

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND ON MONDAY, 17 MARCH 2014 AT 2.00PM

Present:

Councillor E P Foley – Chairperson

D K Edwards	M Jones	H J Townsend
C A Green	G Phillips	C Westwood
R M James	C E Rees	D B F White
P N John	R Thomas	R E Young

Registered Representatives & Co-opted Members:

Reverend Canon E J Evans (Church in Wales)
Mr T Cahalane (Roman Catholic Church)
Mr G Isaac (Secondary School Parent Governor)
Mr R Thomas (Primary School Parent Governor)
Mr W Bond (Special School Parent Governor)
Miss S O'Halloran (NAHT)
Mr J Hopkin Thomas (NAS/UWT)
Mr K Pascoe

Officers:

W Kirby - Scrutiny Officer
L Griffiths - Legal Officer
J Monks - Democratic Services Officer - Committees

Invitees:

Councillor H J David - Cabinet Member – Children and Young People
D McMillan - Corporate Director – Children
C Turner - Head of Safeguarding and Family Support
D Beeke - HR Business Partner
N Echanis - Group Manager - Integrated Working & Family Support
D Davies - Principal Officer Business Systems and QA
S Roberts - Lead Officer for School Improvement
A Norman - Finance Manager - Service Management

94 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor D G Owen due to work commitments.

95 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following declarations of interest were received from Members:

Councillor G Phillips - Agenda Item 5 – Council's Performance against its Commitments for 2013-14 – Councillor Phillips declared a personal interest as his wife is employed in the catering section of the Council providing school meals.

Ms S O'Halloran - Urgent Agenda Item – Nursery Education Policy – Headteacher of Nottage Primary School – Ms O'Halloran declared a

prejudicial interest as it affects the budget and staffing at her school.

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Christina Rees to her first meeting of the Committee.

The Chairperson announced that Estyn Inspectors were present to observe the meeting.

The Chairperson further announced that this would be the last meeting attended by Mr J Hopkin Thomas as he was due to retire. On behalf of the Committee, he thanked Mr Thomas for his input as a union representative during his time as a member. Mr Thomas then introduced Mr Howell Daniel, as the NAS/UWT Union's proposed nomination to sit on the Committee. Mr Daniel, who was observing the meeting, is a teacher at Porthcawl Comprehensive School.

96 WORK PLACEMENTS, TRAINEESHIPS AND APPRENTICESHIPS PROJECT

The Corporate Director – Children provided a report to update the Committee on the progress made on the Work Placements, Traineeships and Apprenticeships Project, and the specific provision for young people who are looked after children (LAC) or care leavers. A Project Board was set up, and an overall project update was presented to Cabinet and the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Further annual reports would ensure that Members are advised on the progress made against the project objectives.

Alongside new arrangements for work placements in the Council, it was agreed that there will also be a need to develop specific work placements for care leavers, which will form part of an accredited programme with the National Open College (NOCN). A Project Group is currently working with the Just@sk Plus team, targeting some LAC and care leavers who are Not in Education Employment or Training (NEETS).

The Corporate Director – Children explained that the report specifically outlines the range of opportunities the Project Group would look at, from developing work placements to creating additional apprenticeship posts, to match the LAC and care leavers, within existing resources and existing vacancies in the Authority. The key achievements to date are detailed under paragraph 4.12 of the report.

One Member pointed out that the number of young people who had secured employment seemed low, compared to other local authorities, and two of the placements were just seasonal.

The HR Business Partner advised that there were also a small number of apprenticeships, and the provision, albeit limited, is meeting individual needs.

A Member queried why the Committee had not been kept up to date with information on Studio 34 as requested, with particular reference to LAC.

The Corporate Director – Children explained that the building was jointly owned with Bridgend College, working collaboratively to ensure that space was maximised daily in order to generate income, as the building was costly to maintain. The funding was available for the next financial year and during that period; the Partnership Steering Group (PSG) were tasked to double the number of children attending Studio 34.

