

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND ON TUESDAY, 2 SEPTEMBER 2014 AT 2.00 PM

Present:

Councillor EP Foley – Chairperson

Councillor D K Edwards	Councillor C A Green	Councillor D M Hughes
Councillor P N John	Councillor M Jones	Councillor D G Owen
Councillor G Phillips	Councillor C E Rees	Councillor R L Thomas
Councillor H J Townsend	Councillor C Westwood	Councillor R E Young

Officers:

R Keepins	-	Scrutiny Officer
A Rees	-	Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees

Invitees:

Councillor H J David	-	Cabinet Member - Children and Young People
C Turner	-	Head of Safeguarding and Family Support
N Echanis	-	Head of Strategy, Partnerships and Commissioning
J Brooks	-	Group Manager Business Support
R Davies	-	Group Manager Business Strategy and Performance
C Dyer	-	Youth Offending Team Manager

122. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from the following Members for the reasons so stated:

Councillor D B F White	-	Work Commitments
D McMillan (Corporate Director Children)	-	Leave
Mr H Daniel	-	Work Commitments
Mr R Thomas	-	Work Commitments

123. WELCOME

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor D M Hughes who was attending her first meeting of the Committee and welcomed Rachel Keepins, Scrutiny Officer who had returned from maternity leave.

124. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Mr W Bond declared a personal interest in agenda item 6 – Rota Visiting and item 7 – Learner Travel Policy as his daughter is a user of both services.

Mr T Cahalane declared a personal interest in agenda item 7 – Learner Travel Policy as his children are users of the service.

125. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee of 10 June 2014 were approved as a true and accurate record.

126. PLACEMENTS AND PERMANENCY STRATEGY

The Head of Safeguarding and family Support presented a report on the Placements and Permanency Strategy which aimed to reduce the numbers of Looked After Children in Bridgend.

He reported that a project manager had been appointed for a 14 month period to manage the strategy. He reassured the Committee that despite the high level of Looked After Children in the County Borough children were taken into care for the right reasons to ensure their safety and protection. He stated that the Council would only take a child into care as a last resort but in some cases would have to take that decision when it was correct to do so, however there would always be a cohort of looked after children.

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support informed the Committee that the Project Manager appointed would be leading on the Strategy and the PLO Process and he was grateful for the Support of the Committee in securing this additional resource.

The Committee questioned the level of permanency of staffing the team responsible for delivering the Strategy. The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support informed the Committee that there was no permanency team and there were currently three vacancies for social workers, it was aimed to recruit experienced practitioners. He informed the Committee that he had recently presented certificates to 3 first year social workers that had completed their first year in practice and had had mixed reactions as not all had been able to protect all of them. He stated that the Council was able to attract newly qualified social workers as it was considered innovative and fresh in its approach. However there was a need to provide newly qualified social workers with support and that due to pressures on the Service, newly qualified social workers had been allocated Looked After Children cases.

The Committee questioned whether other agencies had signed up to the Placement and Permanency Strategy and questioned the ownership of the Strategy. The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support stated that the Placement and Permanency Strategy is an inter-agency strategy which is owned by the Western Bay Safeguarding Board and overseen by the LAC Strategy Board. The Committee asked how the Strategy could be escalated to Chief Executive level, due to demands being placed on the Looked After Children and the national picture. The Committee considered that there was good day to day management of Looked After Children by the agencies but there was a need for the strategic leaders to consider the strategic leadership of the Strategy. The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support informed the Committee that he regularly briefed the Chief Executive on Looked After Children as it is a Corporate priority and stated that he would welcome the opportunity of presenting the Placement and Permanency Strategy to the Local Service Board. He informed the Committee that Police Officers are trained in relation to the completion forms for Looked After Children and each morning a designated social worker will meet with the Police Inspector for Child Protection in relation to Looked After Children cases reported in the previous day. He stated that the service had been commended. The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support stated that there were key recurrent themes of substance and alcohol misuse which were considered by the Western Bay Safeguarding Board in relation to Looked After Children.

The Committee considered that the national picture in relation to Looked After Children needed strategic leadership.

The Committee questioned the reasons for the vacancies for social workers. The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support informed the Committee that the vacancies were attributable to some resignations and also dismissals. Some staff had left the Authority to seek promotion in other local authorities. He informed the Committee that approximately 40% of social workers employed by the Authority did not live within the County Borough. He also informed the Committee that the Safeguarding Teams had been reorganised from four to five teams as the teams were previously quite large. Funding had been received to recruit an additional Manager which enabled the Authority to have greater interaction with other agencies. He stated that having smaller teams brought about a lack of resilience, in relation to sickness absence for example, and therefore the move was currently being reconsidered.

