

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, 13 OCTOBER 2014 AT 2.00PM

Present:

Councillor E P Foley – Chairperson

D K Edwards
C A Green

R L Thomas
G Phillips

C Westwood
D B F White

Registered Representatives & Co-opted Members:

Mr W Bond (Special School Parent Governor)
Mr H Daniel (NAS/UWT)
Mr K Pascoe
Mr R Thomas (Primary School Parent Governor)

Officers:

R Keepins - Scrutiny 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
N Echanis - Head of Strategy Commissioning and Partnerships
D Beeke - Workforce Development Manager

133 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from the following Members:

134 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

135 EARLY INTERVENTION AND PREVENTION STRATEGY

The Corporate Director – Children presented a report to update the Committee on the progress made to develop a Strategy to define the activity around the early intervention and prevention services in Bridgend. The Strategy for Bridgend, known as “Early Help in Bridgend”, was attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

The Head of Strategy Commissioning and Partnerships explained the concept of early intervention, which basically consists of local practitioners from across different services, working together to respond to incidents which require multi-agency responses so that they are able to effectively provide an all-encompassing service for vulnerable children and families. These multi-agency community teams would be able to identify difficulties and intervene before those difficulties reached the point where it could seriously affect the wellbeing and development of a child. Each family would be allocated a key Family Support Worker who would be the main contact and support for the family throughout, continuing to coordinate the family needs for as long as support is required.

She informed Members that considerable investment had been put into early intervention over the last few years; part of which involved moving the support services into hubs within the Borough so that services are community based and more easily accessible. She advised that detailed reports would be available for Members in the next few weeks to explain the Strategy in more depth, including some background and case studies set against the levels of need.

The Committee queried why there did not appear to be any connection with the Western Bay collaboration.

The Head of Strategy Commissioning and Partnerships confirmed that there were good links within Western Bay, with the potential in the future to roll out some initiatives that had already proved successful in Swansea. She explained that the Directorate was in the process of being restructured, with all services reporting to one Group Manager instead of several Managers and Heads of Service as was the case before. This move would result in significant financial savings, mainly in the management structure of the teams, which will preserve early intervention services. She stressed that if the Authority were to disinvest from those services, it would place more pressure on the LAC service in the future.

The Corporate Director – Children explained how the two strategies (Early Intervention and Prevention Strategy and the LAC Placements and Permanency Strategy) would work together, helping to meet the needs of families with complex needs by early intervention. She advised that they were working to manage demand as the Directorate was now expected to find an extra £5m in savings, which equates to a third of the controllable budget for the Children's Directorate. She advised that with the whole reorganisation of the Directorate, the multi-agency community teams would be able to devise individual holistic plans, personalised for each child and their family

The Committee enquired about the makeup of the hubs and how they would prove more sustainable than if services remained centralised.

The Head of Strategy Commissioning and Partnerships advised that the hubs were already in the development stage, based in three locations: Pyle Life Centre; Coleg Cymunedol Y Dderwen and the East Hub will be at Civic. Various support services would be based within those hubs and Officers were currently going through an exercise to establish how to develop them.

The Committee asked about the financial implications on the budget for Early Intervention in view of the Directorate having to find approximately £8m in savings. The Committee further asked for details of the £1.5m unidentified savings, and asked where that was coming from.

The Head of Strategy Commissioning and Partnerships explained that most of the budget for Early Intervention was grant funded, made up of various grants including permanent grants for programmes such as Flying Start and Families First, which could fund many of the support services. As well as core funding, there was also the Integrated Family Support grant, which is a year-on-year budget. Focus was to stop chasing short term grants and look at more stable long terms ones.

The Cabinet Member – Children and Young People advised that Flying Start, Families First and Integrated Family Support were the flagship projects of the Welsh Government, introduced during the current term of office. He therefore did not anticipate any reductions in funding to those programmes during the current term of office, and on the contrary expected a continuous expansion to Flying Start. The Chairperson commented that the Children's Minister's recent statement supported this.

The Committee asked what actions were being taken within the Strategy to involve the wider sector and voluntary organisations such as youth clubs.

The Head of Strategy Commissioning and Partnerships advised that it was limited at the moment; however the intention was to engage with the volunteer sector in all areas and work closely with the Youth Support services, particularly around the restructure. It was also the intention to consult with partners, including health colleagues, in how to populate the action plan.

One Member was concerned where the funds would come from, should there be an over-spend in the Directorate's budget again this year.

