

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, 29 JULY 2015 AT 2.00 PM

Present

Councillor EP Foley – Chairperson

DK Edwards
G Phillips

CA Green
C Westwood

PN John
DBF White

M Jones

Registered Representatives and Co-opted Members:

Mr W Bond - (Special School Parent Governor)

Invitees:

Councillor Huw David	Deputy Leader
Councillor Hailey Townsend	Cabinet Member Children's Social Services and Equalities
Deborah McMillan	Corporate Director - Education & Transformation
Catherine Parry	Interim Head of Safeguarding and Assessment
Kevin Mulcahy	Group Manager - Highways Services
Nicola Echanis	Head of Strategy Partnerships & Commissioning
Fran Jones	Team Manager Additional Learning Needs
David Wright	Family Support Services Manager
Mark Lewis	Group Manager - Integrated Working

Officers:

Rachel Keepins	Democratic Services Officer - Scrutiny
Mark Galvin	Senior Democratic Services Officer – Committees
Sarah Daniel	Democratic Services Officer - Committees

177. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the following Members for the reasons so stated:

Councillor P A Davies – Unwell
Councillor N Farr – Medical Appointment
Councillor G Phillips – Leave
Councillor R L Thomas – Leave
Rev Canon Edward J Evans – Prior Commitment

178. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Mr W Bond declared a personal interest in Item 4 in that his daughter is in receipt of the service for travel to Heronsbridge School.

179. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee dated 11 May 2015 were approved as a true and accurate record

180. RATIONALISATION OF LEARNER TRANSPORT

The Corporate Director Education and Transformation presented a report to Committee on the progress made in relation to the rationalisation of Learner Transport for pupils with a Special Educational Need (SEN).

She explained that Section 3 of the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 placed a duty on the local authority to make transport arrangements for learners of compulsory school age in specified circumstances and subject to specified conditions. She added that this part of the Act makes provision for free transport, defined by whether they live further than the agreed distances from the schools at which they receive education or training.

Members asked Officers what proportion of the total cost for Learner Travel was for SEN Children. The Corporate Director Education and Transformation estimated that from the total bill of £3.3 million, £400k was the cost of Learner Travel for children with SEN.

Members asked what the rationalisation of Learner Transport meant for the authority, and if the possibility of utilising public school transport after they have completed their school rounds has been or could be looked at.

The Corporate Director Education and Transformation stated that a robust review of all Learner Transport was in progress. She added that all the different cases would be reviewed to identify savings and ascertain if individuals are provided with the most suitable and efficient transport. She explained that arrangements such as sharing transport, teaching individuals, independence and mapping of journeys from home to learning centres will be reviewed. The Group Manager Highways Services added that the Council welcomed the use of different methods of transport to maximise transport initiatives overall, however the vehicles in question often have to undertake additional journeys during the day. The Deputy Leader added that as the budget pressures are acute, all options such as buses being used throughout the day, and Learners at Bridgend Learning Resource Centre using the buses for day trips could be explored to make better use of resources.

Members queried if best practice was being adopted regarding efficiency savings.

The Group Manager Highways Services stated that efficiency measures in this area would be a collaborative process, adding that the Authority is ensuring that they are keeping pace with other Local Authorities. He stated that Neath Port Talbot CBC is also currently reviewing their SEN Transport. The Head of Strategy Partnerships and Commissioning added that no decisions would be made based solely on financial savings for the Authority, and that the needs of the child would be considered first and foremost.

A Member queried the legal issues if a parent disagreed with the potential changes to the transport arrangements for their child. The Team Manager for Additional Learning Needs stated that it would depend on the scenario and if it was specified within the policy and relevant legislation. She explained that in all circumstances discussions would take place with the parent and child and also with education psychologists to determine if sharing transport is suitable to the appropriate needs of the child.

Members asked if the identified £100k SEN Learner travel savings outlined in table one of the report was on track to be achieved for 2015-2016.

The Corporate Director Education and Transformation confirmed that the table was indicated as green in that area as they were on track to achieve the saving and the £150k saving for 2016-2017.

Conclusions:

Following their discussions with Officers, the Committee agreed to make the following recommendation to Cabinet:

The Committee recommend that a comprehensive policy review of all transport within the Local Authority be undertaken as a matter of urgency to consider all possible means of utilising the Authority's transport vehicles in order to achieve efficiency savings.

Members further recommend that:

1. Officers determine where there is best practice in Wales, in terms of Learner Transport, and that this is used to majorly inform the review;
2. Legal issues and potential legal concerns are considered as part of the review;
3. The Review utilises empirical evidence and facts and seeks these out where they may not be already known;
4. Consideration be given to further mainstreaming transport for pupils with SEN as far as possible, given that many of these pupils are attending mainstream schools and classes;
5. The use of escorts to be considered as part of the review, and whether they can be better and more effectively utilised;
6. Consideration to be given to revisiting innovative schemes such as the Volunteer Driver Programme to assist with Learner Transport;
7. A process to be determined through the review to continuously assess and track the take up of transport throughout the year, in order to inform future provision.

Additional Information:

The Committee requested that they receive confirmation of the actual figures relating to the cost for SEN transport compared with the total cost for all of Learner Transport in Bridgend.

Likewise, Members asked for figures on the actual cost savings being made through the rationalisation of Learner Transport.

181. **EDGE OF CARE**

The Group Manager Integrated Working and Family, and the Family Support Service Manager provided a report and presentation to Committee to update them on the progress with the Connecting Families Edge of Care work.

