

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

15 MAY 2023

Present: Councillor Bridgeman (Chairperson),
Councillors Ahmed, Boes, Davies, Hopkins, and Melbourne

Co-opted Members: Bridgid Corr (Parent Governor Representative),
Celeste Lewis (Parent Governor Representative) and Carol Cobert
(Church in Wales Representative)

Emily Gao (Cardiff Youth Council Representative)

1 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Patricia Arlotte (Roman Catholic Representative) and Councillors Ferguson-Thorne, and Simmons.

2 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received for this meeting.

3 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on the 28 February 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairperson.

4 : CORPORATE PARENTING ADVISORY COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23

Members were provided with background information to facilitate a pre-decision scrutiny of the draft Corporate Parenting Advisory Annual Report 2022-2023 prior to its consideration by Cabinet on 22 June 2023.

The Chair welcomed Councillor Sarah Merry (Deputy Leader, Cabinet Member for Education and Chair of the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee), Councillor Ash Lister (Cabinet Member for Social Services (Childrens)), Sarah McGill (Corporate Director, Housing & Communities and Director of Social Services) and Matt Osbourne (Operational Manager, Safeguarding & Reviewing Hub) to the meeting.

Councillor Merry was invited to make a statement during which she thanked those officers who support the work of the Committee. The Committee's report covers the period coming out of the pandemic and the Local Elections which means that new members have been involved in the work undertaken by the Committee. The Work Programme aligns with the Corporate Parenting Strategy and the 5 key priorities outlined in the report; those priorities were set by children and young people.

Councillor Lister was also invited to make a statement who confirmed that there is more work that can be done to make sure that the Council hears the voices of all young people who are care experienced.

The Corporate Director made a statement in which she referred to the progress that has been made in terms of the connection from the Committee. A special senior management team meeting was held in December of last year to ensure that every part of the Council is clear about the role that Corporate Parents must play.

Members were invited to ask questions and make comments, that discussion is summarised as follows:

Members sought information about the Children's Services budget and whether it will remain the same. The Cabinet Member advised that the Children's Services Budget has become a key priority, not just for Directors but also for Operational Managers and Team managers to ensure budgetary pressures are controlled as far as possible. There have been some unprecedented challenges; however there has been a lot of work in terms of the accommodation strategy and recruiting foster carers, bearing in mind the bigger than expected costs in those areas.

Members referred the engagement session with some members of the Committee and care experienced young people who are part of the Bright Sparks group and asked to be provided with information about some of the issues raised. Members were advised that concerns have been raised about them being monetised – for example, them being placed in the accommodation of the highest bidder. The authority is endeavouring to ensure that wherever young people are placed is not about money but about what is in their best interest. It was a very positive session, they appreciated general conversation.

The Chair advised that the strategy itself was influenced by children and young people and referenced the importance of My Things Matter; the whole idea is that children and young people should not be packing their possessions in a plastic bag; it's about respect.

Members asked about the Colum Road Assessment Centre and how long is the assessment which takes place there and how long does it take to get them a place in a local school. Members were advised that the assessment process commences very quickly upon arrival; the time that it takes depends on the young person and whether the age of the young person is in dispute. Guidance indicates that the assessment should be conducted within 16 weeks; most are done within that time frame. They can be complex assessments. When the age of the children and young people is disputed, they are considered as children first, in most cases they are able to access school education. If not, remote learning opportunities are considered. Cardiff does have an advantage when managing the assessment process bearing in mind the Council's early engagement with UK Government in respect of unaccompanied, asylum seeking children.

Members discussed the nature of the accommodation at Colum Road Assessment Centre. Officers indicated it provides accommodation and is an assessment centre; those under and over 16 are not accommodated separately. If there are age disputes, they are treated as children in the first instance until the dispute can be resolved. In terms of provision, it is important to identify, understand and assess what a young person needs; some children and young people will have family members or connection in other parts of the UK so there are often reasons they may need to go and live somewhere else. If that is not the case, they will be assessed

and then moved on with the appropriate provisions in place. It is a highly quality assessment.

