

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOMS 1/2/3, CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB ON WEDNESDAY, 23 SEPTEMBER 2015 AT 2.00 PM

Present

Councillor EP Foley – Chairperson

DK Edwards
M Jones

N Farr
G Phillips

CA Green
C Westwood

PN John
DBF White

Officers:

Nicola Echanis	Head of Strategy Partnerships & Commissioning
Susan Cooper	Corporate Director - Social Services & Wellbeing
Mark Lewis	Group Manager - Integrated Working
Catherine Parry	Inerim Head of Safeguarding and Assessment
Sarah Keefe	Senior Development Worker - Central Hub
Owen Shepherd	Engagement and Progression Coordinator - Central Hub

186. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the following Officers/ members for the reasons so stated:

Councillor P Davies – Leave
Councillor R Thomas – Work Commitments
Mr R Thomas – Leave
Deborah McMillan – Unwell

187. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

188. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee of 29 July 2015 were approved as a true and accurate record of the meeting

189. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Scrutiny Officer presented a report to the Committee of the items due to be considered at the Committee's meeting to be held 4 November 2015 and sought confirmation of the information required for the subsequent scheduled meeting to be held on 5 January 2015. She also presented a list of further potential items for prioritisation by the Committee

Conclusions

Members requested that an Item on Residential Remodelling be brought to the November Committee meeting and defer the Permanency and Placement Strategy and Early Help Strategy update to after April 2016

190. RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF SOCIAL WORKERS

The Scrutiny Officer presented a report to Committee with information in relation to the recruitment and retention of social workers. The report set out some of the key activities undertaken in Bridgend County Borough Council since the previous report presented to the Committee in October 2014 and responded to issues which had been raised in relation to:

- Local Authority Pay Scales
- Provision of practice placements
- Support given to newly qualified social workers
- Staff engagement, including exit interviews and consultation
- Agency Workers

Members were concerned that 81% of social workers had less than two years' experience at the Authority; they asked Officers how they were managing the issue

The Corporate Director – Wellbeing stated that Childrens Social Services are continuing to see signs of improvement which is reflected in the performance indicators. She added that in terms of the retention of Social Workers the Authority has introduced a more robust staff induction and development programme which included a coaching and mentoring programme with their newly implemented Assistant Team Managers and Team Managers to ensure that staff felt supported. She further added that the Authority had recently completed their Annual Reporting Framework and had received recommendations back from CSSIW which they had acknowledged and put plans in place to address issues raised. She agreed that there were still issues which are currently being addressed regarding the retention of social workers which she hoped to evidence improvement at a future meeting.

Members questioned how the increasing amount of pressure being placed on Social Workers in relation to high caseload numbers was being managed.

The Corporate Director – Wellbeing confirmed that improving caseload allocation is a priority for the department which they are looking to drive down to a manageable level to efficiently support families. A new case management system had gone live in April 2015 which made it easier for the Social Worker to report on cases so they are able to spend more time with families, instead of at a computer completing paperwork. This has enabled them to better allocate caseloads to Social Workers so they have a balance of complexity of cases. The Corporate Director- Wellbeing added that flexible working policies were also in place to allow staff to have a greater work/ life balance.

Members questioned whether the salary scales for Social Workers was a contributing factor for the low numbers of experienced Social Workers staying in the Authority. They also questioned the comparison of salary for Social Workers employed directly by the Authority and through an Agency.

The Corporate Director – Wellbeing stated that most Local Authorities have a two tier pay system in place for Social Workers which do not take into account career progression. She confirmed that Social Workers at the Authority start on the same entry salary and after two years they complete a competency test and would then be

progressed to the appropriate level according to their skill. The Corporate Director – Wellbeing added that she would need to get comparison figures of salary for agency and permanent social workers and feedback to the Committee

Members asked how the traineeship scheme works and if it would be more cost effective to train Social Workers in house, instead of paying high costs to recruitment agencies to employ Social Workers on a temporary basis. They also queried once trainees had completed their apprenticeship if they were under contract to stay with the Authority.

