

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

13 OCTOBER 2015

Present: Councillor Richard Cook (Chairperson), Councillors Boyle, Chaundy, Gordon, Murphy, Dianne Rees and Lynda Thorne

: Co-opted Members: Carol Cobert (Church in Wales representative) and Mrs Hayley Smith (Parent Governor Representative)

33 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Morgan, Mrs P. Arlotte (Roman Catholic Representative) and Catrin Lewis (Parent Governor Representative)

34 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairperson reminded Members of their responsibility under Part III of the Members' Code of Conduct to declare any interest in general terms and to complete personal interest forms at the start of the meeting and then, prior to the commencement of the discussion of the item in question, specify whether it is a personal or prejudicial interest. If the interest is prejudicial Members would be asked to leave the meeting and if the interest is personal, Members would be invited to stay, speak and vote. There were no declarations of interest.

35 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee meeting of 15 September 2015 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairperson.

36 : BUDGET MONITORING PANEL - MONTH 4 BUDGET MONITORING REPORT

Martyn Hutchings, Principal Scrutiny Officer, presented this report.

The purpose of this report was to provide Members with an update on the outcome of the first meeting of the Budget Monitoring Panel that was recently established by the Committee. The meeting was held on 16 October 2015 and focused on a review of the month four budget monitoring Cabinet report.

The Principal Scrutiny Officer briefed the Committee on the key points of the meeting. During discussion the following points were made:

- In respect of the Education saving 'staff realignment and re-structuring', Education was aware that Estyn would be visiting and this should have been factored into their proposals, rather than used as a reason for not achieving some of the proposed savings.
- In respect of the Business Support review, Children's Services appear to have submitted proposals but had not prioritised them. In relation to these proposals it would be useful to know what actions, if any, had been taken and when.

- It might sometimes be useful to invite officers to the meetings so that they could elaborate on written answers that had been provided.

AGREED: That the report be noted and a letter sent to the relevant Cabinet Members.

37 : CORRESPONDENCE REPORT

Martyn Hutchings, Principal Scrutiny Officer, presented this report.

Following most Committee meetings, the Chair writes a letter to the relevant Cabinet Member or Officer, summing up the Committee's comments and recommendations regarding the issues considered during that meeting. The key points raised in the Committee's letter are taken from the way forward discussion at the end of each meeting and captured in the minutes of the meetings. Responses are evidenced in future reports or copied to Members if specifically requested.

The Committee received a summary of all letters sent and responses received, together with an indication of whether the consideration of the issues resulted in any further action being required. The Committee also received a copy of all correspondence sent and all responses received since the Committee's meeting in July 2015.

AGREED: That the report be noted.

38 : NATIONAL ADOPTION SERVICE FOR WALES AND THE VALE, VALLEYS AND CARDIFF (VVC) REGIONAL ADOPTION SERVICE

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Sue Lent (Cabinet Member, Early Years, Children & Families and Deputy Leader), Tony Young (Director of Children's Services), Rachel Evans (Head of Children's Services for the Vale of Glamorgan), Suzanne Griffiths (Director of Operations, National Adoption Service) and Angela Harris (Regional Adoption Manager – Vale, Valleys & Cardiff Adoption Service).

The purpose of this report was to provide the Committee with an update on the National Adoption Service for Wales (NAS) which is hosted by the City of Cardiff Council and an opportunity to review and comment on the implementation and operations of the Vale, Valleys and Cardiff (VVC) Regional Adoption Collaborative for which the Vale of Glamorgan Council is the lead local authority. The briefing report set out key information about the National Adoption Service and the Regional service- together with some performance information for the period 2011 – 2014 and specific performance information for 2014 – 15.

Officers gave presentations on the National and Regional elements of the service, following which the Chairperson invited questions from the Committee.

The Committee asked where independent adoption agencies fit in to the new arrangements. The Committee was advised that the nationally the service works closely with them. Three of the four independent agencies are on the Advisory Group for NAS and one represents them on the Governance Board. The aim is to develop the involvement of the agencies across the services as a whole including

with the regional collaboratives. There are only two agencies in Wales that recruit and approve adopters, St David's and Barnardo's.

