

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD IN COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB ON THURSDAY, 13 OCTOBER 2016 AT 2.00 PM

Present

Councillor EP Foley – Chairperson

PA Davies	DK Edwards	N Farr	PN John
G Phillips	C Westwood	DBF White	KJ Watts

Registered Representatives

Rev Canon Edward J Evans	Church in Wales
William Bond	Special School Sector
Kevin Pascoe	Secondary School

Officers:

Laura Kinsey	Head of Children's Social Care
Nicola Echanis	Head of Education & Family Support
Mark Lewis	Group Manager - Integrated Working
Deborah McMillan	Corporate Director Education & Family Support
Elizabeth Walton-Jones	
Mark Galvin	Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees
P Wolstenholme	
Hannah Woodhouse	

237. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Registered representative K Pascoe declared a personal interest in Agenda item 6. As on occasions he undertook consultancy work for the Central South Consortium

238. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of meetings of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on the following dates be approved as a true and accurate record:-

16 June 2016
21 July 2016

It was noted that there was no reference in both the above sets of Minutes to any of the registered representatives being in attendance at the meetings, which it was further noted, had not in fact been the case and that some of these had attended either/both the meetings.

Members asked for this to be noted in future, and also that the Registered Representatives be named on the agenda for future such meetings which had also not been the case in respect of the last few Committee send outs.

The Senior Democratic Services Officer – Committees advised that there may be a need to alter the distribution list on the Modern.Gov database system, and that he would look into these issues accordingly in order to ensure that they be addressed.

239. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Corporate Director – Operational and Partnership Services submitted a report, the purpose of which, was to present the items due to be considered at the Committee meetings scheduled to be held on 15 December 2016 and 2 February 2017.

Paragraph 4.3 of the report included a table which listed all potential items that the Committee approved at its meeting on 16 June 2016, which were presented to members for reprioritisation as appropriate.

The Scrutiny Officer concluded her submission by referring to paragraph 4.4 of the report which outlined once more in table format certain extra items that may be considered in the future by the Committee.

Members felt that in light of both the number and complexity of some of the items listed on the Forward Work Programme, that there should be further meetings of the Committee convened for this municipal year.

The Scrutiny Officer advised that this was considered difficult to achieve in light of current and future predicted resources.

A Member further added that there should also be introduced further Research and Evaluation Panels, to concentrate upon the more key areas of work highlighted by Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

RESOLVED: That Members noted the topics due to be considered at the next two scheduled meetings of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

240. EARLY HELP AND PERMANENCE STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

The Chairperson invited to the meeting the Invitees for the above item, and it was agreed by Members that Committee went straight into a question and answering session on the report.

A Member asked how the Western Bay Partnership Group could be challenged, and if necessary, held to account in respect of their Child Practice Safeguarding Review decisions. He added that information regarding these decisions should also be made available to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for monitoring purposes.

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support advised that the Western Bay Safeguarding Board was formed of multi-agency associates, which included representatives from Children's and Adult Services. This included representatives from these multi-agency groups being represented on this Board.

She explained that the Child Practice Reviews were carried out by a Sub-Committee that sat under the Board and therefore any such Reviews were actively considered before being undertaken, and where deemed necessary, by professionals from the key stakeholder groups that made up Western Bay. Safeguarding issues were looked at not only regionally she added, but also as part of local arrangements.

The Member whilst acknowledging the above, still considered that Members of the Committee should be made aware of outcomes in respect of important matters such as Child Practice Reviews. This was required, in order to ascertain if services were progressing to the necessary standard, as well as to establish if recommendations proposed were acted upon and/or service improvements were being made.

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support further added, that as soon as a Child Practice Review was concluded then it was reported to Members through relevant Committees.

A Member referred to page 35 of the report and paragraph 4.30 that stated that Early Help refers to a way of working, which will ensure that children, young people and families who are at risk or vulnerable to poor outcomes are identified early and that their needs are effectively assessed and met by agencies working together. The aim here being to prevent their escalation rather than to respond only when the difficulty has become so acute to as to demand attention. He felt that the crux here was the various agencies working closely together in order to prevent any tragedies occurring. He hoped that any such close partnership working involved all key stakeholders, for example the Police, Flying Start, Health partners, the local authority, and enabling all information generated in respect of a young person within the system, being closely shared between stakeholders so that they all play their respective parts in providing support for young people who were looked after. He asked how the Early Help and Permanence Strategy would address issues such as this.

