

## CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

5 DECEMBER 2023

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

Co-opted Members: Patricia Arlotte (Roman Catholic Church Representative), Bridgid Corr (Parent Governor Representative),

Emily Gao (Youth Council Representative)

### 35 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Feguson-Thorne, Jess Moultrie, Calum Davies and Claudia Boes, Carol Cobert and Celeste Lewis

### 36 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

### 37 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting on the 14 November 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairperson

### 38 : CHILDREN'S SERVICES 2023/24 PERFORMANCE REPORT - QUARTER 2

Members were advised that this item would allow them to undertake a review of Quarter 2 Performance for Children's Services.

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

Councillor Lister was invited to make a statement in which he highlighted areas of challenge and improvement. Members were advised there continued to be challenges around wellbeing assessments, Section 47 assessments and core groups being convened on time. He reassured Members that conversations were ongoing regarding performance management from an operational line management level to front line social workers and reviewing the way the service was supporting social workers to carry out their role in terms of core groups. He stressed the amount of responsibility that was placed solely on social workers including business arrangements such as minuting and processing meetings. The focus was now on improving performance and progressing the workforce strategy.

Members were pleased to hear that the service was in a more stable position regarding the workforce and that the focus was on improving performance for some of the key performance indicators. Clearer targets and expectations were now in place for individual workers and teams and it was anticipated continued improvements would occur.

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

- Members noted that kinship care had increased dramatically and asked for clarification on how the decision was made on whether a child was placed with their family or fostered. Officers responded that robust processes had been put in place for assessing families and friends and ensuring systems were in place for identifying who children were living with either by family networking or family conferencing. The aim was that, following the outcome of parenting assessments, if a child was not deemed to be safely placed with their parents the Authority would already have details of the kinship. A more robust process had been established for kinship and fostering. Kinship had been moved alongside fostering to ensure there was the same access to financial and 24-7 support.
- Members referred to the detail in the report on the steps taken to improve the amount of accommodation available and asked if there was a connection between the challenges in that area and the Welsh Government policy of removing profit from care and if there was any financial contribution to capital costs of purchasing properties or if the funding was obtained entirely from the Children's Services budget. Officers responded that there was a contribution from the Welsh Government. There was a link to the Eliminate Profit agenda which arose from an in-depth review carried out by scrutiny to have a plan in place to build more children's homes run by the local authority and to be placed in Cardiff. The aim was to have good quality homes for children in the local area accompanied by good quality links with Education and Health colleagues. The need to build expertise around more commercial skills and liaising with the small not for profit providers was acknowledged along with the need for more capital funding and more access to revenue funding. There was a need to start scoping to see how much the plan would cost if all the children were back living in the local authority children's homes and to assess what the funding gap would be.
- Members referred to the continued pressures facing the service and if some insight could be provided on the way forward – whether it was a question of capacity (which hopefully had been eased with the reduction in the number of vacancies of permanent staff), the form of management, sharing good practice or a combination of all of those. Officers responded that it was a combination of all of the above. The reduction in the vacancy rate and more permanent workforce would result in improvements but improving performance management was crucial to ensure that targets were being met and children were kept as safe as possible. All management posts in Children's Services were now filled by permanent staff which made a difference in terms of being able to hold risk supporting staff and working more closely with families. Opportunities were being made available to social workers and social work assistants to develop and share best practice and practice matters was undertaken throughout the year. A Practice Leads Team and Academy had been established and over and above their line management arrangements there were a number of staff who were able to undertake joint visits. There was also an emphasis on partnership working and understanding what other partners could contribute and holding them to account in terms of their duties

and powers. It was also noted that although there was ongoing demand at the Front Door of Children's Services there was an increase in the ability to manage demand. Although there had been increasing numbers of children becoming looked after the actual numbers of children in regulated placements had only increased by 9 over the last three years. The majority of children were looked after by their parents or families, but parental responsibility was shared by the Authority meaning officers could intervene and make decisions.

