

CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Members Present:

22nd September 2014

Chairman: Councillor A.R.Lockyer

Vice Chairman: Councillor Mrs.D.Jones

Councillors: A.Carter, Mrs.J.Dudley, J.D.Morgan,
Mrs.K.Pearson, Mrs.L.G.Williams and
Mrs.A.Wingrave

**Co-opted Non Voting
Members:** A.Hughes

Officers In Attendance N. Jarman, A.Jarrett, Mrs.A.Thomas, C.Millis and
Ms.D. Berni, H.Roberts, R.Gordon, D.Cole,
C.Davies and Miss.C.Gadd

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors P.D.Richards and A.N.Woolcock

1. **TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM
MEMBERS**

The following Member made declarations of interest at the commencement of the meeting:

Councillor A. Carter - Report of the Director of Social Services, Health and Housing Re: Hillside Secure Children's Home Care and Social Services Inspection, as he is Governor at Cefn Saeson School.

2. **TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN, YOUNG
PEOPLE AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON
31ST JULY 2014**

Noted by the Committee.

Members of the Committee were reminded that if they had any questions that they wished the Improvement Member Panel to ask of Social Workers to send them to the Scrutiny Officer.

Members queried whether there was Police representation on the Children's Services Implementation Board and it was confirmed that this was the case.

3. **TO RECEIVE THE SCRUTINY FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2014/15**

The Forward Work Programme was noted by the Committee.

4. **HOW CHILDREN'S SERVICES HAVE IMPROVED THEIR ASSESSMENT AND CARE PLANNING FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN**

Members received a presentation from the Head of Children and Young People's Services regarding Improving the Quality of Assessment and Care Planning for Looked After Children (LAC).

The presentation included information on LAC statistics, workforce, training, structure, monitoring and next steps for the Service. It was highlighted that the number of LAC had reduced in 2014 and currently there were 252 males and 211 females. It was explained that to free up resources then the quality of practice would need to be improved. More outcome focussed care planning would be required.

It was highlighted that a strong and committed workforce was required and as the Committee was aware there has been a lot of work undertaken in this area. It was noted that the work of the Improvement Member Panel has been very helpful in supporting this work. Currently the service was looking for experienced staff rather than newly qualified and it was positive that there were more applying due to word of mouth and an improved reputation. Long term sickness absence is been addressed and the Service would now be concentrating on short term sickness absence. Back to basics training has taken place and Members were informed that a high percentage of Social Workers had attended.

As Members were aware there had been changes to the structure with new Intake and LAC Teams. It was highlighted that a new IT system had also been developed to assist the Service with improving quality and consistency and it allowed detailed monitoring of performance. It was noted that quality cannot be built into a system without good performance information.

It was highlighted that there were several ways of monitoring performance and this included case audits undertaken to assess quality. Members were informed that not all cases that were audited were as good as they should be, however, improvement could be seen. Support and performance groups had been set up and these included: Peer Review Group, Complex Needs Panel, LAC Improvement Group and Fostering Inspection Group. All of these groups would help to improve outcomes for LAC. It was highlighted that an embedded Quality Assurance Framework was in place to monitor the effectiveness of the service

The next steps for Children and Young People Services were outlined to the Committee and this included safely reducing the number of LAC through the LAC Reduction Strategy, which would also result in savings to the Local Authority. It was highlighted that savings was not the main aim of the Strategy, it was to ensure that children being taken into care was for the right reasons and the key was early intervention and prevention. Other initiatives would also have a bearing, such as the Permanency Panel to ensure the right children were in the right placement and to look at the long term plan.

It was noted that work was being undertaken to improve the webpages and public information regarding Children and Young People Services so it would provide easier access to information. Engaging with service users was a key piece of work for this financial year. The message for the future is to do the simple things well.

Members noted the significant difference in cost between external foster carers and internal foster carers. It was noted that costs were negotiated with external foster agencies on a regional basis through the 4 Cs Consortium. It was highlighted that by recruiting new foster carers and more placements with internal foster carers it would result in a significant impact on the budget. However, it was also noted that it has to be the right placement for a child and if they had been looked after by foster carers for some time then they would not be moved due to costs. It was noted that the final version of the Finance Policy for Foster Carers will be brought to the Committee.

