

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

19 OCTOBER 2022

Present: Councillor Bridgeman (Chairperson),
Councillors Davies, Ferguson-Thorne, Hopkins, Joyce, Melbourne
and Simmons

Co-opted Members: Carol Cobert (Church in Wales Representative)

WELCOME

The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, welcomed Emily Gao to the meeting in her capacity as the new Cardiff Youth Council representative.

11 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Patricia Arlotte (Roman Catholic Church representative) and Cllr Claudia Boes.

12 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations were received in accordance with the Member's Code of Conduct.

13 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting on the 5 July were deferred until the next meeting of the Committee.

14 : YOUTH JUSTICE SERVICE UPDATE

The Chair welcomed Councillor Ash Lister (Cabinet Member for Social Services (Children's)), Graham Robb (Independent Chair of the Youth Justice Board), Deborah Driffield (Director of Children's Services) and Sarah McGill (Corporate Director, People and Communities) to the meeting.

Councillor Lister was invited to make a statement in which he referred to the improvements made within the service to de-escalate the service from Stage 3 to Stage 1. The most recent inspection has showed that the Youth Justice Service (YJS) is a very different service.

Graham Robb provided a statement in which he too welcomed Emily to the Committee, bearing in mind that one of the key issues of the last months has been to ensure the voice of children and young people informs the strategy.

There were technical difficulties with the audio in relation to the remarks made to the Committee by Graham Robb who was attending the meeting remotely.

The Director of Children's Services outlined some of the points made by Graham due to the technical difficulties. There is now a management structure within the service that is providing confidence in terms of working with children and young people; there

have also been a number of attempts at a quality assurance framework, that will be going to the Board in the near future; and the Sub-Committee is now also working effectively. One of the things that needs further work is the Partnerships to ensure that children and young people, who are most at risk in the community, have easy access to health and all the other services that are needed.

The Chair invited questions from Members:

Members sought some insight and reassurance in relation to the ongoing challenges the service has to face, in particular in terms of capacity and court disposals which remain inadequate at the moment. The Director advised that there has been a commitment that the Operational Manager will only be focusing on the YJS and the number of managers has been increased as the inspection highlighted that the spans of control in terms of good and robust supervision were too broad. The Director confirmed that there are no problems in recruiting to that service.

Members asked about the partnership working with health; the particular challenges; whether the service was getting the input it needs; and whether there was anything the Committee could do to help. The Director advised that Mental Health is a significant issue and that in terms of a partnership approach that is working, the general health person brings to the table an understanding of how children and young people get into where they need to within the health service. However, further consideration needs to be given as to whether there needs to be a person who is more tied in with the CAMHS service involved.

Graham Robb advised that briefings for staff are happening over the next 3 or 4 months to ensure that the right data is being collected to identify that children are accessing the right health services to address their needs.

The information provided by Graham Robb in respect of court disposals was unclear because of the connectivity issues.

Members asked about the liaison between the Board and UK Government – probably the Ministry of Justice or the Home Office. It was explained that there were various forums going in Wales which then link into to Central Government. There are also links with the Justice Board for England and Wales which is an arms length body. There are various routes through which concerns can be raised directly with the Youth Justice Board or the Ministry of Justice when we feel that there are issues that need to be addressed, an example of which is the ongoing discussions about increasing the number of key performance indicators that we are subjected to and whether or not those being proposed are effective.

Members queried the increase in offending during Quarter, the reasons behind it and the action being taken. Bearing in mind the technical difficulties being experienced by Graham Robb the answer would be provided in writing.

Members asked whether there had been any engagement with One Million Mentors and were advised that certainly work was being done with St Giles Trust, Cardiff Football Club and various others, and that enquiries would be made about One Million Mentors.

Members discussed the partnership with education, in particular in relation to the Student Support Unit and reduced timetables and whether mainstream schools are taking responsibility for the students even though a significant proportion of their timetabled week is elsewhere. Members were advised that it is an area that needs improvement; there has to be an understanding of the detail, for example what does it mean when a child has an alternative timetable, how many does that mean and within those hours what do they actually do. Education colleagues are involved in that journey and are helping to ensure that those children and young people have got the appropriate level of education and support. The Corporate Director advised that the scene has been set for will be a very significant piece of work pulling together the services that need to wrap around our adolescent young people, particular when there has been an increase demand. There has to be a corporate approach as to how those services provided going forward. The YJS is part of that wider picture.