The presentation provided the following information to Committee:

- Between 2007/8 and 2011/12, the Bridgend LAC population increased by 40% compared to a 24% increase across Wales
- Children under 2 and young people aged between 14 to 16 accounted for almost 50% of BCBC's LAC population between 2008 and 2013

The LAC population in Bridgend was continuing to rise at a steady rate and support for families needed to change The Family Support Service Manager highlighted the Edge of Care proposal to Committee which was:

- The high number of children coming into the care system was a focus of an LSB workshop in January 2014
- There was an agreement to subsequently to focus some Connecting Families resources on targeting those children on the edge of care to avoid LAC status
- An Annual target set of working with 20 children (and their families) aged 11-16 years at high risk of entering the care system
- Initial age focus informed by high numbers of teenagers entering the care system

He further added that the Approach Connecting Families would take would be targeted support that would be offered based on research of the current data to include:

- children of high risk of becoming looked after
- children currently or previously on the Child Protection register or previously LAC
- Families known to the probation service
- Families affected by domestic violence, substance misuse and mental health
- Families with a history of School Exclusions
- Families affected by housing issues

The Family Support Service Manager informed Committee of the Edge of Care progress, and he explained that the service went live on the 1st May 2014. He also stated that 30 families accessed the Edge of Care service during 2014-15 which included 52 children (including siblings) which significantly exceeded the target. He added that those families are now utilising support via Early Help Hubs.

He added that prior to intervention each family on average had cost Public Services approximately £40k per annum. Following public intervention the average costs avoided for public services was reduced to a projected £23k per annum. He stated that the total costs avoided to the Public Sector were approximately £707k once the service costs of £135k for Connecting Families were deducted.

The Family Support Service Manager concluded with the Developments and next steps for the Connecting Families Service which were:

- The Family Support Team has been amalgamated into Connecting Families
- All eight Family Support Workers/ Intervention specialists now completing work around children at risk of entering care system. Those in care (including rehab home) and general family support work
- Group work developed including Parenting, Sexual Exploitation Prevention, Attachment and Dads Group

Improve Targeting – focus on intervening earlier and take learning from past 12 months forward. Members thanked the Officers for the very informative and comprehensive presentation which was welcomed by the Committee.

Members were concerned about the future funding of the Connecting Families Service and asked if there could be any potential savings made if the Authority worked in collaboration with the Integrated Family Support Service (IFSS).

The Head of Strategy and Commissioning Partnerships stated that the IFSS provides a statutory service to families that are affected by Substance Misuse only, whereas Connecting Families is supported by Grant Funding and involved working with families affected by various issues including Domestic Violence, Substance Misuse and Mental Health issues. She added that the Authority were working on a Resilience Plan to

secure an early help offer to ensure that an increase in children needing intervention with Social Services is limited. She further added that the numbers of LAC and children on the Child Protection Register are reducing because of the early help offer currently in place.

The Deputy Leader informed Members that this year the Authority is predicting an under-spend in Childrens Social Services. He stated that the adoption service has overspent but the reasons for that were that it has been very successful in securing children permanent placements. He added that more investment was needed in that area so the Authority can continue to safely reduce LAC numbers, adding that if statutory services only were funded, as oppose to non-statutory services then LAC numbers would inevitably rise. It was also reported that there had been a reduction in the number of Independent Fostering Agency placements: from 111 to 90 which also helps contribute towards underspends.

Conclusions:

The Committee welcomed the report and recognised the great deal of work that was being carried out under the Connecting Families Project. Members also recognised the need for support and funding to continue in this area in order to maintain these services and ensure sustainability.

With this in mind, the Committee recommend that the Connecting Families project be placed as a strategic priority for the Directorate and furthermore that it be progressed externally as a strategic priority with either the LSB or the Western Bay Safeguarding Children's Board in order to raise its profile and ensure its continuation.

182. **ANNUAL FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME REPORT 2015/16**

The Scrutiny Officer presented a report to Committee with suggested topics for consideration in the development of its Forward Work Programme for 2015-16. She explained that there would be only 6 scheduled meetings during the year for each Scrutiny Committee, which would look at a maximum of 12 service area topics.

She added that without the capacity to support additional meetings there was a need for each of the Scrutiny Committees to Identify 12 topics for consideration which would provide the most significant value for the Authority and to the residents of the County Borough of Bridgend. She further added that there would be 8 meetings during the year allocated to facilitate collaborative committees to deal with cross cutting issues such as Supporting People and the Bridgend Change Programme

Members requested the following items to be brought to Committee in the next 12 months

- Annual report on Consortia and suggested this could be included within the data report
- Nursery Education in Bridgend
- Corporate Parenting Committee Feedback report
- CSE (post March 2016)

RESOLVED:

The Committee considered and approved their Annual Forward Work Programme 15/16 with the following amendments and comments:

1. That the Committee receive the Consortia's Annual Report under their item on Annual School Performance;
2. That an improved process for how the Corporate Parenting Champion can feedback to the Committee be established and included in the Annual FWP;
3. That post March 2016, as part of the annual FWP 2016/17, an item be included on CSE detailing how the Authority and its Partners have delivered to plan.

183. **CORPORATE PARENTING CHAMPION NOMINATION REPORT**

The Scrutiny Officer presented a report to request the Committee to nominate one Member as its Corporate Parenting Champion to represent the Committee as an invitee to meetings of the Cabinet Committee – Corporate Parenting.

RESOLVED: That the Committee nominated Councillor D B F White as its Corporate Parenting Champion to represent the Committee at meetings of the Cabinet Committee – Corporate Parenting.

184. **FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE**

The Scrutiny Officer presented a report to the Committee to present the items due to be considered at the Committees meeting to be held on 23 September 2015 and seeks confirmation of the information required for the subsequent scheduled meeting to be held on 4 November 2015. She also presented a list of further potential items for prioritisation by the Committee

RESOLVED: That Committee:

Noted the topics due to be considered at the meeting of the 23 September 2015.

185. **URGENT ITEMS**

None

The meeting closed at 4.05 pm