Members asked whether the Colum Road site is big enough, and were advised that it is currently meeting the need. It was not the intended use, but it has been extremely beneficial in supporting those unaccompanied asylum seeking children. Any future provision would form part of the wider accommodation strategy.

In relation to age disputes, Members were advised that age could be disputed at the time the young person gains entry to the UK. Information would be provided by the Home Office. In terms of the assessment, it is a national process where two social workers have to undertake the process; it has to be the same two throughout. There has to be a minimum of 5 sessions when they meeting the young person. It is not an exact science, however, there is significant case law which has to be followed.

Members were advised that their needs as children are prioritised, they are able to access the psychology service through ENFYS which is a partnership with Cardiff and the Vale Health Board and Children's Services. They look at the mental health issues. There are also multicultural opportunities and an advocate is also provided and is present at every session.

Members discussed the UBI pilot scheme which was something referred to at the time of Elected Members visit to the Colum Road assessment centre. It has been raised at UK and Welsh Government level. Members noted that it is a pilot for all children and young people who are care leavers, and it's about the most appropriate way to provide financial support throughout the pilot. There is strict criteria that cannot be deviated from, but there are regular conversations and feedback is being provided to Welsh Government.

Members asked to be provided with information about the 'Virtual Head Teacher'. Members were advised that members of the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee have had the opportunity of being provided with information about the Virtual toolkit which tracks the data in relation to those children in Cardiff schools. The Virtual Headteacher will be in a position to access all the data; she will oversee the education outcomes and have a whole team around her. The data has to be translated into actual outcomes. It is a role that is vitally important and is backed by Welsh Government. There are similar models in England and Scotland. The Committee were provided with details of the new appointment - Deborah Williams who is very well known within education in Cardiff. She was also part of the consultation into the role. The funding is initially for two years, but it is hoped with a great deal of lobbying that will be extended.

Members discussed what has been achieved in the last month, Deborah has been getting to grips with what the role is going to be; she has had the opportunity to go to England and Scotland to look at best practice and learn from their experiences. This will ensure that over the next 18 months the role of the virtual headteacher becomes invaluable and sustainable going forward with a view to further funding being provided. The role was previously held by a member of the LACE team, now there will be a team in place to assist and support her and will be part of the Educational Management Team.

Members asked about the removal of profit agenda and the response of young people to that. Young people felt that once you became a child looked after money was the primary concern, either of the local authority or foster carers. Anecdotally, there have been children and young people who have overheard those types of conversations; it is not right. It is about making sure a young person feels respected and are not just commodities.

Members noted that whilst there was not a link to the advocacy service contained within the video for which a link had been provided, every child involved with Children's Services, whether a looked after child or a child that is going to be placed on the child protection register goes through an active offer process, that involves the authority having an arrangement with an advocacy provider. In Cardiff, NYAS is the advocacy provider, they are a Charity. The support they provide is in relation to any issue at any time; and to make sure that the young person is fully aware of their rights.

Members referenced the 5 priorities referred to and what the authority wants to improve, but queried how the improvements were going to take place. Members were advised that those 5 priorities sit alongside information contained in the Corporate Parenting Strategy, which contains much more detail of will be done to improve those priorities during the next three years. The Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee looks at each one of those priorities to see what can be built on. There is also a Children and Young Persons Board, one of the key functions of that board is to drive the priorities forward. This annual report brings together the main themes. Consideration is being given as to how best to report back to children and young people on what and how their concerns are being addressed and improved. A participation strategy is currently being developed, consultation, feedback and an evaluation of effectiveness is to form part of that.

Members sought information about Voices from Care Cymru and the training they offered. Members were advised that they are a third sector organisation; they work with the Council closely, children and young people, they also challenge and have attended the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee and do that. They and NYAS are the largest advocacy providers in Wales.

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

5 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

No urgent items were tabled.

6 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting of the Committee will be confirmed after the Annual meeting of council on 25 May 2023.

The meeting terminated at 6.55 pm