Members sought information in respect of the statistics provide in relation to the proportion of Black or Black British young people coming into contact with the service and the discussions taking place with the police about that feature of the statistics. The Corporate Director explained that currently information is being analysed that has come through from the 2021 census. The population base of young people in Cardiff significantly differs from the population overall; it is anticipated that the most recent data from that census will probably tell us something different from what has been identified in the report. An understanding of the detail coming forward is crucial to aid the discussions in solving the problem together. Members were advised that in certain communities in Cardiff, the YJS have already started working with the Police and members of the community. It is being led by the members of the community who have felt that they have not been able to or have been struggling to support their young people.

Members referred to the figures in relation to the number of young people aged between 10 and 14 coming into contact with YJS and queried whether it was a trend. The Director advised that unless children have been convicted of a crime they do not have to work the YJS but with the involvement of the early help services work can be done with them at a much earlier age undertaking preventative work.

Members queried the increase in referrals leading to assessment made to the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) in March and May of this year; the Director advised that that she did not have information about the specific referrals; sometimes it is about something happening in one particular community so it could be just a small number of children involved but individual referrals have to be made for each child.

Members asked whether those officers present felt supported by Senior Leadership; whether there has been engagement from the Public Services Board; and whether they could offer any further support with those partnerships – in health or the Police to ensure they worked well. The Committee were advised that the new Chair of the Cardiff and Vale Health Board has joined the Advocacy Board and she has attended her first meeting. The Police and Crime Commissioner and Chief Executive is there. It is a very high level advocacy group who are genuinely interested in trying to make a difference not just for this cohort of young people but also to see how the connections can be made more broadly.

RESOLVED:

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

15 : LOCAL AUTHORITY SOCIAL SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22

The Chair welcomed Councillor Ash Lister (Cabinet Member for Social Services (Children's)), Deborah Driffield (Director of Children's Services) and Sarah McGill (Corporate Director, People and Communities) to the meeting.

Members were reminded that a draft version of the annual report was circulated in the summer for comments and feedback; the amended draft report is being considered today prior to being presented to Cabinet and Council.

Councillor Lister was invited to make a statement in which thanked staff for their commitment and referred to the direction for 2022-23. He also referred to the challenges across Social Services throughout the UK in respect of the recruitment and retention of experienced Social Workers and the sufficiency of placements all of which have an impact on the budget.

The Corporate Director thanked Members for the comments provided previously, those have been considered and acted upon. The Committee were advised that whilst the report still follows a specific template it is hoped that by next year that will have changed as Welsh Government are currently considering amending the way in which this report has to be provided.

The Chair invited questions from Members:

Members referred to the interventions and reviewing hubs and queried their impact. Members were advised that a performance report could be provided outlining the difference those hubs have had for families, for children and also in terms of processes and numbers. The reviewing hub provides an assurance that we have independent oversight of those children subject to care and support plans and as a consequence of that oversight we have been able, when cases are not so complex, to use social work assistants to deal with the cases. Feedback from families is that the expectations on them are clearer; the outcomes they are looking to achieve and they support they will receive. It has provided the Judiciary with more confidence in the outcomes we are suggesting. There has been a delay in appointing staff; we have just lost a really good team manager to one of the posts we have advertised.

The interventions hub has been very successful to the point that we now have a waiting list. Those interventions will make a real difference to families and, over a period of time that they will be able to support themselves with without direct statutory intervention. The plan is to develop a business case so that the interventions hub can be enlarged rather than having to go out to the private sector to buy in more expensive packages of support.

Members discussed hybrid working and queried the use of agency workers living in London carrying out Teams meetings with families. The Director advised that she was aware of the issue and confirmed that the service still has remote workers,

although not in Child Protection. The expectation is that they came in at least half of the week to see the children, to do the visits and to go out to, because obviously you can't do child protection without seeing the homes and the children. Remote meetings are often the most effective use of team when you take into account issues such as travelling. More recently the young people and the families have indicated that they wish to continue with the use of hybrid working in terms of meetings. There are significant pressures in relation to the recruitment of social workers; if those living in London are willing to come to Cardiff two and a half days a week there is no reason why they cannot be employed. Remote meetings also provide staff with the flexibility to the timings of meetings. It is about what works for the family.

Members discussed the involvement of Welsh Government in relation to difficulties in recruiting social workers. The Director advised that they have been lobbying hard and as a group of Heads of Service have just agreed enter into a formal agreement, not a contract, in terms of agency staff. There are a whole series of principles; an agreement not to increase any hourly rates; not to employ social workers from another Welsh authority; not employ those that have left on a permanent contract as agency for at least 12 months. It will work until such times as you cannot attend the child protection visits; you will then pay more as you do not have another choice. At the moment it is difficult to say how it will work – will agency workers just disappear to England; they are still doing a lot of hybrid working. Welsh Government and Social Care Wales are looking at the whole area of recruitment.