The Corporate Director – Wellbeing confirmed that the Authority operates a traineeship scheme where trainee Social Workers costs had been paid for by the Authority for two years, they then need to complete two years for the Authority as a qualified social worker. She added that the costs are high as all fees are paid for and no mechanism was in place to stop the Social Worker leaving after they had completed their contract. She confirmed that they currently have one trainee Social Worker at the Authority.

The Trade Union representative for Unison had received feedback from TU Members and highlighted the feedback she had received from them which was:

- Social Workers felt improvements were slow.
- There was too much emphasis on PI's rather than the support of families
- There was a lack of support for Social Workers that were off work suffering from stress and anxiety
- Lack of support for staff having to deal with additional caseloads due to staff sickness
- IT design systems need to be simpler
- Fear if something goes wrong there is no support and felt they are working in a "blame culture"

Conclusions

1. Members expressed concern over the fact that 81% of the Authority's Social Workers had less than two years' experience. The Committee proposed that this should be used as a benchmark for future monitoring and reports as a measure of success.
2. Due to the unfortunate timing of the report; in that Officers reported that it was a little early to see the full results of the consultation exercise and analysis, and that there was a need to revisit aspects of the consultation exercise to delve deeper into particular areas; the Committee agreed to reconsider the item of Recruitment and Retention of Social Workers within the next six to nine months.

As part of this continued work, the Committee requested that the following points are considered and subsequently reported back to the Committee:

- Further analysis of work demands – As this had had the lowest satisfaction rating across all job types but, in Members' opinion, did not refer to dissatisfaction with working environment, as suggested in the report;
- A comparison of salaries for those social workers directly employed by the Authority with and Agency staff;
- A cost analysis of how much the Authority pays for agency staff compared with the cost of internal traineeships;
- Examples of best practice from comparator Local Authorities UK wide;
- A comparison and analysis of Adult Social Workers experiences to those of Children Social Workers;

- Whether or not there is any correlation between the high numbers of social workers with less than two years of experience and the high numbers of LAC. Members referred to evidence reported by trade union representatives that there is a fear factor present with social workers at the moment that something is going to go wrong. Members queried whether fear, coupled with inexperience in the job, could affect their confidence and result in over caution when determining whether to take a child in to care or not.
3. The Committee commented on the important role Trade Unions played, in working practices and in Scrutiny, and asked that they be engaged in any future consideration of this topic.
 4. The Committee agreed to engage with social workers either through inviting a couple to attend a Scrutiny Committee or to visit social workers in their own working environment. The idea behind this would be for Members to try to gain a better understanding of 'a day in the life of a social worker', in order to grasp what demands were being placed on them and where possible changes may assist.

Recommendations

Members referred back to their meeting in October 2014 where they had drafted recommendations relating to the standardisation of Social Workers pay scales and Social Workers training. The Committee had postponed sending these recommendations to Cabinet based on legal advice to obtain more evidence.

From the information contained within the report, the Committee felt that there were indications that pay could be an associated factor affecting the retention of Social Workers. This was further supported by discussions in the meeting relating to the Garthwaite Report: 'Social Work – A Profession to Value' whose recommendations incorporated the notion of standardised pay scales. This, along with evidence presented from Trade Union representatives that clients had specifically fed back on the need for an equal pay and grading system across Wales led the Committee to determine that the following recommendations previously agreed by the Scrutiny Committee in October 2014 be sent to Cabinet (with minor amendments):

The Committee recommends that Chief Officers and Cabinet Members engage with and lobby Welsh Government, WLGA/ADSS and CCW to achieve systemic changes in the following areas:

- *A standardised set of salary scales and conditions in line with the systems used for teachers for all social workers in Wales to ensure a 'no-poaching' approach, similar to that which is being introduced for foster carers whereby payments are harmonised across local authorities. The Committee propose that the Garthwaite report be revisited and used as a basis for evidence to support this proposal.*
- *Place a duty on all Welsh local authorities to provide adequate practice placement opportunities for students going into children's safeguarding to better prepare them for their future career and also compel all authorities to provide a proportionate number of training placements.*

The Committee also requested that the Chair of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee meet with the WLGA Presiding Officer and the WLGA Health and Social Care Spokesperson to discuss these recommendations and the views and concerns of the Committee.