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support advised that the Authority had a significant number of LAC and there were a number of children in Bridgend who were not achieving their potential. He informed Members that there were two aims: to prevent children suffering harm and entering the care system and a permanency plan for LAC. For the Strategy to work successfully, it requires engagement from all professionals, as with the right family support, some of those children could be returned to their families, and once the Strategy is embedded, it was hoped to reduce the number of LAC. However, he stressed that he could not predict what was in the future and gave Members an example of three children from one family within the Borough who were taken into care this week for their safety, just as the number of LAC was reducing.

The Corporate Director – Children advised that at this time of year the Directorate was looking towards next year's budget requirements. She highlighted that there were sometimes pressures in relation to unexpected costs which affect the budget, such as new legislation around pay scales for night time workers working in the Authority's residential homes. She informed Members that they were making strides to increase the number of in-house foster carers, as foster places within the private sector cost twice as much. There had been some success during recent months with 122 independent foster placements being reduced to 100. The other pressure was in Court proceedings, as children very often had therapeutic needs where specialist care is required; however there were processes in place to ensure best value from such providers.

Conclusions:

- Members requested that the links to the Western Bay project through the IFSS are made more explicit within the Strategy.
- The Committee requested that more consideration is given towards the potential future savings from Early Intervention and Prevention work and that this be incorporated into the action plan. Members agreed they would be considering the financial savings when the item is revisited.
- Members expressed concern over the action plan for the Strategy in that it did not contain direct links to outcomes, or have any clear actions that could be monitored and used as evaluative evidence. The Committee therefore requested that priority be given to the development of local indicators and outcomes and that these are clearly laid out and agreed by all partner agencies under the strategy to ensure that there are defined priorities and targets for all to meet and monitor.
- The Committee requested that they revisit the item in 12 months' time, at which point they requested that they receive evaluative evidence of outcomes from the Strategy including any impact on the numbers of LAC within the County Borough and any financial savings that have been achieved through preventative work.

136 **RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF SOCIAL WORKERS**

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support presented a report to update the Committee on work being undertaken in relation to the recruitment and retention of Social Workers, and the

actions undertaken and planned to address these issues. He commented that his team were pleased at the interest the Committee had taken in their work over the years.

He advised that the biggest resource in the Directorate were the staff and it was important that they had the competence and confidence to carry out their various roles. Recruiting and retaining qualified Social Workers was a constant feature over the past five years. He explained that the fundamental issue was that most of the Social Workers are in their first or second year post qualifying, which brought about challenges in supporting them in a highly emotionally charged environment. He explained that the Directorate worked closely to engage with the other Directorates in getting proactive to address the recruitment and retention challenges.

The Committee asked whether internal training programmes continued for new Social Workers.

The Workforce Development Manager advised that the existing Social Care Workers could apply to access the Social Work Trainee position, which replaced the former secondment scheme which had run for many years; however, Managers felt that it was difficult to continue to support this programme, as it would involve those seconded to under social work training to attend two days a week in College and placements in addition to this, with the remaining team members having to manage the workload. This year the Directorate had embarked on a traineeship programme whereby 213 applications were received for just one position. The benefit of doing it this way dedicated training is provided during the period of employment, with opportunities to move around different service areas. Bids will be made to access external funding to enhance that programme further.

The Committee commented on the retention of Social Workers in that there did not appear to be a breakthrough in solving the problem. The Committee further asked why the Children's Social Worker post was treated in the same way as other Social Workers, as there did not seem to be any recognition.

The Workforce Development Manager explained that there were different pay scales across the 22 local authorities in Wales for Social Workers and information gained from exit interviews suggested that this was not the reason provided on why Social Workers were leaving the Authority. There was financial recognition paid to them, after two years' experience, recognising that they are able to work at a higher level and are given more diverse and challenging caseloads.

The Committee asked whether the new arrangements for flexible working hours had affected Social Workers, and if they were provided with administrative assistance so that they were not tied down with paperwork.

The Head of Safeguarding and Family Support advised that there had been some negative feedback from Social Workers on the flexible working hours scheme, as they had lost the ability to have two days off per month. However, they have now all been issued with their own laptop and would be able to work from home.

Conclusions:

1. Members complimented the new induction programme for newly qualified social workers but expressed the need to ensure that all accessed this programme in order that they are protected in their first year in practice and thus encourage them to remain with the authority.
2. Members commented on some of the issues expressed by social workers including the time taken on paperwork and asked that consideration be given to whether there is capacity for providing more admin assistance to social workers.

3. Some Members expressed concerns over management issues, in particular, the need for better communication between managers and practitioners. This was evident from the lack of engagement with the Exit Interview process as well as some of the comments expressed by Officers which inferred that the consultation process in regard to re organising the service had not always been sufficient. Members commented that re organisation, poor due process and consultation arrangements have caused a few issues in this service and will no doubt have had an impact on the retention of Social Workers.

