

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD IN COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB ON WEDNESDAY, 9 MARCH 2016 AT 2.00 PM

Present

Councillor EP Foley – Chairperson

PA Davies
PN John
DBF White

DK Edwards
M Jones

N Farr
G Phillips

CA Green
C Westwood

Registered Representatives:

Mr W Bond
Rev Canon Edward J Evans
Mr K Pascoe

Officers:

Susan Roberts	Group Manager School Improvement
Rachel Keepins	Democratic Services Officer - Scrutiny
Andrew Rees	Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Michelle Hatcher	Group Manager - Inclusion
Natalie Silcox	Group Manager Childrens Regulated Services

214. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the following Members / Officers:

Councillor K J Watts
Councillor R L Thomas
Susan Cooper – Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing
Deborah McMillan – Corporate Director Education and Transformation
Nicola Echanis – Head of Strategy Commissioning and Partnerships

215. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

216. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee of 5 January 2016 were accepted as a true and accurate record subject to the inclusion of Councillor C Westwood in the list of Apologies for Absence in Minute no. 201.

217. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Scrutiny Officer presented a report which detailed the items to be considered at the next meeting of the Committee to be scheduled following the Annual Meeting of Council and sought confirmation of the information and invitees required.

The Scrutiny Officer also reported on a list of potential items for the 2016-17 Forward Work Programme which would be prioritised and scheduled at the meeting of the Committee following the Annual Meeting of Council.

Conclusions:

The Committee noted the items to be considered at the next meeting to be scheduled at the Annual Meeting of Council and determined the invitees to be invited to attend.

218. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN PROVISION

The Scrutiny Officer presented a report which informed the Committee of the support being delivered to improve the educational performance of looked after children in Bridgend.

The Deputy Leader tendered the apologies of the Corporate Education and Transformation and the Head of Strategy Commissioning and Partnerships as they were being interviewed by Estyn as part of the inspection of the Central South Consortium. He informed the Committee that the Central South Consortium is the first of the four Consortia to be inspected and that he would make the results of the inspection available to the Committee once all inspection reports on the Consortia had been published. He also suggested that the Committee invite the Managing Director of the Central South Consortium to present the findings of the Estyn inspection.

The Committee requested clarification of the GCSE attainment level of looked after children leaving without qualifications in 2012/13 being 21%. The Group Manager School Improvement confirmed that the attainment level of looked after children leaving without qualifications in 2012/13 was 21%. She stated that looked after children are the most vulnerable cohort; however since 2012-13 there had been a much improved picture in the performance of looked after children leaving school with qualifications. The Committee questioned whether the improved performance was down to the cohort or the strategies used. The Group Manager School Improvement stated that the improved performance was partly due to the cohort of looked after children but also due to the mentoring work and careers guidance put in place. The Committee considered that as this cohort are amongst the most damaged of children with challenging behaviour and poor attendance at school that their attainment should be based on when they came into care compared to when they cease to be looked after. The Group Manager School Improvement informed the Committee that the Looked After Children in Education Team does monitor the progress made by looked after children and that performance data is gathered on 31 March each year. She stated that it was difficult to monitor data as children move in and out of foster placements. The Deputy Leader informed the Committee that the number of looked after children with special educational needs is disproportionate compared to children who are not in care and stated that progress by pupils who are looked after does need to be identified and measured.

The Deputy Leader informed the Committee that all members of the Committee are invited to the opening of the Bryncethin campus of Ysgol Bryn Castell on 11 March 2016. The Committee requested details of the new facility. The Group Manager Inclusion informed the Committee that the new facilities have been greatly improved and now comprised a food technology room, art and physical education teaching. The facility also had increased capacity with 2 ASD classes at Ysgol Bryn Castell and additional year 10 class. She stated that quality of provision at the new facility far outweighed the provision at the previous facility. She also informed the Committee that the wellbeing of looked after children is as important as educational attainment.

The Committee questioned the accountability and transparency arrangements of the Central South Consortium in the allocation of funding of the multi-agency approach in supporting and targeting the educational performance of looked after children. The Group Manager School Improvement informed the Committee that the funding did not follow each child directly but funding is allocated proportionately and sustainably. She also informed the Committee that there is a three pronged accountability structure in place to ensure funding allocated by the Central South Consortium is proportionate and confirmed that the Consortium is held to account. The Group Manager School Improvement also informed the Committee that the Council has increased control of the funding received from the Consortium as it comes directly to the Council and not to schools which was the case previously.