Members queried if there were strategies in place to manage budget savings that need to be made as previously Children's Services had been protected. It was outlined that the financial background was challenging and Social Services would have to make a significant contribution to the budget savings required and reductions in the number of LAC was key to savings. It was recognised that expenditure on Social Workers cannot be reduced as otherwise the Service could take backward steps. It was noted that the majority of savings would fall on Adult Social Care. Budget proposals would be brought to the Committee for consideration in due course.

Members asked if it would be possible to sustain the HR Officers' posts that were currently seconded to Children's Services. They were informed that there was a commitment to maintain them for next financial.

Members asked how the quality and consistency of social work was measured and it was highlighted that this was done through external audit of a cross section of cases. Opportunities were also taken to review cases when information was brought together at other times such as LAC reviews. Members were informed that improvements in the quality of cases had been seen recently. Another way of measuring quality was the reduction in complaints.

Members queried if the Service was looking at special guardianship to reduce the number of LAC and whether foster carers could apply. It was confirmed that anyone could apply to the Local Authority and this included foster carers. It was highlighted that early intervention and prevention was the way forward and the Service was moving in the right direction.

Members requested notes on the presentation to be circulated to the Committee and highlighted that an accompanying report for presentations would be useful.

Following scrutiny it was agreed that the presentation to be noted.

5. **CHILDREN'S SERVICES KEY PRIORITY GRID PERFORMANCE REPORT**

Members received a report on the key performance management information within Children's Services, for the period August 2013 to July 2014, as detailed in the circulated report.

It was noted that performance had dipped in July 2014 with regards to initial assessments completed within 7 working days (SCC/042a). Members were informed that performance had improved in August and was back up to 81%.

Members highlighted that at previous meetings it had been noted that disciplinary action would be taken with social workers who were not following procedures and they queried if any such action had been taken. They were informed that through continual awareness raising it had not been necessary for any disciplinary action to be taken. It was noted that there would be dips in performance at times, however, subsequent performance demonstrated that the Service was reacting to issues and dealing with them.

Members asked why there had been an increase in re-referrals. Officers informed them that performance in this area would fluctuate and that under 22% was seen as within acceptable limits.

Members queried why so many supervisions within the Route 16 Team were out of timescale. They were informed that the Team Manager had been on long term sick, which had created the dip. The Principal Officer and the Deputy Team Manager had covered and all staff had been communicated with even if there was no formal supervision. The Manager was back in work so performance for this team should improve. Members also asked why performance was lower for unqualified workers than it was for qualified. It was highlighted that the priority for qualified workers to receive supervision as they hold child protection cases and unqualified do not. However, it was recognised that unqualified workers should also receive timely supervision.

Members had some queries on how percentages and performance figures were worked out and the Head of Business Strategy and Public Protection invited Members to come and sit with the team to go through the process for producing performance management information.

Following scrutiny it was agreed that the report be noted.

6. **CHILDREN'S SERVICES QUARTER 1 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT**

The Committee received a report on performance management information within Children's Services for the 1st Quarter Period (April to June 2014), as detailed within the circulated report.

Members asked why 6 Looked After Children (LAC) did not have Personal Education Plans (PEP) within 20 school days of entering care or joining a new school (SCC/024). Officers recognised that performance was not as good as it should be in this area. Officers informed Members that there had been some issues with recording this information on the computer system. Also it was noted that educational needs had been difficult to identify for those LAC that were achieving. However, it was highlighted that all LAC should have a PEP and social workers would be addressing this in care planning.

Members highlighted that there had been 1 LAC that had been permanently excluded from school (SCC/044) and it was asked if there had been no other alternative. Officers informed Members that as Corporate Parents all other options should be explored first and exclusion a last resort. Children's

Services would challenge such a decision to try and prevent it from happening. The details of that case would be looked into and reported back to Members.