The Cabinet Member – Children and Young People advised that the Management Board which he sits on takes a close interest in Studio 34, and he had witnessed first-hand the difference it makes to vulnerable young people. He was currently working with Comprehensive School Headteachers to ensure the provision is expanded to help even more young people, alongside flexibility to meet their individual needs so that those young people are able to return to school instead of having to attend long courses at Studio 34.

Members asked whether there were any elected Members or young people on the Management Board.

The HR Business Partner advised that two Officers from the Children's Directorate were Board members in order to ensure proper linkage. However, as structures and Officers have changed over time, the Board would need to be reviewed.

The Cabinet Member – Children and Young People advised that consideration could be given to a young person becoming a member of the Board. He explained that the youngsters who benefitted from Studio 34 were vulnerable and therefore it may not be appropriate for them to be involved in Board meetings. However, he commented that on the other hand it could improve their confidence as an individual.

A Member asked what happened to those young people who needed to attend Studio 34, but did not attend.

The Corporate Director – Children advised that the projects were only available to around 30 young people in each academic year, as the costs per head were extensive. The Project Group had been tasked to double that number.

Conclusions:

The Committee:

1. Welcomed work placements for LAC; however it was noted that the numbers are low and therefore the Committee would welcome more effort being made to provide suitable apprenticeships for LAC, geared towards the need of the young person.
2. Welcomed the fact that the Corporate Director – Children is aiming to double the number of young people who will access Studio 34 in recognition of the added value this service provides.
3. Suggested that it would be beneficial to have the voice of a young person on the Studio 34 Board and recommended that this option is explored further.
4. Recommended that consideration be given to a member of this Committee to sit on the Project Board to take this work forward.
5. Requested retention of the Forward Work Programme and for an update report to be provided on an annual basis.

97 **NURSERY EDUCATION POLICY**

The Chairperson accepted this item as urgent in accordance with part 4 (paragraph 4) of the Council Procedure rules, due to the importance of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee being able to consider the outcomes of this consultation prior to a decision being made by Cabinet. The closing date of the consultation and the time needed to compile the report could not achieve the deadline for the usual publication of the report.

Members adjourned for 30 minutes to afford them time to read the report, due to its late arrival.

The Corporate Director – Children presented the report to inform the Committee of the outcome of the consultation on proposals to review the Nursery Education Policy and present the findings of the consultation in a detailed Consultation Report. The report would be presented to Cabinet

at its meeting on the 1st April 2014 to make a decision regarding which option to implement now that the consultation process had been finalised.

She reported that there had been an excellent response to the consultation, with over 2,000 replies, all of which had been read and acknowledged, detailed at Appendix 1. Also, a number of responses by telephone, letters and e-mails had been received, listed at Appendix 3 to the report. The overall majority of responses expressed a preference for Option 1, to retain the current provision. She advised that the report had clearly set out under paragraph 4 the statutory duty for local authorities, and the current arrangements. She advised that it was important to note that if Options 2a, 2b or 3 were to be implemented, any amendments to the current admission arrangements were required by the 15th April 2014, which was the reason for Cabinet having to make its decision at its meeting on the 1st April 2014.

She stressed that if there is no change to the current provision, the recurrent annual savings of £1.5m would have to be realised from elsewhere within the Children's Directorate budget.

One Member enquired whether it would be feasible to make cuts from elsewhere in the budget, should the Committee be mindful to go for Option 1.

The Corporate Director – Children explained that the Children's Directorate is required to make savings in excess of £8m over the next three years. Difficult decisions had to be made, with some involving staffing and service delivery. In order to make further reductions of £1.5m, this would inevitably result in a severe impact on the facilities children currently received. The Youth Service and Education budgets would need to be looked at again, as well as some wider safeguarding budgets.

A Member asked why the Trade Unions had not been afforded the same offer of consultation as the other groups. He further asked whether any work had been carried out on the level of top slicing, as he was concerned that cuts in secondary schools could result in displacing redundancies from one area to another, specifically the Post 16 service. Another Member was also concerned that Trade Unions had not been consulted and asked why they were not included, as they represented professionals who worked in frontline services and in classrooms; and would hold valuable views and information on this process.

