

CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Members Present:

15th January 2015

Chairman: Councillor A.R.Lockyer

Vice Chairman: Councillor Mrs.D.Jones

Councillors: A.Carter, Mrs.A.Chaves, M.Ellis, P.Greenaway,
J.D.Morgan, Mrs.S.Paddison, Mrs.K.Pearson,
M.Protheroe, A.L.Thomas and Mrs.L.G.Williams

**Co-opted Non Voting
Members:** R.De Benedictis

Officers InAttendance N. Jarman, A.Jarrett, Thomas, C.Millis,
Mrs.D. Berni, Ms.J.Jones, H.Roberts and
Ms.H.Lervy and Ms.C.Gadd

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors P.A.Rees and P.D.Richards

1. **TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN, YOUNG
PEOPLE AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON
4TH DECEMBER 2014**

Noted by the Committee.

Members queried if there had been any progress with the Children and Adolescence Mental Health Service (CAHMS) in the area. Officers informed them that the Director of Social Services, Health and Housing was in discussions about a CAHMS service for Hillside Secure Unit, which could also provide support to Children and Young People Services. The Committee would be informed of progress.

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

Noted by the Committee.

Members were informed that if they had any additional items for the Forward Work Programme to inform the Scrutiny Officer.

3. **SUPPORT FOR BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT IN SCHOOLS IN NEATH PORT TALBOT**

The Committee received the report on the progress in the new and updated framework for support for behaviour in schools in Neath Port Talbot, as detailed within the circulated report. Members were informed of the personnel changes in Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning Services and the new Inclusion Co-ordinator was introduced to the Committee.

Members had requested information on behaviour in schools at a previous meeting and they had previously received reports on the inclusion review that had been undertaken. The Review had highlighted some good practice and the Service had been monitoring the effectiveness of the behaviour management strategies in place in schools. It was highlighted that as Members were aware there had been an increase in the number of fixed term exclusions from schools during 2013/14 and the majority of pupils excluded had Additional Learning Needs (ALN).

Members were informed that instances of challenging behaviour in schools had become more frequent and the behaviour was more challenging. It was confirmed that the background paper “Understanding and supporting children and young people with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties” had been circulated to Members. A PDF version of the document was requested as it was large and difficult to open on some devices. It was explained that this document would support the work that was being undertaken in schools and the tools in the document would be adapted to suit the needs of individual schools. Members were informed that an educational psychologist, with considerable experience, knowledge and skills in supporting schools and pupils with behaviour difficulties had developed the framework to support schools and was working with them to implement it over a 6 month pilot. It was noted that a similar pilot had been undertaken in one cluster area to assist pupils with learning difficulties and had been positive outcomes that were sustained afterwards. The pilot the approach had been rolled out to all clusters of schools. This was the same aim for the behaviour in schools pilot and there would be three phases – self-evaluation by schools, bespoke training and learning lessons, so that the strategies in the framework can be adjusted and amended throughout the process. Members requested that the updated guidance document be brought back to the Committee following the completion of the pilot and not wait for

the annual report. It was confirmed that Members would receive regular updates on progress.

Members highlighted that it was important for children to be in school as the impact of being excluded can have a significant impact on the rest of their lives, which was evidenced in the report. It was recognised that schools need to identify triggers for certain behaviours and put processes into place to address them. It was noted that different schools had different thresholds for behaviour intervention.

It was noted that children and young people can often become disengaged during the transition stage and Members asked if the work would look at school structure including transition. Officers confirmed that part of the improvement work would be around transition and the earlier identification of needs. One approach has been through learning walks and an example was given of following a pupil with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) through their school day. It highlighted that their behaviour from class to class varied depending on whether or not the teacher knew the needs of the child and how well they could address them. Exercises such as these help to develop an understanding of what works effectively.

Members asked if the Service had any influence with colleges and universities in regards to teacher training, as there was not much training in ALN. Officers informed Members that this had been identified by the regional setup Education through Regional Working (ERW) and they were looking at undertaking some work with Trinity St David's University in the first instance. It was also queried if would be sharing of good practice across the hubs and if all Local Authorities were establishing a consistent approach in regards to behaviour management. It was noted that Inclusion Services were not included in ERW's remit at the moment. However, if Neath Port Talbot got it right it could have a big impact on inclusion work across the area.

Officers recognised the work undertaken by Members in raising the profile of school attendance and asked for their assistance in supporting reducing exclusions and behaviour management.

Members queried who the stakeholders were on the Inclusion Review Action Group. It was outlined that it included secondary and primary schools representatives, challenge advisors, the Inclusion Co-ordinator, Principal Psychologist and the Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning. It was chaired by the Head of Transformation.

