

CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

(Committee Rooms 1/2, Port Talbot Civic Centre)

Members Present:

18th June, 2015

Chairman: Councillor A.R.Lockyer

Vice Chairman: Councillor H.N.James

Councillors: A.Carter, Mrs.A.Chaves, P.Greenaway, R.G.Jones,
Mrs.S.Paddison, M.Protheroe, A.L.Thomas and
Mrs.L.G.Williams

Officers In Attendance A.Jarrett, Mrs.A.Thomas, C.Millis, Mrs.D. Berni,
Ms.L.Kinsey, J.Haeney, M.Daley, J.Hodges,
Mrs.J.Khaghanian and Ms.C.Gadd

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors P.A.Rees and A.Taylor

1. **SCRUTINY FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2015/16**

The Committee received the Forward Work Programme for 2014/15. Members were informed that there would be a workshop in July to consider items for the Work Programme.

2. **SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL TO ASSESS PROGRESS IN PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM SEXUAL EXPLOITATION**

The Committee received the report on the outcome of the Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) assessment tool completed by Children and Young People Services in conjunction with representatives from Health, Education and the Police, as detailed within the circulated report.

The Committee had received several reports on Safeguarding and had asked for an inquiry to be undertaken to ensure there were effective strategies in place to protect children from sexual exploitation in Neath Port Talbot. Members were informed that the Western Bay Safeguarding Children Board

(WBSCB) had adopted the Bedfordshire “self-assessment tool” to assess progress in this area and to provide a check list of what was required to develop and further improve an effective strategy to address the issue locally. Members were informed that this information would form the basis of the one day inquiry being held on 30th June 2015. It was noted that the tool was completed to ensure robust arrangements were in place in relation to training and managing cases and for more strategic systems to be developed to help identify potential hotspots to be tackled. It was highlighted that the report was the Neath Port Talbot version and similar exercises were being undertaken in Bridgend and Swansea. They would then feed into a strategic approach across the Western Bay area.

Members requested a list of the acronyms used in the report for the one day inquiry. They also requested a list of the lead professionals, details of the organisations which sat on the CSE Strategy Sub-Group, the all Wales Child Protection Procedures and what skills and knowledge would be expected of officers.

Members commented that the report included the views of professionals and queried if the voice of the child was represented as they could have views on addressing such issues. Officers informed them that the tool was designed to be completed by professionals. However, the Service recognised that they needed to gather the views of children and young people more routinely. It was noted that the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) was looking into developing a helpline for children, young people and families who had concerns about CSE.

Members asked who monitors the work of WSCSB. It was noted that some reports were brought to this Scrutiny Committee and there were similar arrangements in the other Local Authorities. It was highlighted that Neath Port Talbot had lead the way in the Western Bay region in ensuring protection from CSE arrangements were robust.

Members asked which officers in Education were trained in CSE and if it was just teaching staff, as children and young people often spoke to other members of school staff. It was agreed that this question would be asked to Education representatives at the inquiry day. Members also noted that involving school governors should be considered as part of the awareness raising for CSE.

The Chairman highlighted that further in depth questions would be asked during the one day inquiry and a report would be brought back to Cabinet Board following its completion.

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

3. **PRE-SCRUTINY**

The Committee scrutinised the following matters:

Cabinet Board Proposals

3.1 Neath Port Talbot Fostering Service Quality of Care Report 2014/15

The Committee received the Fostering Service Quality of Care report 2014/15 for the purpose of monitoring the arrangements of the Service, as detailed within the circulated report.

Members were informed that the report sets out the activity of the Service during 2014/15 and it was submitted annually to the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW). It was noted that the intended improvements to the Service were set out in the Looked After Children's Strategy. It was highlighted that there was a separate Foster Carer Recruitment Strategy being developed that would be reported to the Committee in due course.

Members asked whether the events held by the Fostering Team were shared out across the County Borough and suggested that Members should be advised of such events to share with their communities. It was also asked how many foster carers were recruited through such events. Officers confirmed that the events were held in different areas of the County Borough and that some events were tied into national campaigns run by the Fostering Network. It was highlighted that the Fostering Team had a website and used social media and the Team would look at how to improve informing Members of upcoming events. It was noted that further information on numbers of foster carers recruited would be contained within the Recruitment Strategy. Officers informed Members that there was a 14% conversion rate from initial enquiries to people completing the process to becoming foster carers.