The Committee expressed concern if there were resilience issues within the Service. The Cabinet Member Children and Young People informed the Committee that the Workforce Development Group was addressing issues of resilience in safeguarding. He reassured the Committee that the Council was not in a state of crisis and that although it had an inexperienced workforce, all authorities struggled to recruit experienced social workers. He stated that the Workforce Development Group was at its early stages and that a recruitment campaign was being developed nationally for the recruitment of social workers. The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support reassured the Committee that newly qualified social workers were mentored both as a group and individually. He stated that whilst it was difficult to protect social workers they were given support in complex cases and that all the team managers were co-located. It was aimed to recruit experienced social workers and that agency staff were being used in order to keep children safe.

The Committee questioned whether staff were worried about the Western Bay Project. The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support informed the Committee that social workers were fully engaged in the Regional Adoption Service and that the Youth Offending Service across Western Bay was at an advanced stage. He stated that the vacancies had not come about as a result of pressure being put on staff and that there had been a number of internal promotions. He informed the Committee that social work is very challenging work.

The Committee questioned whether there was any evidence to show that the process to identify young people on the edge of care and the reallocation of funding to offer respite as a preventative edge of care service was working. The Head of Strategy Partnerships and Commissioning informed the Committee that work had commenced to look at children on the edge of care, with 20 children being targeted and it was likely that the target would be exceeded and they would be able to remain with their families. She stated that she would be happy to provide figures to the Committee in relation to the Edge of Care Project. The Head of Strategy, Partnerships and Commissioning also informed the Committee that the Early Intervention Strategy had been written and would be presented to the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee. The Committee considered the need for Corporate Parenting reports to be presented to this Committee.

Concern was expressed by the Committee that the average days lost due to sickness across the Children's Directorate was 11.4 days exceeding the target of 9.1 days since the CSSIW Inspection. The Cabinet Member - Children and Young People reassured the Committee that the impetus had not been lost in relation to sickness absence across the Children's Directorate. He stated that there had been significant investment in the Children's Directorate since it had left the protocol by increasing the number of

Safeguarding Teams. He stated that there was always a need to improve, but he was reassured by the CSSIW regarding the review of safeguarding arrangements. He was also reassured that the Council was keeping children safe, but was concerned at the rise of the numbers of Looked After Children. There was a need to focus energies to ensure that children who have returned to their families are kept safe and to minimise the risk of that approach. He was confident that the Authority's social workers will take a child at risk into care.

The Committee questioned whether exit interviews were conducted with social workers who are leaving the Authority. The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support confirmed that exit interviews were conducted with social workers leaving the Authority. He informed the Committee that due to the nature of social work, many social workers suffer from professional burn out, but equally other social workers thrived on working in a highly pressurised response environment, whilst other social workers go down the management route and some social workers leave to work in other areas of social work. He informed the Committee that a cohort of local Looked After Children were surveyed who felt that their social worker did the best for them.

The Committee questioned whether the increase in foster caring would benefit the Adoption Service. The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support informed the Committee that there was still a need to increase 'In House' foster carers, however, they had had recent success, with seven sets of foster carers crossing over from the independent sector in the last few months equating to approximately 20-25 placements for children. This had been achieved despite foster carers in the independent sector earning more than local authority ones. In addition to this, Resolutions Fostering Service had disbanded and 17 out of 19 foster carers chose to continue to foster through the Council. The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support informed the Committee that the adoption service is one of the highest performing services in Wales and it had doubly exceeded its target, with 25 children being adopted. He stated that there was an expectation by the Deputy Minister that the Adoption Service delivers. He also informed the Committee that there was a need to focus on where a child had been placed with foster carers and that 29 children had ceased to become Looked After Children, but were subject to family arrangements orders. The Cabinet Member Children and Young People informed the Committee that the timescale for adoption was now in months and that a very robust process was in place. He informed the Committee that he was reassured by the Head of Safeguarding and Family Support in light of recent events in Rotherham.

Conclusions: Following the Committee's consideration of the report and its appendices, Members wished to make the following conclusions:

- Members requested that they receive the updated action plan in which other agencies have now been identified under certain workstreams.
- Members recognised the day to day links and work between social services and the police, however commented that these were informal arrangements. In order to ensure that the police are more involved in children's services, the Committee recommends that a Senior representative of the Police Force be sought to sit on the Permanency and Placement Board.
- Members highlighted the high rate of LAC within the Borough, with Bridgend reportedly being the fourth highest in Wales for numbers of LAC. Members commented that the numbers indicate a variety of issues at a local level that are directly

linked to child protection such as domestic violence, mental health issues and alcohol and drug misuse.

