

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

13 JUNE 2023

Present: Councillor Bridgeman (Chairperson),
Councillors Ahmed, Boes, Davies, Ferguson-Thorne, Hopkins,
Melbourne and Moultrie

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

Emily Gao (Youth Council Representative)

1 : APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR & COMMITTEE

RESOLVED:

To note that the Council, at its Annual meeting on 25 May, appointed Councillor Lee Bridgeman as the Chairperson of the Committee together with the following Committee Members:

Councillors Saleh Ahmed, Boes, Davies, Ferguson-Thorne, Hopkins, Melbourne, Moultrie and Simmons.

2 : TERMS OF REFERENCE

RESOLVED:

To note that the Council, at its Annual meeting on 25 May, approved the Committee's terms of reference.

3 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies or absence were received from Councillor Simmons and Patricia Arlotte (Roman Catholic Church Representative)

4 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

5 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings on the 20 March and 15 May were approved as correct records of those meetings and signed by the Chairperson.

6 : YOUTH JUSTICE SERVICE

The Chair welcomed Councillor Ash Lister (Cabinet Member for Children's Social Services) and Angharad Thomas (Operational Manager, Youth Justice Services) to provide Members with the quarterly update of the Youth Justice Service.

Councillor Lister was invited to make a statement, in which he highlighted the continuing focus on prevention which is focussed not just on Children's Services but across all services which engage with young people across the Council and that all those services are designed and led by children and young people to ensure that they are given the best possible opportunities.

Members were invited to ask questions and make comments; the discussion is summarised as follows:

- Members queried what would motivate a child to become involved in an incident such as recently happened in Ely and how do you ensure that participation in such behaviour does not become the gateway into more serious criminality. Members were advised that specific cases could not be discussed but made it clear to members that it was not young people who were solely responsible for what happened.

There have been a number of referrals from the Police to Crossroads, around 15 to date. There will be engagement with those children to start to try and understand their motivation in general around their behaviours, what they are doing with their time and they can be diverted to become involved in more positive activities. There are a lot of overlaying factors.

When trying to understand the reasons for a young person to get involved in a riot of this scale; it is likely there would be a lot of different issues; peer pressure around exploitation, the influence of families in particular parents; non-attendance at school. It would depend on the individual; there would be an assessment, it would not necessarily be about what is getting them into trouble but what is keeping them out of trouble and what is working well – the positive behaviours.

- Members sought information in relation to the exclusion figures and the data held, in particular the average number of days a person is excluded for; how many have had more than one fixed term (FT) exclusion; how many have led to permanent exclusions; and how much of a factor are exclusions in influencing how you deal with support for the young people. Officers accepted that exclusions are a big factor, FT exclusions more so than with permanent. FT could be 5 days, then 4 days then 3 days – this can culminate in a child having missed a month of school.

Kathryn Mogford (Crossroads Project Manager) was recruited into post just after Christmas, the post actually sits within Education, she monitors those who have left the service. She has a large amount of information, she has also been able to provide that challenge to schools from within education. Conversations take place with the school setting out the concerns and potential risks of any decision made to exclude a pupil; consideration can be given to restorative work being done within schools before any exclusion

takes place. Emphasis is on coordinating packages of support for children around the educational time table.

- Members asked whether there is sufficient resources to support these young people, and particularly in secondary schools - is there sufficient resources to provide counselling and support? Officers advised that each school has their own arrangements, some schools do and some don't have nurturing support. Education is not just about academia, there is a bigger piece of work around welfare and support. Schools do not have the resources or funding to be able to provide that. Schools need to be seen as more than just an education base to be able to access those resources. Members were advised that schools do share best practice; there are a number of headteachers forums and the designated safeguarding lead forum which would allow for this to be done.
- Members wanted to know whether it was felt that schools listen when concerns are raised by the YJS about the dramatic effect that exclusions have on pupils and were advised that schools and the local education authority are actively engaged. Having Kathryn has also helped; the challenge is coming from within. Schools have to think about so many different facets; everyone needs to take responsibility for these children. Education, Children's Services, Police, Housing etc all have a part to play, and children are at the centre of those conversations. There is a long way to go, but as a collective, there is a want to get the right provision and support.
- Members queried whether there is data to support that school attendance levels have an effect on Youth Justice services, as post covid attendance levels have reduced. Officers advised that the data could be obtained, but noted that the Youth Justice case load has dropped from pre-Covid levels. Cases were being kept open longer than was necessary and there has also been a shift from statutory to prevention; there has been a huge increase in prevention – now Crossroads referrals. Low attendance is now flagged as a risk factor, previously it would not have been flagged so quickly.
- Members queried whether there is sufficient resource and funding within the service should there be an increase in numbers accessing the service. Officers advised that there is sufficiency, it is a multi-disciplinary team which is at full capacity and there are other others who also provide support; Children's Services, Education, Police and others who help to provide the wraparound support that is needed.
- Members referred to the various projects, programmes and initiatives outlined in the report, and queried how would the impact of those projects etc be evaluated. Members were told that positive feedback had been received from both Cardiff City and the young people involved last year and for that reason the project is being run again this year. Some of those young people involved

last year are helping us to create the programme going forward. Also, the YJS office is being designed and decorated by young people, that is the foyer, the kitchen and the shared spaces.

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

7 : CHILDREN'S SERVICES QUARTER 4 PERFORMANCE 2022-23

The Chair welcomed Councillor Ash Lister (Cabinet Member for Children's Social Services) and Sarah Skuse (Operational Manager, Assessment and Care Planning) to provide Members with the quarterly performance information to allow them to assess the progress being made in improving outcomes for children in need and children looked after.