Members, however, noted the comments made by the Head of Safeguarding and Family Support regarding recent improvements; accommodation issues addressed, caseloads being of a reasonable number, regular newsletters to staff and regular meetings with staff. As a result, the Committee:

- a) Complimented these efforts and encouraged their continuation;
 - b) Stressed that any future re-organisation would need to include a better consultation of the workforce;
 - c) Proposed that the Exit Interview process be reviewed to try and achieve a higher response rate.
4. Members welcomed the new Social Worker Traineeship that had been introduced and recommended that this be expanded, increasing the number of traineeships with a loyalty clause that they are contracted to the local authority for two years following their training.
 5. The Committee asked the Scrutiny Officer to explore whether further information could be presented to the Committee in relation to the Council's flexible working policy and how it relates to social workers.

Recommendation:

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.
- 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.

137 MEMBER AND SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT PANEL

The Scrutiny Officer presented a report outlining a revised plan for the Member School Engagement Panel which included information on the new National Schools Categorisation System which would incorporate the principles of the Secondary School Banding.

The Corporate Director – Children advised that until now there had been no categorisation of Primary Schools by WG. The Secondary Schools had been banded from 1, being the best, to 5, , and the Borough currently had one school in Band 5, Coleg y Dderwen. She explained that the national categorisation being introduced in January 2015 would make the system more robust and include Primary Schools. There were three steps for categorisation:

- Analysing data in relation to performance;

- Looking at ability and capacity of a school to improve
- Categories are colour coded to red, amber, yellow or green.

She advised that the Authority's own consortium had for the past 18 months been using the categorisation of the letters A, B, C and D in order to work out how much support schools need. It had been refined this year and she was confident that the Authority's own categorisation system was similar to the National Schools Categorisation System, using the same metrics as the Welsh Government. She was therefore aware of which schools in the Borough were in the red category and the decision made collectively with the other Directors across the consortium was that all schools in the red category would be treated the same in terms of Statutory powers of intervention. She reported that during the past academic year she had used the statutory powers available to intervene three times in different schools, which showed that the Authority was taking a harder line.

The Committee asked whether local government support would be disseminated and work undertaken by consortia, and if so, whether a parent who had concerns about a particular school would turn to the consortia or the local authority concerned for support.

The Corporate Director – Children explained that the Welsh Government brought out the national model for regional working which clearly set out the role of consortia, and the role of the LA, and the rationale being consistent in terms of functions across all local authorities in Wales; each being allocated the same amount of funding. Within the national model a number of areas currently sit outside and are delivered by the Authority, including Governor Support Services, Learning Pathways 14-19 and HR for schools. Councils had until April 2015 to determine how those functions would be transferred to the consortium. She explained that each Local Authority within the Consortia led on a particular area and hers was the 14-19 work. In terms of the Governor Support services, she advised that it would make sense to centralise some work, such as training and stated that she was fighting to retain some local provision so that parents are able to contact local Officers with their concerns. She advised that she would be in a position to report to Cabinet around February/March on the implications for the Authority.

In response to a question from Members, she explained that Wales Audit Office was embarking on a review of best value across all consortia..

Conclusions:

1. The Committee agreed to re-establish the Member and School Engagement Panel with a new approach and criteria as set out in the report including the incorporation of Primary Schools as well as Secondary schools.
2. Members also requested to receive a report in the New Year on any changes to the Consortia, detailing what services are being transferred to them, as well as Estyn's report on the Consortium when it is published.

138 **APPOINTMENT OF REGISTERED REPRESENTATIVE TO THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

The Scrutiny Officer presented a report to inform the Committee that Mr Kevin Pascoe has been nominated for appointment as the Secondary School Parent Governor Representative on the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The vacancy has arisen due to the resignation of the former representative, Mr Geraint Isaac. Following an election held in accordance with the Parent Governor Representatives and Church Representatives (Wales) Regulations 2001, Mr Pascoe was nominated for appointment as the Secondary School Parent Governor Representative. It was therefore proposed that he be appointed to the Committee as their representative with voting rights.

Recommendation:

That the Committee would recommend to Council the appointment of Mr Kevin Pascoe as the Secondary School Parent Governor Representative to the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee for a term of four years.

139 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Scrutiny Officer presented a report outlining the items due to be considered at the next meeting of the Committee on the 25th November 2014, and further sought confirmation of the invitees to attend the subsequent scheduled meeting to be held on the 17th December 2014.

Conclusions:

The Committee noted the topics due to be considered at the meeting of the Committee scheduled for the 25th November 2014 and acknowledged the invitees to attend the subsequent meeting on the 17th December 2014.

The meeting closed at 4:40pm.