The Corporate Director – Children apologised and advised that it had not been a conscious decision to exclude Trade Unions from the consultation. She suggested holding a meeting shortly with the Trade Unions' representatives.

One Member referred to the amount of money some schools held over in earmarked reserves and asked whether those funds could be diverted for the nursery education provision. She advised that as some schools had not been using their full budget allocation, over a number of years the amount of money increased in earmarked reserves and she wondered whether budgets could in fact be lower.

The Finance Manager - Service Management advised that the earmarked reserves are a one-off saving and not an ongoing budget saving.

The Cabinet Member – Children and Young People advised that the level of some school balances had caused some concern in recent years, and this year the Directorate collected back a number of excess balances from schools that have over and above the maximum levels set. Therefore the money had already been recycled back into the system and action was being taken against any schools holding excess balances.

One Member asked the Director what her preferred option would be.

The Legal Officer advised that the Director could state her preferred option, but ultimately it was a Cabinet decision.

The Corporate Director – Children advised that each of the options had the potential in terms of impact and it was about managing the risk, as each option carried a risk. It is a fact that the Directorate has a reduced budget and she advised that her focus was on ensuring vulnerable children continue to be supported; therefore Option 3 would be her preferred option. However, she commented that Option 3 would be extremely difficult to deliver and cause substantial difficulties for schools and Officers in implementing it. She added that the Cabinet decision would be based on the facts presented to them.

A Member asked how the Directorate would ensure that local authority provision would be protected, and whether it would be achieved in areas where that provision was inadequate.

The Corporate Director – Children advised that parents would have a choice of either privately run care or a local authority nursery, and if Option 4 was implemented, parents would still have that choice.

Conclusions:

Following discussion the Committee concluded that:

1. Option 1 was not a viable option due to the impact it would have on other service areas within the Directorate. The Committee further noted that in its view, the implications of choosing Option 1 were not made sufficiently clear during the consultation process.
2. As Option 1 was not considered viable, the Committee's preferred option was Option 4. However, the Committee still has a number of concerns regarding the sustainability of this option and the impact it could have across all schools. Therefore the Committee recommends that £750k (i.e. half the £1.5 million savings necessary) should be top sliced from schools budgets and the remaining £750k should be identified from other sources.
3. The Committee also noted that, as recommended at its meeting on the 30th September 2013, Members were of the view that Option 4 should be amended to include the removal of parental choice of maintained versus non-maintained settings, to ensure that public money is directed towards the maintained sector, (i.e. schools), and is not used for private sector provision.
4. The Committee also expressed its concerns that Trade Unions had not been included in the consultation process. The Committee accepts that this was not a deliberate attempt at exclusion but recommends that Trade Unions are included in any future consultations in relation to educational issues.

Additional Information:

- Clarification on who will meet the costs for redundancies, for those affected in Voluntary Aided Schools, should option 2, 3 or 4 be chosen by Cabinet.

98 OVERVIEW OF QUARTER THREE PERFORMANCE 2013-14

The Corporate Director – Children submitted a report to provide the Committee with an overview of the Council's progress in delivering its improvement priorities identified by the Corporate Plan 2013-17 relevant to this Committee's areas of responsibility regarding:

- Performance against national and local performance indicators;

- Key service actions;
- Financial performance.

There are 61 commitments which had been identified for this financial year, attached at Appendix 1 to the report, 16 of which are relevant to this Committee. The tables detailed in the report, set out the performance of the commitments by improvement priority with results from Quarter 2 shown for comparison purposes.

One Member referred to the level of sickness absence within the Children's Directorate, as it had gone from green in Quarter 2, to red in Quarter 3. She asked what the financial implication of these sickness absences had on the Directorate.

The Corporate Director – Children advised that the target for the Directorate for the whole year is 9.1 full time equivalent days. Although the percentage was 7.6% in Quarter 2, overall the Directorate was still on target and she was confident that strategies were in place to tackle sickness absence and were starting to have an effect.