Councillor Lister was invited to make a statement, in which he referred to the continued changes to Children's Services with a focus on three areas; people, place and practices. He also referred to the increase in Children Looked After but highlighted the shift in the balance and sought to encourage Members to look at the breakdown of different types of placement.

Members were invited to ask questions and make comments; the discussion is summarised as follows:

- Members queried the percentage of well-being assessments completed within statutory timescales and queried the reasons for the reduction during Q4. Officers advised that there is a quirk in those figures on the basis that the assessment is not counted until it is finished. There was a push in Q4 to address some of the outstanding assessments; they have come through late. There has been continued progress since then.
- In relation to Q3, it is difficult to assess whether it was a good quarter or due to the Covid recovery; anecdotally it feels like the normal pattern of work is returning.
- Members discussed the target figures; why they are being missed and the why have a statutory timescale if it is circumvented by your own targets. Members were advised that there is no desire to circumvent targets; the targets set within the corporate plan are set taking into consideration that performance is not always needs to be, but the goal is always 100%. It is the signing off of the assessment which is not always done, not that the work has not been done. The target is not set at 100%; there are so many factors that affect performance. 100% is not realistic; we need to continuously improve. It is important to understand the reasons in completing assessments and constantly work towards minimising the risk of delay.
- Members noted the increase in the number of social workers and queried whether the target will move to reflect the fact there are

fewer vacancies. Members were advised that the target will certainly remain the same this year, however there will be discussions at Director level about the level of the target going forward. The Cabinet Member made it clear that any vacancies are covered where possible and, if necessary, by agency staff.

- Members queried the expected saving as a result of the reduction in the use of agency staff, and asked that the response be outlined in response to the Chairs letter.
- Members sought clarification as to whether or not there will be continued annual injections of staff – social workers, until the vacancies are eliminated and whether it is expected that the number of vacancies will increase next year as staff leave or retire. Members were advised that the reason for the large number of staff joining at this time is that newly qualified social works have just qualified and they are waiting to register, the same will apply next year as it is a 12 month course. There will also be turnover in social work staff - for a variety of reasons and staff will retire. Social Workers are now supported by social work assistants for social care practitioners so that the social workers can concentrate on what they need to do. It is vital that the new recruits are provided with the right support from the beginning and the right training to ensure that they have the confidence to do the job that needs to be done and to ensure they remain with us.
- Members queried the Intervention Hub – Think Safe! figures and why has the number of young people accessing it dramatically reduced and were advised that the information would need to be checked and further information would be supplied.
- Members referred to decrease and stabilisation of the numbers of children receiving Care & Support and were advised that there was an increase during Covid, so the decrease and stabilisation is not unexpected, although the figures are not reducing to levels they were at previously. The figures now are probably the new normal.
- Members noted the success/performance of some of the teams and sought information about their good practice, and how that is being used to build capacity in other teams. Officers explained that some teams have embraced week by week performance and have responded well. They are also teams that have a much more stable work force and are more able to respond. All of the teams have twice weekly meetings, performance is updated on a Monday, meeting on Tuesday and it is followed up on Friday. During Q4 there has been a change in the day to day data and hopefully it will be continued. There has been a sea change, social workers were exhausted, they had got into a rhythm of responding to crisis, but are now settling back into the pattern of day to day work, managing diaries and planning visits. To the teams it is not about performance and evidencing a visit it is about the visit taking place to ensure there is an intervention which will keep the child or young

person safe.

- Members asked for some clarification in respect of a) the percentage of child protection conferences slipping back because of quoracy issues; and b) the increase in re-registrations within 12 months of deregistration.

It was explained to members that it could have been just a partner agency that was unavailable which would have caused the quoracy issue – hopefully just an issue in Q4. However, the relationships with partnership agencies are such that there can be effective challenge to ascertain the issues and overcome them. It was noted that there were also some scheduling issues during Q4.

Members were advised that the risk of re-registration has been opened up because de-registrations are increasing which warrants a question as to whether de-registration is happening prematurely. The levels will be monitored.

- Members queried the decrease in young people having a personal advisor and were advised that it would also reflect the increase in Children Looked After. It is an area that is being monitored very closely. There is a strong young person's gateway within housing, which means that young people benefit from all that connected advice. There has also been a number of sickness absences which has had an impact on who can be allocated; however they do still have an allocated work from Children's Services and the partnership with housing.

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

8 : SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2022-23

The approval of the Committee is sought for the combined Scrutiny Annual Report 2022/2023, prior to its consideration by the Council on 29 June 2023.

RESOLVED:

- To approve the draft Scrutiny Annual Report 2022/2023; and
- To note the provision committee dates provided

9 : COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Members were provided with the following information:

- Correspondence update arising from recent scrutiny meetings;
- Update on the SOP Task & Finish Group;

- Update on the EOTAS Inquiry Task & Finish Group;
- Update on the RLDP Task & Finish Group;
- Update on other business consider by the Committee informally; and
- Update on the latest position in relation to the 2023/2024 committee work programme.

RESOLVED:

- To note the correspondence update;
- To note the Task & Finish Groups updates;
- To note the progress made in relation to those items distributed informally; and
- To note that a Work Programming Forum will be arranged

10 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

No urgent items were tabled.

11 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED:

- To note the date of the next meeting of the Committee is 4 July 2023;
- To note the future dates set by Council at its Annual meeting on 25 May 2023:
 - 4 July 2023
 - 12 September 2023
 - 10 October 2023
 - 14 November 2023
 - 5 December 2023
 - 9 January 2024
 - 26 February 2024 (Budget meeting)
 - 12 March 2024
 - 16 April 2024
 - 15 May 2024

The meeting terminated at 6.03 pm