that we have live re-offending data.

The Operational Manager (OM) advised that the focus of the services is now the planning and intervention. There has to be a joined up plan to enable early intervention to avoid reoffending. It is important that we work with the young person to create the plan rather than them feeling that it is being done for them. They have to own their plan. There has to have been some progress as in Cardiff the nature of the offences, when looking at reoffending, are less serious.

Members were advised that within the service, partnership working is working really well, but more work needs to be done in strengthening links with the Early Help Team.

Members noted the importance of completing the joint strategic needs assessment, it will inform as to what other partners may be needed within the community to support the young people. There may also be more sub-groups required on particular aspects of the work.

The Director advised that recently there has been some joint working with Health in relation to speech and language therapy; there is a high percentage of children involved in the Youth Justice Service who suffer such difficulties. Whilst training and pathways were reviewed by therapist, it is not seen as a gap it is something which needs to be developed going forward.

- Members referred to the reduction in case work and asked what that was due to Covid. If that is case what is in place to address the spikes as the recovery process continues.

The OM advised that there has been a reduction in the statutory case load but the Out of Court and Prevention case load is increasing. It was noted in relation to the total lack of Probation input in February in Youth Justice Service Case Planning Forums was due to no young people of that age group during that time. Members were advised that a Probation Officer has been seconded to the Team and the Sub-Committee is Chaired by a Member of the Probation Service.

- Members commented that the issues that have been raised

during this process are not just issues for the Youth Justice Service but for all those partners involved as well; Children's Services; Education; Community Safety Partnership; and Third Sector. The other services need to be held to account, they are societal problems and whilst Children's Services can provide some of the support mechanisms, the problems themselves cannot be solved without the input of all.

- Members referred to Quality Assurance as being a work in progress and what the priorities were. Members were advised that time is required to better understand the impact of the work that is currently being undertaken. It is not just about meeting performance targets is about better education and better outcomes for the young people. It is the long term impact.

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

25 : CHILDREN'S SERVICE QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE 2020-2021

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Graham Hinchey (Cabinet Member for Children and Families) and Deborah Driffield (Director, Children's Services) to the meeting to present the report.

Councillor Hinchey was invited to make a statement in which he confirmed that the report refers to a period from the end of restart phase, through the firebreak and through to the start of the second full lock down in December.

The Chairperson invited questions and comments from Members.

- Members sought clarification in respect of the difference between the family help team and the support for families team. The Director advised that Early Help Service is an umbrella for a number of services; The Gateway and Family Support. Those services are pre-statutory and do not sit within Children's Services and referrals can be made by other organisations. Support For Families is a services that does sit under Children's Services, but it is also pre-statutory and people can enter voluntarily agree to have support from that service.
- Members queried the information supplied, namely the percentage of children placed in regulated placements in Cardiff and sought information in relation to those targets and why the percentage of those placed in Cardiff was reduced. The Director advised that the targets were reduced slightly because there was an incentive; when considering regulated placements in and outside of Cardiff the numbers for those being placed out of Cardiff was increasing because more and more children were being placed with kinship and family. Our aim is to shift balance so that more children are living with family and friends and also to make sure children are not placed in residential placements outside of area.

Members asked for the information to be added to the Chart included with the report.

- Members queried the reference to the Social Worker vacancy target being 24% and the Social Worker vacancy 28.2 percent and asked for clarification of those figures. Members were advised that the aim is to reduce the vacancies, which are covered currently by agency staff. Currently the figure is 27%, 24% is the goal.
- Members requested information regarding identification likely to create a spike in Child Protection referrals when children and young people are back in the school system and how the system is geared up to cope with that increased demand.

The Director advised that there has been a huge increase in demand across the board. The figures do show this, it is predominantly because we have not been able to work in partnership during Covid, lots of the services have not been open. There has not been any scope to safely carry out Progression Plans in order to deregister children. People have quite rightly been taking a precautionary approach. Temporary funding from Welsh Government has allowed us to employ Social Work Assistants to support the Social Workers. 4 teams have been created in the localities as demand was so great. It had been hoped to employ some Adult Social Workers, Substance Misuse Workers, and Domestic Abuse Workers. They will be important in working with the parents. There has also been a big change in the Court work; do not get to Court unless the Authority wants the child or children removed from their family. As a result there will be a shift in the work force with the aim is to progress multi-disciplinary teams to wrap around the family.

- Members referred to Staff sickness absence and the difference between those in Children's and Adult Services, which has crept up above 13% again. Adult Service is about 8 – 8.5%. The Director advised that there was an increase during the last quarter, but the figure is now back within target going into the next quarter. Sickness absence is monitored closely; there are not many people on long term sick but it has been impacted by Covid and those who have had underlying health conditions.
- Members queried the increased budget for Children's Services this year and the increased resources, and whether that is sufficient to meet in demand. Members were advised that there has been increased demand over the last 9 months; it is hoped that demand will not continue to rise. The increase in resources means that we can link into performance reporting and the focus will be on shifting some of the budget out of residential and fostering and kinship which could help give families some additional financial help to support their own children.

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

26 : 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.

27 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

No urgent items were received at this meeting.

28 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee is to take place on Tuesday 11 May 2021. The venue is to be confirmed.

The meeting terminated at 8.00 pm