There was some concern that Independent Fostering Agencies were offering additional incentives to that offered by the Local Authority could offer. It was noted that the draft Foster Carer Finance Policy had been previously considered by the Committee and the Service had felt that the Policy needed to be more holistic in approach. It was confirmed that the final proposed Policy would be reported to the Committee and Cabinet Board in due course for approval. Members highlighted the "When I am Ready" Scheme, which was due to come into effect in April 2016. Members felt that it was a good

scheme and that young people should not have to move out of a supported home until they were ready for independence. However, the impact that would result from this scheme was recognised and that it could result in more Foster Carers being required. Officers informed Members that the Service was already considering the resource implications and were looking at how the Scheme could be implemented effectively. It was identified that there was already work underway in regards to care leaver accommodation and the consideration of the implications of the new Scheme would dovetail with some of this work. One potential issue outlined to the Committee was whether fostering rates would remain the same once a child was no longer looked after, which may not be financially viable to foster carers. Consideration of such issues had to be undertaken before the Scheme was in place and any proposals would be brought to the Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet Board for approval. Members suggested that financial allowances around the “When I am Ready” Scheme could be included in the Foster Carers Finance Policy.

Members asked if there were incidences of conflict between children looked after by foster carers and the carers’ own children. It was noted that the Service works closely with the foster family and always considers their needs as well as the needs of the looked after children and would work with them to resolve any concerns.

Members noted that in the recent CSSIW Fostering Inspection Report 2015, one area identified for improvement was the engagement with foster carers who did not engage in training. It was asked if this had been addressed by the Team. Officers highlighted that there was a range of training offered to foster carers and they were required to attend at least three training sessions a year. The Fostering Panel had a key role to play and would check that this minimum standard had been met. The Service was now better at recording what training had been received and they were also looking at different options, such as online training. Other potential incentives were being considered to encourage foster carers to attend training but it was noted that it had to be balanced with it being a requirement of the role. It was confirmed that during supervisions with foster carers training would be discussed and an approach of constant reinforcement was taken. It was further asked if for long term foster carers there was additional and specific training offered that suited individual circumstance. Officers confirmed that the training packages were creative and responsive.

Members asked how many Looked After Children were now placed out of County as this had a cost implication. Officers informed them that it was under 100 and would confirm the exact number.

Following scrutiny, it was agreed the report be noted.

3.2 Neath Port Talbot Fostering Service Statement of Purpose Revised 2015

The Committee received the revised Fostering Service Statement of Purpose 2015, as detailed within the circulated report.

Members were informed that each Fostering Service was required to have a statement of purpose which included aims and objectives and the services and facilities to be provided. The revised version of Neath Port Talbot's Statement incorporated all the actions from the Looked After Child Strategy that had previously been considered by the Committee.

Members asked what the main reasons were for foster carers to deregister. It was highlighted that there was a low drop out rate for foster carers once they had completed the process and if they did stop there did not seem to be a pattern in the reasons why. Members asked how long the process took to become an approved foster carer and it were explained that it took an average of 196 days, which was below the benchmark set for the Service. Members also asked if there were there any particular barriers that prevented people from becoming foster carers. Officers informed them that the main barrier would be if they had committed an offence that related to a child. Members asked if people who smoked were prevented from becoming foster carers. It was explained that the national regulations guidance was followed and foster carers who smoked could not have a child under 5 placed with them. There was some concern that this could put some potential foster carers off applying and could agreements be put in place such as the carer only smoked away from the children. Officers explained that they could not deviate from the guidance as it was based on medical expertise. It was noted that foster carers who smoked could foster children over the age of 5 and agreements would be made with the carers about where they smoked. It was highlighted that this was not a major factor as the main challenge was finding foster carers for teenagers. Officers informed Members that further information on these areas would be detailed in the Foster Carer Recruitment Strategy.

Some Members requested further information on the Letterbox Club and it was agreed that this would be circulated outside the meeting.

Members recognised the work that was undertaken by the Fostering Team and foster carers in Neath Port Talbot.

Following scrutiny, it was agreed the report be noted.

3.3 Business Strategy, Public Protection and Housing Services Business Plan 2015/16

The Committee received the Business Plan for Business Strategy, Public Protection and Housing Services 2015/16, as detailed within the circulated report.

Members were informed of the services covered in the Business Plan and the areas that were relevant to this Committee, which included: Business Support Services, Complaints and some aspects of Housing Strategy and Housing Options. The achievements accomplished during the last financial year and the objectives for this year were outlined. It was highlighted that there was further work to be undertaken on the reporting of complaints to ensure they were not just seen as statistics. It was noted that it was important to continue to provide adequate business support to Children Services following the recent Inspection and the Service being taken off the Serious Concerns Protocol.

The potential risks were also highlighted to Members and it was noted that for this Committee one of the main risks was accommodation for Care Leavers. The Service had undertaken work to ensure that no care leaver would end up homeless or in Bed and Breakfast Accommodation. A Working Group had been established to ensure there would be adequate provision of housing accommodation and to review existing commissioning arrangements with housing providers. It was noted that a report would be brought to a future meeting of the Committee on the Social Service and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014, as it would impact on performance reporting requirements, which would be more outcome focussed.