- Whilst recognising the multi-agency involvement in the Strategy, Members proposed the need to raise the profile of the growing numbers of LAC with all organisations involved; recommending that the Strategy be held by Chief Officers of all organisations with one clear Strategic Lead. The issue of rising numbers of LAC should thus inform the work of key strategic partnership boards such as the Local Service Board and the Community Safety Partnership Board; ensuring that all partners are committed to working together under the same priorities and ensuring clear lines of accountability and responsibility.
- Members expressed concern over the workforce resilience and retention to take forward and achieve the Placement and Permanency Strategy and its associated actions. Members agreed they would consider this in more detail at their next Committee meeting under the item on the Social Services Workforce Plan.
- The Committee requested that they receive the latest figures for the Edge of Care Project informally.

127. IMPLEMENTATION OF A SINGLE YOUTH OFFENDING SERVICE ACROSS WESTERN BAY

The Scrutiny Officer presented a report relating to the Western Bay Youth Justice and Early Intervention Service. The Head of Strategy Partnerships and Commissioning reported on progress being made with the creation with Western Bay Youth Justice and Early Intervention Service. The Cabinets of Swansea, Neath Port Talbot and Bridgend Councils in April 2014 gave agreement for the amalgamation to take place. The Management Board is chaired by the Director of Social Services of Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council with Bridgend being the Lead Authority. She stated that there had been a great deal of activity to progress the amalgamation, however, the recruitment of the overall Group Manager and three Locality Managers had been delayed due to ongoing negotiations with the trade unions in relation to the staffing structure beneath the Locality Managers. A point had now arisen whereby the Group Manager would be appointed as a Bridgend County Borough Council employee.

The Committee referred to Bridgend being the Lead Authority and responsible for the pooled budget and questioned what would happen if there was an overspend. The Head of Strategy Partnerships and Commissioning informed the Committee that Swansea Council had not achieved its savings and the authorities were indemnified before it assumed any responsibility.

The Committee questioned the reason for the high costs of the service of Neath Port Talbot Council. The Youth Offending Team Manager explained this was due to them occupying two buildings instead of one building. She stated that once the merger was in place there would be continuous savings.

The Committee questioned the contributions made to the Youth Offending Service from its partners. The Youth Offending Team Manager stated that contributions were made to the service with the provision of staff, with only a small amount of monetary input. The Head of Strategy Partnerships and Commissioning informed the Committee that

there were a number of grant sources which fund the Youth Offending Service and it was not all Council funded.

The Committee questioned whether scrutiny arrangements had been developed in relation to the single Youth Offending Service. The Head of Strategy Partnerships and Commissioning informed the Committee that scrutiny arrangements for the project would need to be resolved at Board level.

Conclusions: The Committee concluded to revisit the item in approximately 12 months to consider the following:

- Concerns over funding for the YOS given the uncertainty over the future funding positions for the three Local Authorities.
- The Governance Structure of Western Bay and where Scrutiny fits into this structure.

128. ROTA VISITING

The Scrutiny Officer presented a report on Rota Visiting in relation to the Council's Children's Social Care establishments.

A Committee Member, as an advocate of young people, expressed a preference for more opportunities for Members to visit children's homes. The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support informed the Committee that there is a requirement for premises to be visited once a month. The Group Manager - Business Support confirmed the arrangements for establishments to be visited once a month, however there were ten teams of Members and eleven homes to visit. The Group Manager - Business Support stated that additional Rota Visits per month could be scheduled.

The Committee stated that the Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee had considered an opt-out system in relation to Rota Visiting. The Group Manager - Business Support informed the Committee that she was awaiting the outcome of this Committee prior to progressing the opt-in/out system proposed.

Conclusions: Members expressed disappointment at the overall number of Members involved in the Rota Visiting Scheme as well as the turnout of Members for scheduled visits, both equating to less than half.

Given that each Member is a Corporate Parent and therefore has legal responsibilities under the Children Act 2004 for the care of all Looked After Children within the County Borough, the Committee felt that more Members should be signing up to the Rota Visiting Scheme.

Following their discussions with Officers, the Committee determined to make the following suggestions for changes to the Rota Visiting Scheme to try and increase the numbers of Members involved and try to encourage more Members to attend the scheduled visits:

- An 'Opt Out' system rather than an 'Opt In' one, where Members would be automatically signed up to the scheme unless they requested otherwise;
- An expressed preference from Members as to whether they would prefer to visit Children's housing establishments or Adults;

- An expression from Members as to how many visits they could undertake in a month.