Members asked if all young carers assessed by Social Services were offered services and it was confirmed that they were. Members requested further information on the services offered to young carers and the take up.

Following scrutiny, it was agreed that the report be noted.

7. PERFORMANCE INDICATOR MONITORING REPORT 1ST QUARTER 2014/15 EDUCATION LEISURE AND LIFELONG LEARNING

Members received a report on the performance achieved for the first quarter of the current financial year (1st April to 30th June 2014) in relation to Education Leisure and Lifelong Learning Directorate, as detailed within the circulated report.

It was noted that there were no officers present to discuss the report. It was agreed by the Committee that the following questions would be submitted to the Directorate following the meeting and the responses circulated to Members.

Performance at Key Stage 2 primary school pupils achieving core subject indicator (EDU/003) Neath Port Talbot is ranked 21st in Wales. Also Performance at Key Stage 3 secondary school pupils achieving the core subject indicator (EDU/004) Neath Port Talbot is ranked 22nd in Wales. In relation to both these indicators Members asked why this was the case, what the Council was going to do to address this and what strategies were in place.

It was asked that out of the permanently excluded pupils (EDU/008) did this include the Looked After Child previously reported in Children's Services data and if so, was it from primary or secondary school.

Members requested that for the number of school days lost due to fixed term exclusions if they could they have the number of days in relation to each pupil.

Following scrutiny and with the agreement to circulate follow up questions to Officers, the report was noted.

8. **TO SELECT APPROPRIATE ITEMS FROM THE CABINET BOARD AGENDA FOR PRE-SCRUTINY**

8.1 **Implementation of Penalty Notices for Non-School Attendance at School**

The Committee received a report on adopting and implementing the Code of Conduct for Penalty Notices in relation to irregular attendance at school/alternative education provision, as detailed in the circulated report.

It was noted that the fine amounts were set by Welsh Government and a policy for the fixed penalty notices had to be approved and implemented. Letters would be sent to parents/guardians and the same timescales would be set across the regional consortium. Members were informed that there will be a slight redrafting of the procedure for issuing a penalty notice. Instead of parent/guardians having 15 days to respond the parent/carer would have 15 days to provide evidence, which if deemed appropriate the notice would be rescinded. Members asked if medical evidence included an official medical certificate as these could be costly. Concern was raised for cases where a child had an on-going medical condition. Members were reassured that if a child was regularly absent due to known reasons then the absence would be authorised and the penalty notices were only in relation to unauthorised absences. Head Teachers will work with parents/carers where possible.

Members asked what consultation had been undertaken by Welsh Government regarding the penalty notices. They were informed that the regional consortium ERW (Education Through Regional Working) had been consulted and it had gone out to all schools and Local Authorities before becoming legislation. Members noted that there was no payment plan and were concerned that if parents/guardians could not afford to pay the amount in the required timescale then the amount would increase. It was highlighted that failure to pay could result in court action, which would have further implications for children then becoming looked after. Officers informed them that no payment plan had been considered and it would have to be looked into if this was possible. Members requested an additional recommendation to be considered by Cabinet Board that officers looked at the viability of a payment plan being included. The Committee was supportive of this proposal to go forward to Cabinet Board.

Members highlighted that schools being closed for different reasons, such as events like NATO Conferences, would not give the right message to parents and guardians. It was also noted that penalty notices would not apply to nursery or reception as they were not statutory.

Officers informed Members that parents/guardians would be informed of this Policy and leaflets were being developed that would contain the main information. Members felt that parents/guardians would benefit from additional literature being available and that the information should be in plain English so there was a clear message.

Members were supportive of the recommendation and the additional recommendation proposed by the Committee. Following scrutiny it was agreed that the report be noted.

8.2 Welsh in Education Strategic Plan 2014-17

Members received the NPT Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) 2014-17, as approved by Welsh Government, which included affirming home to school transport provision in relation to Welsh-medium schools, as detailed in the circulated report.

The Equality Impact Assessment for the Plan was tabled at the meeting. Members were given some time to consider the information and it was noted that Members would have liked the information in advance to fully take it in.