Members asked if Children and Young People's Services, Team Around the Family and Health Services were going to be involved in this work. It was

confirmed that partners would be involved as there would be cross over with other areas. This would be included within the pilot to identify which services should be involved, as some issues would need to be addressed outside of school.

Members asked if there had been any research into the change of behaviour of children and young people and was it used to feed into the work. Officers explained that a lot of evidence based research and good practice was being used in the framework. It was noted that speech and language has a big impact and the Youth Offending Team had a lot of evidence in this area. Members also asked if there was any evidence of whether both parents working full time had an impact on behaviour as there could be a lack of support. In addition if there was any difference with grandparents undertaking childcare responsibilities rather than professional carers. It was highlighted that there was extensive research and evidence, however, nothing conclusive in these areas.

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

4. **SCHOOL ATTENDANCE**

The Committee received the report on school attendance that included data and information that Members had requested on comparison with similar schools and development of procedures to raise attendance, as detailed within the circulated report.

Members had previously received reports which outlined the Council's priority in raising levels of pupil attendance. Officers thanked Members for their support in this priority, particularly in raising it at School Governor meetings.

It was highlighted that attendance levels were going in the right direction. Primary schools had surpassed the targets set for them and Neath Port Talbot had moved up the rankings from joint last to 16th in 2013/14. They had also surpassed their targets for Free School Meals (FSM) pupils. Secondary schools had improved attendance, however, they had dropped slightly in the rankings from 12th to 13th. It was highlighted that this was still positive and Neath Port Talbot was just below the Welsh average for improvement at secondary school level. Members highlighted that there had been more exclusions from secondary schools and queried whether this impacted on attendance figures. It was confirmed that it would depend on the length of the exclusion, but it was recognised that this was a small cohort of pupils.

Members noted that schools had undertaken different approaches to attendance and asked if it had been identified which strategies were the most effective. Officers informed them that there had been a lot of sharing of ideas and Education Welfare Officers had shared different approaches across schools, however, there was no particular strategy that was the best as they had to be tailored to suit the school. Members they were pleased that pupils had been involved in the process.

Members queried if the size of a school made a difference to attendance levels. It was highlighted that it could have more of an impact on small schools as the overall percentage could be affected by one or two pupils, however, other factors also have an impact such as levels of FSMs. It was noted that there were schools that buck such trends and outperform similar schools.

Members were provided with prosecution data for 2013-14, when on occasion poor attendance had to be dealt with through the legal system. On those occasions the Council had won all except one case, which was withdrawn due to family circumstances. The result was penalties imposed by the courts and during 2013-14 there had been no custodial sentences. Members asked if the number of prosecutions had decreased and they were informed that they had not. Members asked if attendance of children improved after their parents had been prosecuted. It was noted that in some cases it did and in others it did not.

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

5. **PRE-SCRUTINY**

The Committee scrutinised the following matters:-

Cabinet Board Proposals

5.1 The Future of Youth Offending Services

The Committee received the report on the future of the Youth Offending Service, as detailed within the circulated report.

It had previously been reported to the Committee that the Swansea, Bridgend and Neath Port Talbot Councils were undertaking a voluntary merger of their Youth Offending Services by April 2014. However, by this date the right architecture had not been put in place and Trade Unions had not been involved in the process. The Western Bay Youth Offending Services Board was established in May 2014

and the Director of Social Services, Health and Housing was Chairman of the Board. A recovery plan was then put in place and Trade Unions were engaged and it was noted that they had been accommodating, which resulted in some progress. A Regional Manager had been appointed and following this three locality managers. The full amalgamation had not taken place, however, Members were informed that there was now a workable model in place. This included the development of a Central Business Unit, which has delivered the 20% savings required for two out of the three Councils (Neath Port Talbot has delivered in full). The potential changes in local government reorganisation also have had an impact on the design of the service. Officers were recommending to Members to maintain the model that was now in place, which includes the Central Business Unit and Area Manager and continue to deliver services on a local level and not complete the full amalgamation. It was noted that the Police and Crime Commissioner was supportive of this approach.

Members recognised the work that had been put into this area by the Director of Social Services, Health and Housing. It was queried if the delay in the amalgamation and the subsequent changes had had an impact on the Council's excellent Youth Offending Service. Members were informed that it had not but could have due to the uncertainty facing staff and the service remained strong, which was a credit to the staff.

Members asked if there had been any communication with the Minister of Public Services regarding the complications of uncertainty over potential local government reorganisation. Officers informed Members that it had not officially been communicated and in this instance it had not been the main block in progress.