The Deputy Leader informed the Committee that the authority has gained some power in the way in which Pupil Deprivation Grant is allocated as it is now administered by the Central South Consortium instead of schools. He stated that the authority has gained some power in that he is a member of the Consortium, while the Group Manager School Improvement is a member of the multi-agency Panel which considers all school requests for grant funding, which ensures that money is spent in a more accountable way. He commented that there is a more robust process in place which has been better for schools. He also informed the Committee that Thrive training has been offered funded through the pupil Deprivation Grant. Thrive provides training to a member of staff in each secondary and special school and a member of staff from each cluster in order to support looked after children. The Deputy Leader informed the Committee that a number of schools had used Thrive training but had not initially applied for funding as they might have had relatively few looked after children. The need was greater where there are more looked after children and Thrive had now been used in 20 schools in the County Borough. The Group Manager School Improvement informed the Committee that working on a regional basis has helped good working practices to be shared. The Group Manager School Improvement also informed the Committee that schools would need to evidence the purposes which they had received Pupil Deprivation Grant. The Committee expressed concern that some schools with looked after children may not receive Pupil Deprivation Grant funding. The Deputy Leader informed the Committee that not all schools had applied for Pupil Deprivation Grant funding. The Group Manager School Improvement explained that channelling funding through the Consortium was a more effective means of using the funding and that training had been provided to a member of staff in each secondary school and a member of staff from each primary cluster in the Thrive programme. She also informed the Committee that an exercise was being undertaken to establish whether some Pupil Deprivation Grant had been unspent in order that schools could benefit from that funding. A member of the Committee commented that Maesteg Comprehensive School had used Pupil Deprivation Grant funding to fund a Sports Leadership Programme which in turn had led to some pupils finding employment.

The Committee questioned whether a virtual head teacher had been appointed yet. The Group Manager School Improvement informed the Committee that a virtual head teacher had not yet been appointed as there had been a focus on improving the performance of looked after children. She stated that it would be the role of the virtual head teacher to lead a virtual school of pupils spread across the county borough and beyond. The Group Manager Inclusion informed the Committee that having oversight is key to ensure a consistent approach in the education of looked after children. The Group Manager School Improvement informed the Committee that a virtual head teacher would oversee the educational progress of all looked after children but that pupils would remain on roll at the school they attend. She stated that the virtual head teacher will work with designated teachers who will become part of a virtual school.

The Committee questioned whether Pupil Deprivation Grant funding would be unspent. The Group Manager School Improvement informed the Committee that it was anticipated that all funding was likely to be used. She stated that some schools may apply for funding on behalf of other schools.

The Committee questioned whether training is offered to Governing Bodies where there are looked after children attending those schools and a need to raise awareness of Pupil Deprivation Grant amongst Governing Bodies.

The Committee thanked the invitees for their contributions.

Conclusions

The Committee raised the need for a culture shift in governance, prioritising vulnerable learners and as such recommended that each School Governing Body nominate a Champion for Vulnerable Groups (to include Looked After Children). Their role would be to promote this aspect with their Governor Group, share best practice and ensure that the individuals are apportioned sufficient support and focus in their school. Members proposed that this recommendation be taken forward by the Directorate through Governor Support to ensure that proper training is provided to support those individuals who undertook this role.

The Committee requested that awareness be raised with all Governing Bodies over the recent changes under the Pupil Deprivation Grant and how it is now being distributed.

The Committee expressed continuing concerns regarding the increasing role of the Central South Consortium and the lack of accountability from elected Members. Members raised concerns over the fact that the Consortium now had clear decision making roles involving money being dispersed for which they were not being held democratically accountable for. The Committee looked forward to the Estyn report on the Central South Consortium and agreed that there was an urgent need for Joint Regional Scrutiny of the Central South Consortium.

Additional Information

Members asked for clarification as to what the day to day role of the Virtual Head would be in order to gain an understanding of exactly what the role would involve and how it would be carried out.

The Committee asked for assurances that the Virtual Head role would incorporate a formal process for monitoring the progress of all Looked After Children and requested that evidence of this be provided to the Committee on an annual basis.