129. LEARNER TRAVEL POLICY

The Scrutiny Officer presented a report in relation to the composition with regard to Learner Travel arrangements in Bridgend.

The Committee questioned the timing of the consultation which was to commence on the 29 September when many of the governing bodies would have held their statutory meetings by that date. The Group Manager Business Strategy and Performance confirmed the timescale for the consultation period of the 29 September to the 15 December, which had to fit in with the Admissions Policy and should that timescale not be met it would delay the Learner Travel Policy by a further year. He confirmed that once the consultation ends it would be brought back to this Committee prior to a decision being made to Cabinet. As part of the consultation, there would be public meetings with the Youth Council.

The Committee noted the appointment of a Project Manager which recognised the importance of the Policy and requested an assurance that the new Policy would be written in plain English. The Group Manager Business Strategy and Performance confirmed that the Communications Team had been engaged in the Policy and that the questions in the Consultation would be written for a reading age of 9 years to ensure it was understood by all and that there was sufficient explanation behind the questions.

The Committee questioned the lack of reference to transport of 14 to 19 year olds. The Head of Strategy Partnerships and Commissioning informed the Committee that 14 to 19 year old pupils in Learning Pathways would not be affected by the Policy and that schools would make those arrangements for travel and share costs. However the Policy would look at post 16 education.

The Committee considered that there was a need to have equality of treatment with the further education sector, which would be part of the consultation.

The Committee questioned whether there would be additional funding for transporting students to college. The Head of Strategy Partnerships and Commissioning informed the Committee that should there be a decision to remove funding for travel for post 16 education, the college may fund it themselves. The Committee questioned whether post 16 transport would be considered as a whole or would post 16 schools and post 16 further education be considered as separate entities. The Group Manager Business Strategy and Performance informed the Committee that post 16 education would be treated as one regardless of whether students were attending school or college.

The Committee questioned whether the reduction in costs to Learner Travel by Neath Port Talbot and Swansea councils had been considered. The Head of Strategy Partnerships and Commissioning informed the Committee that very few local authorities had undergone the process of reviewing Learner Travel following the new guidance as many had already changed their policies to the statutory minimum a number of years ago. The Authority had looked at these but have also been looking at the experiences of councils in England. She added that there has been no evidence in either England or Wales that indicates any reduction in the take up of post-16 education following the removal of post-16 transport.

Conclusions: Following consideration of the report and the planned consultation process, the Committee concluded to make the following suggestions to Officers:-

- That the proposals are set out clearly and in plain English so that all consultees, such as parents, teachers, pupils etc can easily understand them and are able to provide an informed response;
- To ensure consistency of treatment with other teaching unions, the University and College Union be included in the Consultative Panel Focus Group;
- That Bridgend College representatives and Parent Governors be included in the Focus Groups;
- That in addition to e-mails being sent to Councillors, an informative e-mail is also sent to all Governors to inform them of the consultation exercise and the proposals;
- That Head Teachers are contacted and asked to bear in mind that the date of the start of the consultation may be after their School Governors termly meeting and therefore an additional meeting may be required to consider the proposals.

Members also proposed that the Further Education Sector be approached at the earliest possible convenience to determine whether they could contribute to transport costs for pupils.

130. **INFORMATION REPORT - PERFORMANCE**

The Scrutiny Officer reported on the year-end performance relating to its area of responsibility.

Conclusions: The Committee noted the content of the Information Report and Appendices.

131. **SOCIAL SERVICES ANNUAL REPORTING FRAMEWORK**

The Scrutiny Officer presented a report which updated the Committee on the work of the Joint Research and Evaluation Panel held on the Social Services Annual Reporting Framework in June 2014.

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support thanked the scrutiny process for its examination of the Social Services Annual Reporting Framework. He stated that the response of the CSSIW was awaited and that he would report their response to the Committee.

Conclusion: The Committee agreed that it would like to receive informally the CSSIW's response to the Council's Social Services Annual Reporting Framework.

132. **FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE**

The Scrutiny Officer presented a report which detailed the items to be considered at the meeting on the 13 October 2014 and sought confirmation on the information required for the meeting of the Committee on the 25 November 2014.

Conclusion: The Committee noted the topics to be considered at the meetings scheduled for the 13 October 2014 and 25 November 2014.

The meeting closed at 4.57pm.