Members asked what work the Council was doing with local colleges to encourage a career in social work and were advised that there has been liaison via HR with various forums with schools and colleges and events are attended to talk about what Cardiff has to offer, but the main priority has been to liaise with universities so that students in their final placements can do them with Cardiff. The issue is not with the recruitment of newly qualified social worker, there is a lack of experienced social workers.

Members queried whether there were sufficient safeguards in place to ensure that children looked after with additional learning needs are being protected, during the transition from the previous SEN code of practice to the new system. Officers advised that they had received number of presentations from education in terms of the changes and the impact they will have; there are also regular management meetings. Sometimes children with additional learning needs are not receiving the support they should because of the long drawn-out process to get that assessment. It is therefore vital, using all the formal processes that we identify where the children's needs aren't being met, or even the haven't been assessed, and that is raised at a strategic level.

The Cabinet Member advised that currently within Education they are considering a virtual Headteacher role, and whether a Headteacher role could be created to have that oversight of all children looked after in education.

With reference to a question about unregulated placements, Members were advised that unregulated placements are illegal; the legislation is clear but that more recently when it is has not been possible to find a place for a child at a Children's home a bespoke arrangement which is unregistered has to be set up. It is overseen by the regulators, CIW who send reminders about facing prosecution. It is something that is happening on a regular basis throughout the country.

It is necessary as there are not enough placements for children. Whilst there has been an increase in residential placements, it takes a long time to design and build a Children's Home, the registration alone takes 6 months. More recently there have been teenagers whose parents could not cope with their behaviours and placements have had to be found quickly, hence the need for the bespoke arrangement. It has been happening over the last 6 months. It is not something that the authority wants to do, many other local authorities are in the same position.

The Director advised that as a result of the letter threatening prosecution there is a need to attend certain panels, to write every week outlining what has been done to find a placement for those children, what is being done to keep them safe and what the arrangements are; how close it can be made to look like regulated accommodation for example using agencies that are regulated. There are lots of steps that have to be taken on a weekly basis.

The regulator requires attendance at a panel to explain and provide reassurance that we have done all that we can to bring the arrangement in line. The Corporate Director advised that the authority is very well aware of the requirements for and that, with the properties that were using, the rules are followed and we are careful about making sure that the support in place. The Committee were also advised that the outcomes for those young people in these bespoke arrangements are very positive. Steps are being taken to register the authority's own provision as quickly as possible to ensure that the best interests and needs of Cardiff's young people are served and that we are not just following the letter of the law.

In answer to Councillor Davies, the Director made it clear that she stood by the legislation in respect of unregulated placements, the guidance is absolutely clear, the requirements are to ensure that children looked after are safeguarded, they have the best in terms of property and the best in terms of staff support. There is a ratio of staff which is much higher than they would have anywhere else, we have found that they needed the period of time with that support, they have no other pressures or peer pressure. It has enabled them to reach a sense of calm and a lot of them have been able to move on. There has been such a change in their Pen Pictures over a period of 4 – 6 weeks which has allowed them to find a registered placement.

Members discussed out of county placements; there is a national shortage of residential provision across the UK but the long term aim would be for the children of Cardiff to remain in Cardiff. There are conversations taking place with Welsh Government about what the Council is doing to reduce the figures and to be able to confidently say that we are doing all that we can to safeguard and support a child or young person either to go back to their family or to progress to a placement. The issue of sufficiency of placements is about having the opportunities in Cardiff; we need to make sure that sufficiency in Cardiff so that children in Cardiff can be as close to home as possible to maintain family groups, schools and friendship groups. However, it is not always appropriate for the child and they may have to be moved out of county for their own safety.

Members were advised that some of the performance information talks about children within a 20 mile radius of Cardiff, this is due to the size of Cardiff, it does not make sense to just to stay within the boundary. Why would you move a child that lives with extended family just because they don't live in the Cardiff boundary; it makes

absolutely no sense, but it makes sense if you're performance driven in terms of improving the numbers. What is important for the child has to be the consideration.