The Member referred to page 45 of the report where it listed the ambitions of the Strategy, and in conjunction with this, he referred to page 46 where there were listed key objectives under the sub-heading Key Objectives in Early Help and Permanence Planning Early Help. In relation to bullet point 3 here, where reference was made to managing highly predictable risk better (e.g. parents who have been in care themselves and parents who have previously had children removed), he was hopeful that the Early Help and Permanence Strategy would adequately address issues such as this so that they are avoided in the future.

The Head of Strategy Commissioning and Partnerships advised that these had been historic problems, and that one of the aims and objectives of the Strategy was to address these and other areas where improvement could be made in respect of managing arrangements with regard to Looked After Children.

Within the last 18 months support services had been reconfigured in order to obtain improvements, including the development of 3 Hubs where employees from key areas of support such as the local authority and the Health Service worked together. A single point of contact had also been introduced for a number of various services and this was located in the main Civic Offices in Bridgend. A single database system called WCCIS was now also being used by key stakeholders such as Health and BCBC, which was also allowing for a more cohesive and joined-up approach in terms of support for Looked After Children. Professionals from all partner agencies had also put in place as part of the Strategy, an Action Plan to look to secure improvements proposed in the support of young people.

A Member asked if there were close working links between statutory bodies such as the Police, Safeguarding Unit and schools, amongst others, in respect of the serving of Person Protection Notifications (PPN's) on young people.

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support advised that when the Police were alerted to a worrying situation concerning a child or young person, they were obligated

to inform other key support agencies in order that each agency looked to play their part, by actively taking steps and appropriate actions to protect the child/young person from harm at an early stage.

The introduction of Multi Agency-Safeguarding Hubs (MASH) would give increased support to both vulnerable young people and adults advised the Head of Safeguarding and Family Support. These would allow for Assessment teams in Adult Social Care and Education to overlap and therefore integrate more effectively than previously.

The Corporate Director – Education and Family Support emphasised that integration of elements of both her team and that of the the Corporate – Social Services and Wellbeing was key, and in relation to that, she advised Members that the Chief Executive and herself had attended a meeting this week, to look at a new Plan proposed to tackle both poverty and child mistreatment, where the importance of improved integration of key support services was highlighted. Grant funding would be made available by Welsh Government for this for key support services of the Authority, such as Families First and Flying Start. Welsh Government were encouraging more proactive methods of support and giving financial backing for this, in order to meet the needs of children and young people at an earlier age. This funding would also be made available across a wider area as opposed just to the more deprived areas of the County Borough.

A Member referred to pages 30/31 of the report and asked how many children were in receipt of foster care with family members other than their parents. He also asked how many children stay in such a care arrangement for long periods of time, as there was a significant cost element attached to this type of care package, as opposed to them remaining with their parents. He was unclear from the Tables on page 31 of the report of the split in this regard.

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support confirmed that she would be able to provide the Member with this information outside of the meeting. She added however, that Social Services were encouraged to take the above course of action by the Courts as well as it also being an approach promoted by the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014. It was often better to place a child in the care of a family member as they were familiar with these individuals. The family members were assessed prior to such a placement being made and they also had to be registered as foster carers in order for this course of action to be pursued. The alternative to this was that the child be placed with an In-House or Independent Foster Carer. It was generally considered that to remain in a family environment as opposed to being placed with an Independent Carer was a more preferential option that came with a better outcome for the child in question.

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support further added that a more proactive approach was needed by family members looking after children pursuing Special Guardianship Orders should long term situations such as that mentioned above arise.

A Member confirmed that he was concerned with the fact that BCBC were the fourth highest ranking Authority in Wales when it came to numbers of Looked After Children (LAC) and this concern had been shared by another Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The current number was 131 children per a 100,000 population.

The Corporate Director - Education and Family Support advised that the Early Help/Early Intervention Hubs were still to be fully developed and that the above figure was high, but this had been compounded by the fact that historically there had been a backlog of LAC cases that had been actively worked upon in order to reduce this number.