Members highlighted the outcomes that were stated in the report and that there had been a survey undertaken with parents regarding wanting more Welsh Medium Primary Schools and asked if the results had been fed into the action plan. It was confirmed that the information from the survey had been fed into the Plan. It was noted that the proposal for a second Welsh Medium Secondary School would increase access to Welsh medium education as it would improve accessibility. The WESP would also secure the provision already available.

Members raised concerns regarding the access arrangements in regard to the Home to School Transport Policy. It was highlighted that the current provision could be a barrier to the Welsh language in some communities, as children would get free transport to the designated Welsh medium secondary school but not to English medium secondary school if over 3 miles. If the children attended an English

medium primary school then their designated secondary school would be English medium and they would receive transport provision. It was felt by some Members that this would have a detrimental impact on Welsh in some Welsh speaking communities as it would prevent parents sending their children to Welsh medium primary schools if they did not wish their child to go the Welsh medium secondary school. It could encourage them to send their children to an English medium school instead.

Members queried if post 16 pupils had to pay for transport to access Welsh medium education and it was noted that they would not if they were attending the designated Welsh medium provision.

Having given due regard to the Equality Impact Assessment Members were supportive of the first recommendation to adopt the WESP 2014-17. However, not all the Committee were supportive of the second recommendation to affirm the access arrangements to Welsh-medium schools as set out in the report. Following scrutiny it was agreed the report be noted.

8.3 Corporate Parenting Strategy

Members received the updated Corporate Parenting Strategy for their consideration, as detailed in the circulated report. The Corporate Parenting Strategy describes the role of the Council as a corporate parent, responsibilities of individuals and explains to Looked After Children what they can expect from the Council.

It was noted that the Policy had been tested on young people to ensure it was understandable and covered all the aspects that were required. This included questions being asked at the Information and Fun Day arranged by the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Members queried what areas of health the 3 nurses covered and they were informed that it covered all areas of Looked After Children's health. Members also highlighted that an area for improvement in the National Inspection Safeguarding and Care Planning of Looked After Children and Care Leavers, who exhibit vulnerable or risky behaviours, was that there was no strategic representative from Health on the Corporate Parenting Panel. Members were informed that there had been a health representative on the Panel, however, it had been felt that it was not at the right level and this would be looked at.

Having given due regard to the Equality Impact Assessment Members were supportive of the recommendation. Following scrutiny it was agreed that the report be noted.

8.4 Early Intervention and Prevention Commissioning Strategy

Members received the final Early Intervention and Prevention Commissioning Strategy and were advised of progress made to date in relation to the procurement process for those services, as detailed within the circulated report.

The Director of Social Services, Health and Housing was granted delegated authority to undertake the procurement process for the new early intervention and prevention services. An urgency action was also undertaken to prevent a delay in the tender process being started and included in the papers for this meeting.

Members were advised that the Commissioning Strategy would have an overall negative impact on a number of protected groups. A number of mitigating actions would be put in place to reduce the impact. Having given due regard to the Equality Impact Assessment Members were supportive of the recommendation. Following Scrutiny it was agreed that the report be noted.

8.5 Hillside Estyn Inspection

The Committee received the Care and Social Services Inspection report for Hillside Secure Children's Home, as detailed in the circulated report.

Officers highlighted that there were no recommendations in relation to the quality of life and environment at Hillside and this was very positive. There were 2 recommendations in relation to leadership and management and these were being addressed. The biggest change had been to the education provision. The 2011 Estyn Inspection report highlighted 6 recommendations and Estyn re-visited in 2012 and 2013 to review progress and it was reported that unsatisfactory progress had been made. It was highlighted that during the recent inspection, the inspectors reported that they were overall very pleased with progress. All recommendations were partially or fully met and there had been a fast turnaround. A post inspection action plan had been produced to build on the progress to date and work towards all 6 recommendations being fully addressed by the time of the next inspection in 2015. A

Recovery Board had been put in place and the management of Education provision had been taken over by Cefn Saeson School and it was recognised that the Headteacher had done an outstanding job.