The Committee asked what proportion of children that are put up for adoption are from minority ethnic groups and what percentage of adopters are from those groups. The Committee was advised that there are only a small number of children from minority ethnic groups. There has been some success in recruiting adopters from ethnic groups but on occasion they are from outside the area.

The Committee asked why there has to be a national as well as a regional adoption service and noted that both have the same performance indicators (PIs). The Committee was advised that the decision to have a National Adoption Service was made by the Welsh Government. The National Adoption Service is a three tier service comprising of the national elements, regional collaborative groups and some local services. It is one performance system and that is why the PIs are the same. The collaboratives are responsible for delivering a regional service for the local authorities in their area within the context of a partnership agreement. The National Adoption Service is a network of independent organisations, including the regional collaboratives, Health and partners from the voluntary sector. Legally there is a link with all twenty-two local authorities and the five regional collaboratives .

The Committee enquired about the possible impact that the migration of large numbers of people into Cardiff might have on adoption services, and whether there will be difficulties in recruiting adopters for children who are asylum seekers. The Committee was advised that there is no current evidence that asylum seekers will need adoption services more than any other part of the community does. Migration into Cardiff will bring significant and complex pressures. The Director offered to return to the Committee at a later date with a report on asylum seekers and adoption.

The Committee asked whether the Welsh Government has given any assurances that the funding arrangements for the National Adoption Service will continue for some years. The Committee was advised that local government is now responsible for the ongoing funding of the National Service. Initially the service had been given a fixed budget but it is working with the Welsh Local Government Association to try and secure a funding arrangement that will cover core costs into the future, something which is needed in times of austerity.

The Committee asked if there are any risks that the introduction of the National Adoption Service will cause Cardiff Council to overspend on its budget for adoption services. The Committee was advised that there is no risk of that. The Council will hold the regional service to account; the scrutiny of the National Adoption Service as a whole is done through other means, ultimately by Welsh Ministers. If it is a success then a lot of money will be saved because children who are up for adoption will be placed more quickly and so move out of local authority care, which is costly.

The Committee asked officers to comment on the fact that Wales has a larger number of children in care than other parts of the UK. The Committee was advised that there are many complex reasons for this but the main thing to be borne in mind is that there is no right number when it comes to children placed for adoption. It is always about making the right decision for each individual child.

The Committee asked how long it takes to assess and approve prospective adopters and whether children are ever placed with adopters outside Wales. The Committee was advised that placements are made outside Wales where there is a need and where an appropriate placement in Wales cannot be made. Where an adoption agency or regional collaboration cannot make a placement within its own resources an interagency fee is paid which is based on a national formula reflecting the costs of assessing the adopters. With regard to the duration of assessments, Members were advised that the requirement is that Welsh Government guidance indicates that the assessment process should, optimally, take about eight months but the aim is to complete it in a shorter time than that. Performance for 2014/15 was an average of just over nine months. Recruitment is less of a problem than matching. There are various ways of matching children with approved adopters and these include things like child profiles and activity days where children and adopters can meet.

The Committee noted that between different areas of Wales there are large discrepancies in performance and suggested that these gaps have to be closed. The Committee also suggested that there are clearly issues when it comes to the adoption of older children and commented that the report does not provide much data on the numbers of older children coming into the system. The Committee was advised that just a year ago Members would not have had access to any of the data that is provided in the report because the systems were not in place to bring it all together. The process of understanding and responding to the data gathered by the NAS performance Measurement System has now commenced and will develop from now onwards.

The Committee asked officers how they saw scrutiny following through on the whole process for the whole of the region. The Committee was advised that all of the collaboratives have a seat on the Governance Board and ministers from the Welsh Government will also scrutinise the national arrangements.

The Chairperson thanked the Cabinet Member and officers for attending the meeting, for their presentations and for answering questions from Members.

AGREED: That the Chairperson on behalf of the Committee writes to the Cabinet Member highlighting the issues raised during the Way Forward discussion.

39 : WAY FORWARD

During the Way Forward discussion the Committee agreed the content of the letter that the Chairperson would send to the Cabinet Member on behalf of the Committee, highlighting the issues raised and comments made in relation to the agenda items that had been discussed during the meeting.

40 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on 10 November 2015 at 2.30pm in Committee Room 4, County Hall.

The meeting terminated at 6.55 pm