

**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, 16 JUNE 2016 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:

R Keepins - Scrutiny Officer  
GP Jones - Head of Democratic Services

Invitees:

Councillor HJ David - Deputy Leader  
D McMillan - Corporate Director – Education and Family Support  
Nicola Echanis - Head of Education and Family Support  
M Hatcher - Group Manager – Inclusion  
S Cooper - Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing  
L Kinsey - Head of Children’s Social Care

222. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the following Members:

Councillor PA Davies  
Councillor RL Thomas  
Councillor H Townsend  
Councillor K Watts

223. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

224. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The Committee queried the outcome of the questions shown on pages 13 and 14 of the agenda pack. The Scrutiny Officer advised that she was awaiting one response and that she would circulate all of the responses as soon as possible.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meetings of the Children and Young People’s Overview and scrutiny Committee held on 21 January and 9 March 2016 be approved as a true and accurate record.

225. STRATEGIC APPROACHES TO THE SUPPORT OF VULNERABLE CHILDREN

The Committee received a report from the Corporate Director – Education and Family Support which described the development of more strategic approaches to supporting vulnerable groups of learners. This included pupils who are eligible for free schools meals, looked after children on the Child Protection register identified as a child in need, those for whom English is an additional language, those with additional learning needs, young carers, those excluded from school and young offenders.

It was explained that there has been a multi-level strategic approach to supporting and targeting the educational performance of vulnerable groups of children in Bridgend which was a key priority in the Directorate business plan. The report outlined the Vulnerable Groups Strategy which identified a range of groups of children who were deemed to be vulnerable. It was expected that the interventions and practices which are proven to have the greatest impact in raising the attainment of looked after children and those children entitled to free school meals will be replicated to benefit other vulnerable groups.

Following the pattern of a high number of fixed-term and permanent exclusions, a Fair Access Strategy Group was formed and an action plan written for 2015-2016. The implementation of the Fair Access Strategy Group has ensured that there is a strategic approach to enable all pupils to have a fair access to education. Robust tracking and data analysis was used to provide targeted early prevention and intervention to meet the needs of children and young people.

The report provided information regarding the number of permanent and fixed-term exclusions in previous years. Partnership working had resulted in no further permanent exclusions. This has been due to the creative use of the Bridge Alternative provision with pupils who were at risk of permanent exclusion.

The Committee indicated that the use of fixed term and permanent exclusion were only used as a last resort but these created additional pressures for finding suitable placements. Members were advised that provision mapping was being undertaken and that although Heronsbridge School had no physical space extra funding was being used as part of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools to improve special needs capacity. It was intended that all fixed term exclusions needed to attend Ysgol Bryn Castell (YBC) but permanent exclusions would attend a different school.

Members queried the reasons for fixed term exclusions and were advised that exclusions were for a variety of reason as shown in the report which included Racial Harassment, Theft and Substance misuse. Officers were working to tighten up in these criteria to enable specific issues to be identified and managed appropriately. The Corporate Director – Education and Family Support added that the culture to exclude pupils had changed since her arrival and exclusion was the last resort. The figures identified that the number of days lost had been halved in the last period.

The Committee queried the support which a child could expect. It was explained that although the provision varied they could be provided with a youth worker, Family support and counsellors. The Deputy Leader offered to provide an explanatory note to members to of the work being undertaken as part of the Bridge alternative provision and the support that was available at YBC.

The Corporate Director – Education and Family Support described the data and work carried out to develop the 3 hubs in the County Borough and the collective working of the support teams. Members welcomed the benefits that the hubs could achieve and it was requested if the Public Service Board could provide top-down support for the long term sustainability of the hubs. The Corporate Director explained that the Authority were committed to the model and were working with other agencies to progress the opportunities for early intervention.

The Cabinet Member for Education explained that the authority had a legal and moral responsibility to provide all children in the county borough with a good quality of education.

Members queried the sufficiency of the support able to be provided. It was explained that the service was leaner but due the multi-disciplined approach the authority was able to provide more support for the available funding.

The Committee asked for clarification for the range of reasons for exclusion and the number of exclusion for racial harassment and theft. It was explained that the existing data was being analyse further to identify patterns of behaviour which could then be addressed accordingly. Further work was also being undertaken to hone the categorisation in order for detailed and common descriptors to be used when recording data which with minimise the use of "other" categories.

The Cabinet Member commented that Show Racism the Red card programme was being offered to all primary school. This was becoming increasingly important given the level of publicity that the immigration debate was having recently and which was being picked up by young children.