Members noted that in the last inspection report that Welsh education had been criticised and it is difficult to make progress in this area if pupils were from England and only there for a short period of time. Officers informed Members that that the approach they take to Welsh was to promote every day Welsh and pupils had been responsive to this.

Members asked how well the new management structure was working and it was highlighted that there was high staff morale at the moment and that the new structure was working well. It was outlined that there were challenges, however, they were manageable and it was noted that there was no longer term sick at that point.

Following scrutiny it was agreed that the report be noted.

8.6 Policy and Guidance on Internet Safety for Foster Carers and Looked After Children

The Committee chose not to select this item for scrutiny but agreed with the recommendation.

8.7 The National Inspection of Safeguarding and Care Planning for Looked After Children and Care Leavers who exhibit Violent or Risky Behaviour

Members received a report advising them of the outcome of the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales on the National Inspection of Safeguarding and Care Planning for Looked After Children and Care Leavers who exhibit Violent or Risky Behaviour, as detailed in the circulated report.

The inspection was part of a national themed inspection that covered every Local Authority in Wales, it was based on 5 main questions and areas of good practice and areas for improvement were identified. Officers informed Members that they were pleased with the number of positives and highlighted that there were also improvements to be made. It was noted that there had been some improvements in quality identified.

Members queried what action had been taken to address the oversubscription of advocacy services. Officer informed Members that the waiting lists had been reduced and they were looking to re-commission the service. Members asked what had happened to the previous Connect Welsh Government Advocacy Service. Officers were unaware of it and would look into it.

Following scrutiny it was agreed that the report be noted.

8.8 Officer Urgency Action – Appointment of Local Authority Governor Representatives to the Temporary Governing Body of Cwmafan Primary School

The Committee chose not to select this item for scrutiny but noted the report.

8.9 Officer Urgency Action – Early Intervention and Prevention Tenders

The Committee chose not to select this item for scrutiny but noted the report.

9. ACCESS TO MEETINGS

RESOLVED: that pursuant to Section 100A (4) and (5) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded for the following items of business which involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 12 and 14 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A to the above Act.

10. TO SELECT APPROPRIATE PRIVATE ITEMS FROM THE CABINET BOARD AGENDA FOR PRE-SCRUTINY

10.1 Manager's Report on Hillside Secure Centre

The Committee received the Manager's report on Hillside Secure Centre for the period 1st April to 31st July 2014, as detailed in the circulated report.

Officers informed Members of the breakdown of admissions for the period. It was highlighted that the youth justice beds had been

reduced from 17 to 10 and this changed the profile of young people being admitted. Members noted that there was an increase in welfare placements. A service review would be required to ensure there were appropriate resources in place to meet demands. Members were informed the review that was due to take place in October would likely take place in January.

It was noted that since April the Youth Offending Team was under the remit of the Social Services, Health and Housing Directorate. There were fewer young people in the youth justice system and the characteristics have changed and more complex needs were becoming evident.

Education attendance was good and staff turnover remained low. It was noted that training was vital for support staff and the restorative justice approach would have a big impact overtime.

It was highlighted that BBC News had visited Hillside to report on the launch of the DVD young people had been involved in producing with the Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service. Members were informed that there was an open day planned for 23rd September 2014 and they were welcome to attend.

Members asked what could be done to address emotional needs, especially with the short period of time young people tend to be resident in Hillside. It was also queried how many come back into the system due to the sentence being too short for effective work to be undertaken with them. It was highlighted that young people would often be at crisis point when they come into Hillside and the longer they were there the more work that could be done with them. Also it was recognised that the work would be more effective if it was done at an earlier stage. Resettlement could be an issue.

It was outlined that the education work focussed on short term work that could be completed and taken away with the young people. However, the longer term also had to be considered which included fitting in with such things as strict GCSE conditions and timetables. It was highlighted that it can be challenging liaising with other institutions to transfer the work over.

Following scrutiny it was agreed that the report be noted.

CHAIRMAN