- Members referred to the fact that there the report mentioned there were 23 care leavers without a personal advisor and asked how the service was addressing that. Members were advised that young people now had direct access to all routes. Officers responded that the Personal Advisor Service had moved into Adult Services due to the better fit with the Into Work Service. Members were advised that young people now had direct access to all routes. Officers were aware there had been some issues in allocating personal advisors but this was being addressed and there was confidence that the figure would improve.
- Members noted the proportion of care leavers who were not in education, employment or training in the second year after leaving care and asked officers how more could be done to support them as they moved into the adult world. Officers responded that this had become a priority on the Corporate Parenting agenda and the Children and Young People Board. Officers were looking at what was on offer across the Council for care experience young people and who was providing those services and if not, why not. It was hoped to understand the figures in order to meet the individual young person's needs, what their aspirations were and how the service could deliver those needs.
- Members were pleased to hear there had been an improvement in completion of Section 47 and Wellbeing Assessments, and the decrease in the number of young people on the Child Protection Register. Officers referred to factors such as having a stable management team in place, practice leads and the academy in place to support social workers to hold risk, reviewing hubs and safeguarding chairs reviewing cases on a regular basis.
- Members referred to the staff sickness table on page 12 of the report and asked if there was a reason for it being so high and the strategy for improving it. Officers responded that the sickness levels had been improving and as a result the performance target days for sickness had been reduced. Since the target had been lowered the levels of sickness were slightly over it. There were now more children's hubs in operation so it was expected that the levels of sickness would increase. It was noted that stress was a factor in social work and therefore a considerable amount of work was being carried out around wellbeing and support. Additionally, caseloads were being managed to ensure they were not too high for individual social workers.

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

Members were advised that this item would allow them to consider the contents of a presentation on Education and Schools Post-Pandemic Recovery. Members were noted that the focus of the session was to receive an update on this issue. A further deep dive would be undertaken at the March 2024 meeting.

The Chair welcomed Councillor Sarah Merry (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Education), Melanie Godfrey (Director of Education and Lifelong Learning), Phil Norton (Achievement Leader Targeted Support, Education & Lifelong Learning) and Jennie Hughes (Head of Inclusion).

Councillor Merry was invited to make an opening statement in which she highlighted the key bullet points of the presentation including Cardiff being the first UK city to be recognised as a child friendly city, the rise in Elective Home Education and the transfer from SEN to ALN. She stressed that none of the issues facing Education/Schools post-pandemic recovery were unique to Cardiff or Wales but they were UK issues. She noted that when the headteachers had attended Committee the issues had been around attendance figures rising again, but still lower than pre COVID, and some behaviour issues with the growth in additional learning needs (ALN).

Members were then provided with a presentation which gave an overview, position statement of the progress being made by education and schools. It was hoped that the slides would demonstrate the significant amount of work and progress being made by education services and schools. Although it was also noted there were challenges and pressures ahead.

The presentation included:

- Progress - Continuing to deliver the Cardiff 2030 Vision for Education and Learning (Educational Outcomes, National Reforms),
- Progress - Supporting Education Recovery Post Pandemic (Recognition of Cardiff as a Child Friendly City, Cardiff Commitment engagement, Review of Youth Service);
- Finance/School Budgets – Current Context; (Key Actions, Efficiency Board Arrangements);
- Children and Young People Safeguarding and Recovery Board; Children and Young People Board Scope;
- Supporting Education Recovery Post-Pandemic with a focus on Vulnerable Groups (Successful Attendance campaign, Discussions around changes to way School Attendance Officer operates; Team around the School, Increase in Elective Home Education, Increase in Permanent Exclusions and Fixed Term Exclusions since Pandemic);
- Community Focused Schools Cardiff;
- Attendance at Primary and Secondary Schools

Members noted the challenges in terms of the increasing number of children in Elective Home Education (EHE) in Cardiff resulting in an increased workload on the EHE team. In addition, EHE learners did not have the same level of contact with public services as those attending school. Members were advised that Welsh

Government guidance recommended face to face visits to those children but two charities had challenged the legal requirement.

In terms of the 2022-23 transfer from SEN to ALN Members noted an additional 131 additional ALN places had been implemented for September 2023 with a 20 further places planned for 2023/24 following completion of adaptation works.