Members expressed concern over the ongoing situation with recruitment and retention of social workers and feared that this would continue. The Committee queried what was unique to Bridgend in terms of Social Workers and LAC as it has previously been reported to the Committee that Bridgend's LAC figures are far higher than some neighbouring LAs where you would expect it to be the opposite, (based on such things as social deprivation). Members agreed that in order to understand what changes need to be made to attract and retain Social Workers, a full understanding of need was essential.

- *The Committee therefore recommend that a Strategic Analysis of demand be undertaken looking into the day to day demands on social workers; for example caseloads, types of cases, numbers of LAC; in comparison to other Local Authorities.*
- *Members also proposed that a reputational piece of work be carried out in parallel to this to determine whether there is a link between the reputation of Bridgend with respect to demand on Social Workers.*

Additional Information

Members requested additional information as to why 12 out of the 25 leavers since August 2014 were not available to participate in the Exit Interviews.

The Committee requested that they receive a copy of the CSSIW report in response to the Authority's Annual Social Services Report when it is published.

191. **YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND PROGRESSION FRAMEWORK**

The Scrutiny Officer presented a report to Committee with an update on progress implementation of the Youth Engagement and Progression (YE&P) Framework and the Youth Service Review. She explained that the YE&P Framework is key in reducing the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET). As part of the Framework, Welsh Government requested each Local Authority to complete an action plan by the 14 March 2014 outlining how they were going to take forward implantation of the Framework. In Bridgend this was initially developed by a multi-agency task and finish group; however, responsibility for developing a more focussed implementation plan has come under the remit of the Engagement and Progression Coordinator (EPC) and members of a newly formed YE&P Framework steering group.

Members asked if a Keeping in Touch Officer was still employed to support the Framework

The Family Support Services Manager stated that Integrated Working and Family Support now has six full time Lead Workers which are funded by the Education Improvement Grant that are allocated to each of the Authorities Secondary and Special Schools. Their priorities were to identify young people with the greatest need through the Authority's Early Identification tool which would then enable them to reduce the number of NEETS and also reduce a young person's vulnerability towards becoming NEET.

Members questioned how many hours of support from staff at the Authority was being offered to the Youth Council.

The Family Support Services Manager stated that three workers currently invest time in sub groups that had been set up with the Youth Council, he explained that they were still

being developed so was unable to give the Committee specific number of hours at this time.

Members felt that that early intervention was key to the prevention of young people becoming NEET and suggested intervention earlier than Key Stage 3 & 4 to possibly Key Stage 2 & 3, especially in socially deprived areas where the vulnerability is higher. The Partnership Manager - Integrated Partnership Support Team stated that they were restricted by the Schools budget regulations that are set by Welsh Government on an annual basis. Members asked for further clarification of the regulations to be shared with the Committee.

Members asked if the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework were being proactive to prevent Looked After Children (LAC) becoming NEET as they were identified through the Vulnerability Assessment Profile as a potential high risk at becoming NEET; and Members queried if the Authority could do more as a potential employer.

The Partnership Manager – Integrated Partnership Support Team stated that they work closely with Corporate HR internally and also with external bodies such as Careers Wales. He stated they have a team of three Engagement and Transition workers to provide lead work support for post 16's. He added that they focus on potential apprenticeships and work opportunities for post 16 LAC in the Borough

Conclusions

Members requested further information in relation to how many hours of support from the Authority was being offered to the Youth Council.

Members asked that they receive the Outcome Report and Action Plan resulting from the Youth Review Consultation.

The Committee requested that they receive further information as to how the FE College were engaging and assisting schools regarding reducing the number of young people becoming NEET.

Members expressed concerns over the inability of schools to plan an alternative curriculum to enable them to intervene at Key Stage 2/3 with pupils who are potential future NEET, due to the constraints of a yearly budget instead of a Medium Term Financial Strategy. Whilst Officers reported that this was due to regulations under the Budget Statement for schools, Members argued that the statement had flexibility that if a school could prove it had a robust plan for spending the money they would be allowed to keep it. Members were concerned that this allowance was not being permitted and therefore requested further clarification of the subject and its regulations

192. **URGENT ITEMS**

None

The meeting closed at 4.45 pm