She added that the Action Plan that supported the Early Help and Permanence Strategy 2016 sets down a series of actions/milestones, some of which related to managing the population of LAC. Paragraph 4.40 of the report outlined a number of steps and proposals by which these could be reduced and therefore Officers were being proactive in attempting to achieve this through these.

The Chairperson asked if funding in respect of the aims and objectives of the Strategy, particularly Families First, is both adequate and secure.

The Group Manager – Learning Disabilities confirmed that the Early Help and Permanence Strategy would be supported by grant funding equating to 80%. Funding for Connecting Families was core funded however, this was not sufficient and had to be supplemented from Directorate funding where appropriate. Services in respect of Early Help received grant funding in the region of £3 - £3.1m, though the staffing compliment in this area of work were in the main on temporary contracts and there was also insufficient number of staff to adequately support the work that needed to be undertaken.

With regard to an earlier question concerning numbers of Looked After Children, the Group Manager Safeguarding and Quality Assurance confirmed that there had been an increase recently of court related work for Social Workers. The picture overall however, for numbers of Looked After Children was approximately the same currently as last year.

A Member voiced some concern regarding this, in that whilst other local authorities were having some success in reducing these numbers year on year, BCBC always seemed to have difficulty in consistently achieving this. He asked how BCBC compared to other neighbouring authorities in terms of areas of deprivation.

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support advised that BCBC were the 4th highest in terms of Looked After Children numbers, and over the last 5 years we had been anywhere between the 3rd to 5th highest. Cardiff University were undertaking research into the numbers of Looked After Children in Welsh local authorities. The findings of the Cardiff University arising from this research would be available early next year, and local authorities would be informed if they could take any steps whereby they could possibly reduce these numbers.

The Member made a follow-up comment, namely that it may be internal system issues that need to be addressed to reduce numbers of Looked After Children, as opposed to a study by Cardiff University.

A Member referred to Table 1 on page 31 of the report where reference was made to there being 49 children on Placement Orders for adoption which was quite a high figure. She asked if there was any connection between this and any high level of teenage pregnancies in the County Borough.

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support confirmed that as far as she was aware, there was no correlation between these, though she could investigate this further, by obtaining information regarding the ages of parents whose children were subject of Placement Orders.

The Corporate Director – Education and Family Support confirmed that in 2012 and as a result of an inspection by Estyn, an Inspector picked up upon the fact that there had been an instance where there were 9 pregnancies in the same comprehensive school. Due to this, an increased and more robust awareness campaign was introduced at all BCB schools, and since this time, the numbers of pupils pregnant in schools had significantly reduced.

A Member asked where the Just @sk premises was presently based.

The Group Manager – Integrated Working and Family Support confirmed that this Drop-In facility was now based here in the Civic Offices. He added that as well as this facility, there were further Outreach bases in community settings. The feedback received from young people on this set-up and who required these services he added, was in the main positive.

As this concluded debate on this item, the Chairperson thanked the Invitees for attending following which they retired from the meeting.

Conclusions:

1. 1 The Committee recommend that the Joint Action Plan be revisited as the evidence for a number of actions do not support the outcomes. For example, Members commented that a Health Visitor part of the front door arrangements, or a new referral form, does not provide evidence that Children and Young People's needs are identified and met in a more timely manner. Further clarification is needed in order for the action plan to be used and monitored effectively.
- (2) 2 The Committee reiterated the concerns of the Corporate Resources and Improvement Overview and Scrutiny in relation to the numbers of LAC within the County Borough. Given the Authority's social and economic position in Wales, its current numbers of LAC were significantly high in comparison with other LAs, ranking 4th highest. The Committee acknowledged the work that was being undertaken by Cardiff University into LAC figures in Wales, and requested that they receive this as soon as it is available.
- 3 3 Officers reported that recent checks made by courts had confirmed that all children that are currently Looked After, needed to be Looked After. Members therefore commented that if this is the case the issues may lie in the preventative work, before children and young people are hitting those levels and agreed to test this on the research findings from Cardiff University.
- 4 The Committee requested further detail as to:
 - a) whether the numbers of children in foster care as illustrated in the Table on Page 31 of the report are with foster parents or with family members;
 - b) how long these children are staying with family members; and
 - c) how are the LA encouraging family members to take on a special guardianship orders.
- 5 The Committee requested that they receive further detailed information of the funding for Families First.