Following scrutiny, the Committee was supportive of the proposals to be considered by the Cabinet Board.

5.2 Looked After Children Strategy

The Committee received the Looked After Children Strategy, which sets out Children's Services plans to safely reduce the number of Looked After Children in its care and to meet placement sufficiency and quality of service, as detailed within the circulated report.

Members were aware that the number of children in care in Neath Port Talbot has significant implications on resources and the outcomes for

those children. Several strategies and plans have had some success in addressing these issues and the Looked After Children (LAC) Strategy brings them together under one overarching strategy. It was explained to Members it was ambitious but achievable and there were several elements to the plan. This included reducing the number of LAC placed with Independent Fostering Agencies and using internal fostering placements where possible. Actions would be taken to address the shortage in specialist placements, such as 11 plus and there would be improvement to the accommodation plan, improved planning and monitoring processes and strengthening the role of the Independent Reviewing Officers. Adoption Services were also being strengthened and ensuring those children remaining in the system had the right care and support. In addition a Communication and Engagement Strategy was being developed. Members were informed that monitoring arrangements for the Strategy would be through the Children's Services Improvement Plan.

Officers informed Members that it was an internal strategy to deliver and make improvements and would have a positive impact on the Service. Members highlighted that Officers completed Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) differently and it was easier to follow if the EIA explicitly stated the information or signposted to it and Members would like to see some consistency in the information contained within EIAs. For example, in the EIA section 4 states that the Strategy should have a positive impact but does not explain how it would do so. It was recognised that the positive impacts were in the Strategy, however, it would be helpful if the information was also included in this section. In addition Members highlighted that aspects of the EIA information referred to the impact being neutral and others to it being positive and requested clarity on this. Officers confirmed that the Strategy would have a positive impact. Members felt that the EIA should be amended to reflect this. Officers noted these comments and they informed Members that it was one of the first that they had completed and it was a learning curve for them.

Members highlighted that advocacy did not feature strongly in the Strategy and suggested that the wording should be amended to reflect its importance. Officers explained that advocacy would be picked up in other strategies, such as the Commissioning Strategy that was being developed, and it would feed into this overarching Strategy. It was noted that such strategies within the Children's Services were now dovetailing, which was positive.

Following scrutiny, the Committee was supportive of the proposal to be considered by the Cabinet Board. It was also agreed that Cabinet

Board be asked to consider the following additional recommendations:

1. The EIA to be adjusted to reflect the positive impact of the Strategy.
2. The wording around advocacy under priority 3 to be changed to “All children who need an advocacy service will receive one”.

5.3 Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) Monitoring Report – April to September 2014

The Committee received the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) Monitoring Report for April to September 2014, as detailed within the circulated report.

Members were informed that there were indicators to demonstrate that good progress was being made in improving the quality of practice. Members highlighted that there had been a reduction in the number of agency workers, which was pleasing. It was queried how many agency workers had become permanent members of staff. Officers informed them that it was around four or five and would confirm the exact number following the meeting.

Members asked what measures had been put in place to ensure consistency in evaluating caseloads and supervision. It was explained that having a stable workforce and management team with less turnover of social workers would assist with this. The Practice Improvement Group also helped to support this work in identifying potential improvements. Supervisions were a high priority and case audits were regularly undertaken. External partners had also been engaged in this process through such activities as the Peer Review.

Members noted that the Think Family Partnership was supporting 15% of vulnerable families identified and asked if there were any capacity issues. Officers explained that the Partnership and Team Around the Family worked with other agencies to deliver support and this would not be counted in their figures.

In relation to the information in the report Members queried whether low re-referral rates were a good or bad indicator of performance. It was explained that a lower rate was good as it demonstrated the Service was dealing with referrals effectively, however, if they were too low then questions would need to be asked to ensure children were not inappropriately screened out before referral stage.

It was highlighted that the Service had made continued improvements since this report and staff morale was high. Members were informed that the visits to the Social Work Teams by the Improvement Member Panel had reinforced this and the Committee would be receiving a report from the Panel in a future meeting.

The Committee was informed of the dates of the full inspection from CSSIW, which were the weeks commencing the 9th February and 23rd February 2014. There would be seven inspectors considering 65 cases. The inspectors would also be meeting a number of representatives, including some Elected Members and details would be confirmed.

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

5.4 School Attendance Penalty Notice Authorisation

The Committee received the report to agree delegation to the named officers authorised to issue and withdraw Penalty Notices for Irregular Attendance at School, as detailed within the circulated report.