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

- Members enquired as to the ALN process and if the timeline to obtain an IDP was of a similar length to a statement and additionally if the numbers of ALN and IDP could be predicted. Officers responded that the guidance stated that a school had a timeline of 35 days to work with the family and professionals involved and to write the IDP. The IDP was a more rapid process than statementing process and school based with the family being more involved in the discussions. In terms of numbers, the increase in numbers was in respect of the children with the highest level of need. Members were informed it was difficult to predict the numbers as it was a work in progress and further complicated by the transfer from SEN to ALN.
- Members requested the percentage of those young people educated at home. Officers to forward the information to the Committee.
- Members asked if as a local authority Cardiff had access to a bank of tutors with which to signpost to the parents of young people who were home educated. Officers responded that parents could commission tutors or programmes and online learning but as a local authority this was not a service that was provided, although the authority did have access to a small grant.
- Members enquired what process was in place for home educated young people returning to full-time education and if the numbers of those returning was increasing. Officers responded that once every two weeks a Fresh Start Panel was convened to look at home educated children. An agreement was in place with the Secondary School headteachers that they would give a fresh start to the pupils to avoid those pupils going into a small number of schools. Members were informed that the numbers of returners to full time education was increasing
- Members discussed the increasing numbers of families changing their minds and the number of young people expressing a desire to return to full time education. It was suggested that this could be adding to the challenges facing education/schools rather than reducing them. The question was asked whether the current arrangements around elective home education were fit for purpose and were the concerns being addressed with the Welsh Government and if there was an indication that they were reviewing the position as it currently stood. Officers responded that the reason for sharing with the head teachers was to share the responsibility with the schools so the young people did not go back to the same schools that were facing challenges. In terms of an analysis of what was being delivered – whilst it was only a statutory responsibility for an annual visit for home educated children where it was felt that education was not being delivered the Authority did not have to wait a

year to revisit. Ongoing discussions were taking place with the Welsh Government and this had been raised at a National Group level.

- Members asked if the children returning to full-time education were returning to their school age provision or not and what provision was in place to put them into a lower age group to ensure they achieved their academic potential. Officers responded that parents could request chronological offsetting for their child to put back a year. There were arguments for and against this but ultimately it was up to the school to decide whether this happened or not. It was a question of looking at the best option for the child going forwards.
- Members asked for clarification of the reasons why parents elected for home educated. Officers responded that the reasons included a belief that their child's needs were not being met, lifestyle and other reasons such as anxiety etc.
- Members asked how parenting groups were identified in Cardiff. Officers responded that there were many groups across the city. They were open groups for parents to attend and be a part of the discussion.
- Members asked for further information on how the 131 additional ALN places were spread out amongst the schools. Officers agreed to provide the information to the Committee meeting in March 2024.
- Members referred to the fact that a third of all school budgets in Cardiff were in deficit and many had used their one-off reserves set against a reduction in pupil numbers and asked what discussions were taking place with head teachers on the issue. Officers responded that the School Budget Forum would be the mechanism for determining school budgets and school resources and what it would mean in terms of numbers of staff and teaching assistants. Discussions would take in the New Year.

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

#### 40 : COMMITTEE BUSINESS

The Chair invited Alison Jones, (Scrutiny Officer) to take Members through the report which updated the Committee on a range of issues relating to the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee including:

- An updated CYP Work Programme 2023/24 for noting. (Appendix A)
- A copy of the Vale, Valleys and Cardiff (VVC) Adoption Collaborative Annual Report 2022/23 for noting (Appendix B)
- A copy of the draft Replacement Local Development Plan (RLDP) Joint Scrutiny Task and Finish Group report for noting (Appendix C)
- An update on the CYP School Organisation Planning Task & Finish Group and EOTAS Task & Finish Group

- An update on any informal business or updates received by this Scrutiny Committee for noting (including the Estyn letter)
- Links to the scrutiny of related matters by other scrutiny committees and other relevant council committees, which aims to provide Members with further information in relation to the committee's work.

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

- Members referred to the Vale, Valleys and Cardiff (VVC) Adoption Collaborative Annual Report 2022/23 and a reference in the report referring to the fact that the Adoption Services during 2023/24 had to find cost savings of 3%. It was suggested that in Committee's letter to Children's Services Members ask for views on the impact of those cost savings.
- In relation to the Estyn letter members asked if it might be opportune to meet with them. The Scrutiny officer responded that this was in hand and suggestions had been made for representatives from Estyn to attend the Committee meeting in March. She would update Members when confirmed.

41 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

None.

42 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To note the date of the next meeting of the Committee is Tuesday 9 January 2024.

The meeting terminated at 7.09 pm