The Committee requested that they receive feedback gathered from Just Ask service users in relation to their views on the user friendliness of the Civic Office site.

241. ESTYN REPORT OF CENTRAL SOUTH CONSORTIUM

The Chairperson welcomed the Invitees to the meeting.

The Managing Director – Central South Consortium presented this item, the purpose of which was to share with Members the findings of the Estyn Report on the Central South Consortium (CSC).

She gave some background information on the report confirming that Estyn had inspected the CSC in March 2016 and that this was the first Consortium to be inspected under a new Consortia Inspection Framework. All four Consortia had been inspected, and key outcomes regarding these inspections were outlined in Appendix A to the report.

The Managing Director – Central South Consortium, advised that the Inspection was supported by the Wales Audit Office and that a number of different components were examined as a result of this Inspection, including surveys received from Head teachers, Business Plan(s), performance levels, and the likes of feedback following the interview of teachers, governors, Council Leaders and Cabinet Members, and the senior team of the Consortium amongst others.

The Report as published, entitled 'Quality of the School Improvement services provided by the Central South Consortium' was attached at Appendix B to the report, and it was expected that all consortia would be revisited to measure progress against their recommendations from the autumn of 2017 onwards.

The Managing Director – Central South Consortium added that as Members would note from the paper tabled at the meeting, the report was overall positive and that the CSC were the fastest improving region in Wales currently and possible even in the UK.

The Report included some recommendations made as a result of the inspection, and she gave a summary of each of these for the benefit of Members. Page 3 of the tabled paper also gave some comparable information with other authorities, which confirmed that Bridgend were performing well in terms of its Key Stage 4/Level 2 Regional Performance, including in English/Welsh or Mathematics.

Other main headlines from the inspection had also been positive she advised, and these included the Consortia's vision, strategy and investment in its schools.

The Managing Director – Central South Consortium confirmed that the Judgements made from the inspection in respect of the various key category areas reflected that 3 Judgements had been deemed at Good, with 2 being classed as Adequate. The two main issues highlighted as Adequate were in the categories of Support for School Improvement and Resource Management.

Paragraph 4.3 of the main report highlighted a number of areas of strength in the way that the Consortium operated and delivers impact and these were listed in this section of the report.

The Managing Director – Central South Consortium confirmed that the Consortium had reviewed action plans against the recommendations and added to them where necessary. Appendix C to the report detailed a summary of each of the recommendations with actions and impact against them.

A Member noted from the report and supporting information that there were mixed feelings and reviews portrayed in relation to the support at schools of Challenge Advisors. He was aware that on occasion there was a quick turnover of these in some places of education. He felt that Challenge Advisors within schools needed to share consistent ideas as well as setting both similar and a high level of standards.

The Managing Director – Central South Consortium stated that there was a quick turnover of Challenge Advisors at some schools, however, this was not necessarily a negative thing. She confirmed that back in 2013 some research had been carried out in order to establish the quality of support being provided by Challenge Advisors, and some of the Challenge Advisors at this time left as a result of this. It was generally considered at present that most if not all Challenge Advisors had previous experience working in a Senior Management team at a school, and that there had been a number of cases whereby Head teachers had requested and been granted secondment for a specific period to take up a role of Challenge Advisor on a temporary basis. This helped develop a consistent approach with Challenge Advisors working across different regions and take good practice from one school to another.

A generally positive issue was that when a Challenge Advisor left a school, it was normally custom and practice for them to right a report on the school in readiness for the incoming Challenge Advisor, who would then take this up further through the Central South Consortium.

A Member voiced some disappointment with the Judgement of Adequate in respect of the area of Support for School Improvement. She asked if this applied to just schools in Bridgend or on a wider basis.

The Managing Director – Central South Consortium confirmed that the Inspection covered a regional rather than a more localised area, so this applied to all 5 Authorities involved in the Consortia, as opposed to only the Bridgend area. She added that she was hopeful of a positive progress report in this and other areas next summer.