A Member referred to the overspend of £1.1m on LAC and asked whether this figure had included independent fostering and other institutes. Another Member asked what efforts were being made to keep on achieving those underspends on out of county placements.

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support advised that the Committee would be aware of the reliance the Authority had on the independent fostering agencies, and despite Officers attempts to reduce the number of children coming into the care system, LAC continued to place pressure on the budget. With regard to out of county independent residential placements, other agencies such as the Health Authority were being encouraged to contribute to the cost, but it remained a formidable challenge. Also included in the overspend was an element of fees paid to adoption agency placements, as some children had been identified as needing to be placed out of the county.

With regard to achieving underspends, he advised that every effort was made to ensure a robust strategic overview of high costs, but some children had to be placed in establishments far away from the Borough for their own protection. He advised that he chairs a monthly Panel which scrutinises placements of children who are placed out of county, in order to look at alternative establishments for them closer to Bridgend. He referred to the in-house provision and specialist unit for the most vulnerable children with the most complex needs, which was set up approximately four years ago. Since it opened, they had been able to return three children to the Borough. Also the Intensive Family Support Service was starting to show results, with the potential to reunite those children with complex needs back into their families.

One Member referred to the Performance Indicator SCC/037 (NSI) on page 38 of Appendix 1, which relates to 16 year old LAC in relation to their educational achievements, and asked how they would address this

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support explained that this particular performance indicator only takes into account a small number of children with complex multi-faceted needs, and there are frequently difficulties in getting those children into a classroom. He advised that it only takes a small number of the LAC population, who may either be in Youth Offender Units or secure establishments, to affect the results. In such cases, a personal plan is put in place, involving Education and a Social Worker to monitor those children so that they receive the best education.

A Member asked whether the Authority was failing to recruit in special needs schools, and how those primary schools would manage if those vacant posts are not filled.

The Corporate Director – Children explained that one of the major pieces of work in the Inclusion Service is to review all learning resources centres to meet additional learning needs, and a recent review had concluded that those vacancies would need to be realigned.

One Member asked for more detail on the commitment to ensure that the Authority supports those more able children and young people who were currently underperforming. He further asked how the ICT strategy would assist in replacing pupil trackers.

The Corporate Director – Children explained that the consortia had decided to discontinue the pupil tracker. However this Authority already had a number of tracking tools in place to track pupil performance, as required by all schools. If a school does not have a tracking tool in place, that school would then be challenged by System Leaders and the appropriate advice given. Also it was shown in red to implement the consortia wide categorisation for schools superseded by Welsh Government on the 14th September which were the two main reasons why that is red.

The Principal Officer Business Systems and QA advised that tools such as the Basic and Key Skills Builder can be used for individual pupil assessment and enable teachers to track capability and performance for individual pupils. The current licence costs had been funded. This kind of development links to the ICT strategy by promoting access to systems that support learning.

A Member was concerned at the sharp increase in the number of pupils from 3 to 13 who had been permanently excluded from school.

The Corporate Director – Children explained that in this academic year it was clear that a number of exclusions were unacceptably high, with six exclusions from two secondary schools. A Task and Finish Group was set up, involving a range of professionals, to question those exclusions and establish whether the Authority could have intervened earlier to prevent them. That work was ongoing; however the early indication was that earlier intervention when those children were younger could have prevented those exclusions and the Task and Finish Group was to make sure that those lessons are learned.

One Member referred to the backlog of special needs statements, due to long term sickness absences, which had since improved. He asked whether those sickness absences had been resolved, or if the Authority were required to bring in specialists to clear the backlog.

The Corporate Director – Children advised that as part of the Directorate's restructure, this area underwent a review. Two members of staff who previously carried out that role had been made redundant and a more economical and effective procedure was now in place to achieve this.