### Conclusions

1. The Committee commented on the fact that whilst the report contained a lot of detail on pupils eligible for free school meals, Looked After Children and pupils at risk of exclusion; there did not appear to be the same detail afforded to other vulnerable pupils such as young carers or those with English as an additional language. The Committee asked that strategic approaches be balanced out appropriately to ensure that there are no gaps in support and that provision for other vulnerable groups such as those mentioned above be made more obvious in the supporting documentation.
2. The Committee expressed concern over the exclusion data for fixed term exclusions for reasons such as Racial Harassment, Assault/Violence and Substance Misuse. The Committee recommended that:
  - a) the programme 'Show Racism the Red Card' be promoted more with school governors to try and encourage more schools to sign up: and
  - b) that the Police be approached to offer more support through the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs.

### Additional Information

1. The Committee asked for the data of any charges that have been brought against secondary school pupils from Bridgend's schools.
2. The Committee asked for further breakdown and analysis of the exclusion data, particularly focusing on data for 2014-15 for fixed term exclusions in Primary and Secondary Schools.
3. Members asked for an explanatory note on the various types of provision under the Fair Access Strategy.

## 226. CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE - OVERVIEW

The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing presented a report which updated the Committee on the recent changes to Children's Social Services since the function was transferred to her six months ago. She advised of the introduction of the Social Services and Wellbeing Act, the implementations of the Welsh Community Care Information System (WCCIS) being led by Bridgend and the current budget pressure faced by the Authority and the Directorate. She added that this was a complex statutory service with a high demand and the importance of protecting children from harm.

Members queried the retention of staff and their training and development to enable them to stay with the authority. The Corporate Director responded that there was a training budget provided by the Welsh Government to enable the Social Care Workforce Development Partnership (SCWDP) to provide training as directed. She advised that there was no indication that this arrangement would change. Social workers were also able to undertake training as part of their ongoing development with the Care Council for Wales, Continuing Professional Education and Learning (CPEL) consolidation programme.

Members queried the differences between the social worker vacancies numbers in the report. It was explained that the service has ensured that all vacancies are covered either by temporary or agency staff. A wide portfolio of further foundation training was available to staff in the western bay region and the authority was proactively identifying staff with the necessary experience and an interest in coaching being trained to undertake senior roles.

Members asked how many Looked After Children were currently being supported by the authority. The committee was informed that the service was currently supporting 390 children.

The Committee queried the progress of the implementation of the Social Services and Wellbeing Act. They were informed that the preparation made before its implementation had increase awareness of the act and its implications. The increased level of assessments were reducing and the authority was responding to the new codes of practice.

The committee queried the effectiveness of the Multi agency safeguarding hub being based in the civic offices. The Cabinet Member indicated that discussions regarding the most suitable location for the hub were ongoing.

#### Conclusion

1. Members strongly supported the continued promotion of the 'grow your own' approach for social workers.
2. The Committee recommend that the Bridgend MASH and the Just Ask Service be relocated from the Civic Centre to a more suitable location within the community in order to aid them in being more user friendly.
3. The Committee proposed that a Pre-Council Briefing take place on the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs.

#### **Additional Information**

1. The Committee asked for further information on the current staffing structure within Children's Social Services including anonymised details of number of FTEs, current Agency figures, as well as detail on roles, team structures etc.
2. Members asked for information on whether the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs were now all fully operational and whether there had been any difficulties experienced with the agencies working together.
3. Members asked for further information on the mix of skills and services available within the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs and specifically what assistance is available for those in transition from Children's to Adult Services.

227. CORPORATE PARENTING CHAMPION NOMINATION

The Scrutiny Officer outlined the role of the Committee's Corporate Parenting Champion and explained that Councillor DBF White was the current appointee. After some debate it was:-

RESOLVED: That Councillor DBF White be re-appointed as the Committee's Corporate Parenting Champion

228. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2016-17

The Corporate Director-Operational and Partnership Services provided a report which requested that the Committee consider and approve its Forward Work Programme for the year.

1. In Relation to the item on Children with Disabilities public consultation, the Committee requested that the Youth Council be invited to attend and engage on the subject.
2. The Committee asked that the report on Early Help, Permanency and Placement scheduled for October 2016 incorporate an update on the current LAC numbers, as well as some detail or examples of the costings of foster placements, both in house and Out of Authority. Members also asked that an external view be sought for this meeting with advocate(s) invited to speak to provide perspectives on the services for LAC.
3. Members put forward the subject of 'Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service' (CAHMS) as an item to pilot for Collaborative Scrutiny and asked that should this go forward, a representative from Cwm Taf and ABMU be invited to attend.

229. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

Following the discussion during the previous item the Committee requested that the proposals be confirmed at its next meeting.

230. URGENT ITEMS

None

The meeting closed at 4.35 pm