Members sought clarification as to the security of the sources of funding for a number of the initiatives referred to and whether they will continued. Members were advised that the DWP was a grant which has since ended. There will be increasing pressures due to the number of care experienced children than are leaving care. There is still a legal duty for them to have a social worker until the age of 18, and thereafter support until they are 25. A personal advisor is a legal responsibility which does not have to sit with Children's Services. Into Work is Council run service, it is critical that there is joint working between Children's and Adult Services. There has been good work around the Youth Gateway ensuring that young people have got access to accommodation and support and building on that developing a more integrated set of provisions which is a start.

RESOLVED:

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

16 : CHILDREN'S SERVICES Q1 PERFORMANCE 2022/23

The Chair welcomed Councillor Ash Lister (Cabinet Member for Social Services (Children's)), and Deborah Driffield (Director of Children's Services).

The Chair invited Councillor Lister to make a statement during which he reiterated previous comments about the wish to provide as much of the detail behind the data as is possible. There are extreme challenges within Children's Service in terms of the demands and the complicity of cases.

The Director outlined the fact that some of the performance data is good, but that there was room for improvement. It is a challenging situation.

The Chair invited questions from Members:

Members queried the target for vacancy rates amongst social workers. The Director advised the service was on target with that vacancy rate; they are recruiting to all of the vacancies with newly qualified social workers; the number of placements offered to students has been increased so if they come to Cardiff for their final placement they are more likely to stay in Cardiff. There is not a problem in recruiting newly qualified social workers but having a service made up of newly qualified social workers means there is a lack of experience across the board. There is a lack of experienced social workers in the market so the vacancies are covered by agency workers which means there are no vacancies. Further, it is not possible to change the pay and conditions within Cardiff Council.

The Cabinet Member highlighted the fact that no social work post is uncovered; it highlights the importance that is put on ensuring that every child and young person, were possible, gets that support, gets that intervention and gets the oversight to make sure that we can safeguard them as best we can.

Members discussed social workers pay and conditions, there was an awareness that social workers could earn more in England, in fact just over the borders – Bristol or Hereford whilst still living in this area. The Director advised that following Job Evaluation there is a very clear framework in terms of grading; it is not within our gift to work outside of that. There is currently a market supplement, that has made a huge difference but it is not permanent, it has to be reviewed every year. Staff have been recruited on higher grades, but that has had a knock on effect, they have been paid more than those managing them. It is very difficult; people will be brought in on higher grades but they will be doing very specialist child protection work.

A significant amount of work has been done to retain the newly qualified social workers; a number of posts have been developed which are called practice lead posts, they are supported by the manager, but by a practice leads that try and help with Court, there is a buddying system and a massive induction programme. The feedback has been positive.

Members discussed whether conversion courses for those currently involved in similar jobs could be considered. They were advised that it is something that has been proposed.

Members asked for information about sickness absence and how they compare, bearing in mind the challenges faced by the service, with other publicly facing services within the Council. Members were advised that the sickness target for both Children's and Adult Services was set at the higher rate because the level had always been high. Children's Services has come in underneath the target for a variety of reasons; working remotely has provided more flexibility in terms of child care and other caring responsibilities and has therefore had a positive impact; and 23% agency staff – they do not go off sick because they do not get paid. In relation to a slight increase, this has been caused as Children's Services are not responsible for direct services provision, for example Children's Homes and if people are off sick they are not allowed to go in.

Members referenced the reduction in statutory visits and were advised that it is an area of concern; at the moment we are unable to confirm whether it is a recording issue or whether the children have actually been seen. A lot of work has been done in terms of trying to get resource assistants to work with social workers to make it easier for them to record information after their visits; you can now talk into your phone and it will translate it into text and put it on your case records.

RESOLVED:

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

17 : COMMITMENTS TO UNPAID CARERS

Members were advised that the Regional Partnership Board had released a Charter for unpaid carers and a companion document. It was considered by the Community and Adults Services Scrutiny Committee on Monday. A number of issues were raised by them but there has been widespread commendation for the Charter

RESOLVED:

To note the Charter for Unpaid Carers.

18 : CYPSC WORK PROGRAMME 2022/23

This item enabled members to consider and sign off the Committee's work programme for 22-23 and agree the forward work programme for October December 22 for publication.

RESOLVED:

1. To agree the forward work programme set out in Appendix 1;
2. To agree the scope for the SOP Task & Finish Group as set out in paragraphs 17 – 21 and Appendix 2;
3. To agreement the commencement of the EOTAS Inquiry Task & Finish Group as set out in paragraphs 22 – 25; and
4. To approve the Committee's Work Programme as set out in Appendix 3

19 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

There were no urgent items.

20 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting of the Committee is on Monday 14 November 2022 at 5.00 pm.

The meeting terminated at 7.00 pm