Conclusions:

The Committee:

1. Recommended that the SCC/037 NS target is revised downwards, as the target appears to be set too high and Members felt that the Directorate is setting themselves up to fail.
2. Recommended the inclusion of the Impact of the Pupil Deprivation Grant as a topic on the Forward Work Programme, particularly focussing on how the £1.5m grant is being invested, and to show the positive outcomes.

Additional Information:

- The annual cost of sickness within the Children's Directorate.

99 DIRECTORATE BUSINESS PLAN – CHILDREN

The Scrutiny Officer presented a report to introduce the draft Business Plan for the Children's Directorate, attached at Appendix A, for the Committee to consider appropriate lines of enquiry to follow, or comments it may have, to be included in the Community Safety and Governance Overview and Scrutiny Committee's report to Cabinet. The Business Plan, which had been developed to implement the Council's Corporate Plan 2013-17, had identified 17 commitments which were pertinent to the Children's Directorate. These commitments are broken down into Improvement Priorities, detailed in table form under paragraph 4.1 of the report.

One Member referred to the aforementioned table of Improvement Priorities and asked why there were no commitments identified under Improvement Priority 1 – Working together to develop the local economy. She commented that the report had stated that if educational attainment does not improve, it will affect the local economy.

The Corporate Director – Children explained that the table referred to the number of commitments within each Improvement Priority, and the Directorate did not have any commitments under Improvement Priority 1.

In response to a question from Members, the Head of Safeguarding and Family Support advised that there was a continued strategy to recruit foster carers. However the reality was that there was still a strong reliance on independent foster agencies and it was for that reason that Bridgend foster care was promoted in order to protect that brand.

A Member asked why there was no budget going forward for post 14. She further asked why there was no budget shown for sickness absence.

The Corporate Director – Children advised that the grant for post 14 comes through the Authority and is then distributed to schools to dispense. She would find out detailed information and report back to the Committee. With regard to sickness absence, she explained that if a member of staff within a team went sick, then that team would be expected to manage and back fill that post from within its allocated budget.

The same Member asked for an explanation as to why the number of looked after children (LAC) was increasing, yet the budget was decreasing.

The Corporate Director – Children explained that when the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) was set, it was clear that there would not be sufficient funds to support an increase in the number of LAC. The other Directorates had agreed to mitigate the potential for overspend with an extra £950k, on the premise that the preventative early intervention programme, supported through the development of the Connecting Families Programme, would be worked on and start to show a decrease in the number of LAC. He reassured Members that every area had been considered in an attempt to make savings, and this had already been achieved in out of county placements, with fewer children being placed in higher cost placements. He commented that this had proved to be a success story for the Resolutions Foster Service, a collaborative fostering project with Caerphilly, Merthyr Tydfil and the Vale of Glamorgan Councils, and the scheme had seen 19 out of 22 foster carers choosing to transfer to Bridgend.

The Cabinet Member – Children and Young People informed Members that the Authority's Foster Panel had recently approved one foster carer from Merthyr Tydfil and another from the Vale of Glamorgan, enabling some troubled teenagers to be able to make a fresh start in a different Borough.

Conclusions:

The Committee:

1. Noted that there are no commitments identified under Improvement Priority 1 – Working together to develop the local economy – and recommended that this is reconsidered, as the impact of Not in Education Employment or Training (NEETS) may well have an impact on the local economy.
2. Noted that Foster Care had not been included within the Business Plan and recommended that it be included in future versions of the current Business Plan.
3. Requested an explanation to the £0 spend on the Post 14 budget going forward.

Additional Information:

- Members requested that they be provided with a structure of the Children’s Directorate to include names and contact details of Senior Officers.

100 **FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE**

The Scrutiny Officer presented a report outlining the items due to be considered at the meeting of the Committee on the 3rd February 2014, and further sought confirmation of the information required for the subsequent scheduled meeting to be held on the 17th March 2014.

Conclusions:

The Committee noted the topics due to be considered at the meeting of the Committee scheduled for the 28th April 2014 and acknowledged the invitees to attend the subsequent meeting on the 10th June 2014.

The meeting closed at 6.00pm.