A Member noted from the four recommendations in respect of the areas where improvement could be made, that these were primarily interlinked. He asked if there was any evidence to suggest that if Challenge Advisors improved in terms of their performance, then this would also lead to improvement in the above areas.

The Managing Director – Central South Consortium advised that a good Challenge Advisor normally made for a positive school in terms of its performance. She added that only in a minority of schools it had been revealed that Challenge Advisors were not fully accountable in terms of the role they were fulfilling at that particular school. It had been established as a result of the Inspection that 3 secondary schools had been under performing at level Key Stage 4, and the reasons for this were being investigated.

The Chairperson asked if Schools Challenge Cymru were soon to terminate in terms of a supporting role.

The Managing Director – Central South Consortium advised that information was still being awaited regarding this. However, should School Challenge Cymru remain in being in the future, there would definitely be a reduction in funding and support to schools from this body.

A Member advised that in all the schools he had previously had an involvement with, there had been a considerable turnover in Challenge Advisors, though he did also consider that this now seemed to be an improving picture. He asked the Invitees if the local authority asked schools what they considered of the support services provided to them by bodies such as the Education Department, the South Wales Consortium and Schools Challenge Cymru. In terms of Estyn Inspections etc, such as that of schools periodically and the Consortia, he wanted an assurance that anything negative arising from these inspections was not down purely to the fact that schools and their supporting bodies were not linking in cohesively enough, in order to achieve effective performance, outcomes and results for pupils.

The Managing Director – Central South Consortium felt that this was not the case, though she was unable to categorically confirm that.

A Member referred to page 65 of the report and the point made that there was a need to strengthen leadership succession planning and future leadership capacity, as well as recruitment of core subject (particularly mathematics) teachers in the region. He felt that there was a need to recruit and retain good mathematics teachers as the retention of both these and good quality English teachers was particularly important for Key Stage 2 pupils.

The Managing Director – Central South Consortium confirmed that the Consortia were working with the Institute of Education and certain universities in order to look to improve and broaden the availability of

Teaching opportunities in both these subject areas, and this was something that was being advocated on a national basis. There was a problem in that word often got around as to the schools that employed good quality mathematics teachers and other schools would then employ tactics to look at ways by to entice these teachers to leave that school in favour of their own. Schools would often look to provide extra enhancements to assist in retaining these teaching staff. The Consortia also encouraged teachers to take up Subject Enhancement programmes to encourage teachers to teach mathematics as opposed to other subjects in order to increase expertise in this important area of learning.

She also added that there was a Teachers First Programme specifically designed for teaching staff in the subjects of Science, Mathematics and English. This was an initiative that was supported by Welsh Government to encourage staff to teach in these important subjects, however, it was a worry knowing that they intended to cut the funding in future.

The Chairperson felt that it was very important to ensure that there is succession planning in terms of the recruitment of teaching staff at Bridgend schools, and the Managing Director – Central South Consortium confirmed that she agreed with this, and that steps were being taken to ensure that this would be achieved wherever possible in the future.

As this concluded debate on this item, the Chairperson thanked the Invitees for attending and providing their input at the meeting, following which they retired from the meeting.

Conclusions:

1. The Committee commented on the lack of a communication between Educational Leaders, the Consortium and FE Leaders and expressed concern over educational public services not integrating and working together effectively. Members recommended that a greater link is made between the FE Sector and Local Authority Education, including the Consortium.
2. The Committee expressed concern over Estyn's 'Adequate' judgement for 'Support for School Improvement' given that this was the key role of the Consortium. Members commented that the lack of consistency of Challenge Advisers in schools due to a high staff turnover in the Consortium could potentially have a significant impact on support for schools. The Committee asked for further information on the turnover of Challenge Advisers in schools to consider how substantial an issue this is.

3. The Committee asked that Officers ensure that any future school performance information presented to the Committee includes comparative data with other Local Authorities in order to understand where Bridgend stands in the bigger national picture.

The Committee requested that they receive the survey data from the survey carried out with School Governors on the role of the Consortium.

242. URGENT ITEMS

None.

The meeting closed at 4.30 pm