The Committee asked for clarification as to why Bridgend have a higher proportion of Looked After Children than the average in communities with similar levels of deprivation detailing; a) what are the significant factors affecting Bridgend's LAC that attribute to the high number and b) how does Bridgend compare in this way with other similar Local Authorities?

The Committee asked the Scrutiny Officer to confirm when the Estyn inspections of the other 3 Welsh Consortia will be completed to assist them in planning their FWP and the most appropriate time for them to consider Estyn's findings.

219. ROTA VISITING BY ELECTED MEMBERS

The Scrutiny Officer introduced a report which gave an update on the programme of rota visiting the Council's children's social care establishments.

The Group Manager Business Support informed the Committee of the importance of Members undertaking rota visits to social care establishments. She stated that rota visiting had been part of the quality assurance of the authority's services for a number of years and is valued by staff. Rota visiting gave Members the opportunity to meet and discuss with service users their views on the services they receive. The Committee was provided with a schedule of visits carried out at children's establishments together with a summary of the comments made by Members and service responses.

The Committee questioned whether there are independent providers of children's establishments operating in the County Borough. The Group Manager Childrens Regulated Services confirmed that there are independent providers of children's establishments operating in the County Borough which are subject to monitoring by the CSSIW. She stated that there is a very robust assessment process in place in order for independent providers to get on to the framework.

The Committee commented on the importance of rota visiting and questioned whether staff morale was good at children's establishments given that changes are proposed to be made to service provision at Baker's Way. The Group Manager Childrens Regulated Services informed the Committee that the manager of Baker's Way is involved in discussions and part of the review on proposed changes to be made to the way in which services are delivered from that establishment. She stated that staff are part of the consultation process and had shared their concerns during the review but no decision had been made on the possible options, however there was a need to ensure the facility at Baker's Way is fit for purpose. The review of Baker's Way was being undertaken as part of a wider review of residential provision in the County Borough. She informed the Committee that funding had been set aside to make kitchen adaptations at Baker's Way. She also informed the Committee that it was not possible to install a stair lift at the premises but this had not affected service users from using Baker's Way. She informed the Committee that there is an open book approach available for staff to express their views.

The Cabinet Member Childrens Social Services and Equalities informed the Committee that a report on options for Baker's Way and residential remodelling would be brought to a future meeting of this Committee for consultation prior to a decision being made by Cabinet.

In response to a question from the Committee on the numbers of Members who had undertaken rota visits, the Group Manager Business Support confirmed that 28 visits were carried out by Members out of a possible 63 visits to children's social care establishments between April 2014 and January 2016.

The Committee questioned the stance taken to minimise access to Wi-Fi facilities at Newbridge House at certain times. The Group Manager Childrens Regulated Services informed the Committee that the Council has very strict policies and protocols governing the access to Wi-Fi facilities. Usage of Wi-Fi facilities is monitored and it is turned off at certain times. However, residents at Newbridge House could still access the internet via their own mobile networks through smartphones and tablets. She stated that the Council as corporate parents provide mandatory training on ICT safety and is responsible for safe internet usage.

Conclusions

The Committee recommended that the rota visit programme be expanded to incorporate private sector children's residential establishments, similar to the pilot that has been undertaken in Adult Services.

The Committee also questioned whether each establishment had to be visited every month and instead proposed that a quarterly visit to each home may be more feasible, particularly in light of the desire to expand the programme to private sector residential establishments.

Members asked to receive additional information regarding the reasons why Members have been unable to attend their scheduled rota visits, if this information is collected and available; and if not Members recommended that this be collated for future monitoring.

220. NOMINATION TO STANDING BUDGET RESEARCH AND EVALUATION PANEL

The Scrutiny Officer submitted a report seeking nominations from the Committee to sit on the Standing Budget Research and Evaluation Panel. The Standing BREP would undertake a review of the process following the setting of this year's budget. The Committee was requested to nominate the Chair of this Committee and one Member of the Committee and additionally a reserve Member to sit on the Standing BREP.

RESOLVED: That the Chairperson of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Councillor G Phillips be nominated to represent the Committee on the Standing Budget Research and Evaluation Panel with Councillor D B F White being nominated as the reserve member in the event that Councillor G Phillips could not attend.

221. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

The meeting closed at 4.00 pm