It was highlighted that the Welsh Government had announced plans to develop a single national Community Care Information Solution (CCIS). Members were informed that the system was in early stages of development but there was an expectation that all Local Authorities would adopt the system in the future. It was not that the current 'in house' IT system for Children's Services meets the requirements of the Service and was capable of reporting on all statutory performance indicators. This was however not the case for Adult Services where

such a system would benefit the integration agenda with Health Services. Officers wanted to be involved to ensure Neath Port Talbot had an input into shaping the system and they would be suggesting that it was trialled for Adult Services only in the first instance.

Members requested that the performance report cards for the Services relevant to this Committee be reported to a future meeting. Officers agreed that they would take the view of the Members as to when they would like this information reported.

Members highlighted that some of the information contained within the attached Compliance Statement was not evidenced within the Business Plan. Officers took on board this comment and explained that it was a balancing act to include relevant information and not make the plans too detailed.

Members asked if the staff appraisal system for Children's Services would be developed by Business Support. Officers informed them that the training department would be developing it. Officers would bring a report to a future meeting on the Foundation Apprentice Scheme implemented within Business Support and explore potential opportunities for care leavers.

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

3.4 Progress Report on Engage Programme and NEETS

The Committee received the report on the outcomes achieved by the ENGAGE programme, progress made with the Not in Education, Employment of Training Service (NEETS) and how new developments may affect both areas of work in the future, as detailed within the circulated report.

Members were informed that the 25 places had been filled and they had achieved 165 qualifications between them. It was also highlighted that the three Keeping in Touch Youth Workers were held in high regard.

Members noted that when work started with the NEETS project it was shared with Carmarthenshire and it was queried if Neath Port Talbot still worked with them. It was explained that some elements of the work undertaken with NEETS was shared across the Education through Regional Working (ERW) consortium. The ENGAGE

project was a Neath Port Talbot initiative, however some elements were touched on in regards with participation and deprivation.

Following scrutiny, it was agreed the report be noted.

3.5 Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning Services Business Plan

The Committee received some of the Business Plans 2015/16 for Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning Services, as detailed within the circulated report.

Members were informed that the managers from different Services within Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning had undertaken an exercise to read and comment on the Business Plan for each Service to ensure there was joined up working and to reduce duplication. The Education Business Plans had also taken on board the Estyn Framework. Members requested that the report cards for each Service be presented to the Committee in due course.

In regards to the Flying Start Business Plan, Members asked about speech and language services funding being available through the Scheme. Officers informed them that Plans may need to be re-adjusted to take account of this and would find out about specific resources packs.

In regards to the Education Development Inclusion Service (EDIS) Business Plan it was highlighted that one action was a universal training programme to improve the quality and consistency of Challenge Advisors and Members queried if this had been an issue. It was confirmed that there had been issues with consistency and quality across ERW and that training should address this to ensure there was quality assurance across the six areas. Members were informed that a new post had been created in ERW to quality assure Challenge Advisors.

Members asked who monitored ERW and it was explained that the Education Service's role was to hold ERW to account. It was further explained that several measures were being undertaken to ensure there was a consistent approach to scrutiny across ERW. For example, Scrutiny Officers from across the six areas meet on a regular basis to ensure that the relevant information was being considered by Scrutiny Committees. In addition a Seminar for Chairs and Vice Chairs of the relevant Scrutiny Committees across the areas was being held in

September and would be hosted by Neath Port Talbot. It was noted that ERW was also inspected by Estyn.

Members asked if the standardisation and modernisation work that had been undertaken had an impact on the performance of Neath Port Talbot across the area. They were informed that there was a similar pattern across Wales in regards to this and further work in standardisation across schools needed to be developed to improve accuracy. Members asked if performance still remained lower at key stage 2 and 3 compared with key stage 4. Officers informed them that this was still the case and standardisation work would help to address it. However, it was recognised that it was better for pupils to be achieving at key stage 4 and underperforming at key stage 3 than the other way round. It was highlighted that the Donaldson Report 2014 would have an impact on the way performance was assessed as it advocated more focus on the measure of the journey of the child.

In regards to the Adult Community Learning (ACL) Service Delivery Plan, Members highlighted that a lot of courses had been transferred to Neath Port Talbot College. It was asked what discretionary funding was used to support community members who were deprived. Officers informed them that courses that covered priorities set by Welsh Government, for example literacy and numeracy, remained free. In addition some reduced cost courses were run in Community First areas. It was noted that there was a franchise agreement with the College and fees were set by them.

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

CHAIRMAN