Since Members were presented with the ‘Code of Conduct for Penalty Notices, Irregular Attendance at School/Alternative Education Provision’ in September 2014, a recommendation had been received from Legal Services that the officers authorised to issue penalty notices to be noted in the document.

Following scrutiny, the Committee was supportive of the proposal to be considered by the Cabinet Board.

5.5 School Attendance Payment of Penalty Notice

The Committee received the report on School Attendance Payment of Penalty Notices, which proposed to withdraw the option of a payment plan for parents, as detailed within the circulated report.

It was highlighted that when Members were presented with the ‘Code of Conduct for Penalty Notices, Irregular Attendance at School/Alternative Education Provision’ in September 2014, a recommendation was made from the Scrutiny Committee to Cabinet Board that Officers looked at the viability of a payment plan to be

included. Officers had investigated and it had found it would be impractical to deliver.

Members accepted that it was not practical and highlighted that it would add confusion in legal processes if part payments had been made.

Members asked how much latitude Local Authorities have in regards to the trigger for Penalty Notices to be issued. It was explained that below 90% attendance was the trigger for proceedings to start and this was agreed by Welsh Government and was consistent for all Local Authorities. It was highlighted the schools would engage parents in the process and if there proof of a valid reason, such as a medical note, then the Notices would not be issued.

Members noted that it was discriminating that parents who could afford to pay the penalty notices could take their children out of school to take them on holiday and other parents would not be able to afford this. However, it was highlighted that the key message was that children should attend school.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning thanked all those involved in improving attendance.

Following scrutiny, the Committee was supportive of the proposal to be considered by the Cabinet Board.

6. **URGENT ITEM**

Because of the need to deal now with the matter contained in Minute No. 6 (i) below, the Chairman agreed that this could be raised at today's meeting as an urgent pursuant to Section 100B (4) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972.

Reason for Urgency

Due to an administrative error the report was submitted to the incorrect Cabinet Board and it was therefore presented to today's meeting.

(i) Review of Youth Club Provision – Results of Consultation and Recommendations

The Committee received the report on the review of youth club provisions and to approve changes to the current allocation of youth

clubs to enable continuity of the service within the context of current budget limitations, as detailed within the circulated report.

Officers highlighted that there had been consultation on the proposals during November 2014 and the responses had been taken into consideration. For example, one of the proposals had been to reduce the annual number of weeks open from 30 weeks and the majority of respondents indicated that 30 weeks should be maintained. Officers have taken this on board and subsequently clubs would remain open for the 30 weeks. It was outlined that the reduction in staffing would be due to held vacancies and Early Retirement and Voluntary Redundancy. Members asked if the Trade Unions had been consulted over the reduction in number of posts. Officers informed them that they had not at this point but they would be as part of the management of change process, if the recommendation was agreed by Cabinet Board.

Alternative methods of delivery had been considered where possible. There had been some offers of help and support, however, it was noted that there were not many volunteering offers and that community members who wished to volunteer to work with young people were most likely already doing so. The proposals put forward were intended to have minimal impact on provision and the community. Members noted that community organisations can be useful in helping to deliver services and it was confirmed that Service Level Agreements already existed with some local organisations to deliver youth provision.

Members highlighted that the compliance statement indicated that there would be positive impacts and this would not be the case. Officers agreed that it should be amended. Officers informed Members that, where possible, actions would be put in place to mitigate against negative impacts. Members highlighted that Youth Workers were important to young people in communities to help identify concerning behaviours. Officers informed them that there would still be regular contact by the Youth Service with young people. The consultation had shown that young people had indicated that they felt safer having youth workers around. Members also expressed concern about the impact reduced services could have on anti-social behaviour. However, it was noted that youth clubs were already only open on certain nights and some had low attendance numbers. Officers would also be ensuring that the Personal and Social Education curriculum in schools was delivering what was required.

Members commented that a report on youth club provision had been brought to the Committee previously and had been rejected as the information was felt to be inaccurate. It was noted that these proposals

were not based on the information in that report. Members recognised that the current proposals were regarding existing provision and that budget savings had to be met. Members requested that if these proposals were implemented that further work was undertaken on the distribution of youth clubs in Neath Port Talbot. Members would like more information on overall provision and if resources were allocated in the right areas.

Members noted that the Principal Youth and Community Officer would be leaving the Council at the end of March and the Committee thanked her for her hard work and wished her the best for the future.

Following scrutiny, the Committee was supportive of the proposal to be considered by the Cabinet Board. It was also agreed that Cabinet Board be asked to consider the following additional recommendation:

Following the implementation of the recommendation the need and corresponding best distribution of youth club provision is assessed and brought back to the Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet Board.

CHAIRMAN