

CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

(Committee Rooms 1/2, Port Talbot)

Members Present: **14 January 2016**

Chairperson: Councillor A.R.Lockyer

Vice Chairperson: Councillor H.N.James

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

Co-opted Non Voting Members: A.Hughes

Officers In Attendance A.Jarrett, A.Thomas, Ms.J.Davies, M.Daley, I.Finnemore, M.Lazarus, J.Hodges, Ms.A.Flynn, Mrs.H.Morgan-Rees and Ms.C.Gadd

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

1. **MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 3 DECEMBER 2015**

The Minutes were noted by the Committee.

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

Members requested data on the link between increased attendance and improvements in attainment. Officers highlighted that the data would be from the previous academic year. Members indicated that they would like information at a local authority level and at individual school level. It was also requested that if possible they would like a scatter graph format included in the report and officers would look into the best way of presenting the information. It was agreed that this would be incorporated into the Forward Work Programme to be reported on an annual basis.

The Forward Work Programme was noted by the Committee.

3. **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SERVICES - KEY PRIORITY INDICATORS**

The Committee received the report on the key priority indicator information within Children's Services, as detailed within the circulated report, for indicators:

- Priority Indicator 1 – Average number of cases held by qualified workers across the Service.
- Priority Indicator 2 – Staff supervision rates.
- Priority Indicator 3 – The number of social worker vacancies across the service (including number of starters/leavers/agency staff/sickness).
- Priority Indicator 4 – Number of approved foster carers within the Council.

Priority Indicator 1 – Members noted that there was variation in caseload numbers and asked if it reflected the amount of staff in each team. Officers explained that this was the case and the amount of cases held by workers would also vary due to factors such as, experience and type of case. It was highlighted that Deputy Team Managers would have management responsibilities and would therefore have fewer cases. It was explained that the Looked After Children team had more cases as there were some stable cases that needed less management. Officers informed Members that there was nothing to suggest that Social Workers had unmanageable caseloads and they would continue to be monitored. Members queried if Team Around the Family was included in the figures. It was explained that the Head of Service had only recently taken over the Team and they were currently not included but would be in future information.

Priority Indicator 3 – Members highlighted that a deputy manager and consultant social worker had left and asked what effect this would have had on the Service. It was also queried why the deputy manager post was under review by Health. It was explained that the deputy manager post was in the community drug and alcohol team that sat under a Principal Officer in the Service but the post was funded by Health. The consultant social worker post had been advertised internally to establish if any experienced members of staff wished to progress to this level. It was highlighted that both posts had been left due to natural progression.

Priority Indicator 4 – Members requested the numbers as well as percentages for children in foster care and it was explained that as at 30th November 2015 for 0 to 10 year olds there were 47 in house placements and 32 independent placements. For 11 to 17 year olds there were 68 in house placements and 52 independent placements. It was noted that there were more in house foster carer placements for children under the age of 10 and Members asked what could be done to attract more in house foster carers for teenagers. Officers explained that it was more difficult to attract foster carers for the 11 to 17 year old age group as they would often have complex needs and some foster carers had young children which was not appropriate for them to foster teenagers. Members noted that costs of independent carers were more than double that of in house carers. To try and improve recruitment the Foster Carer Recruitment Strategy was in the process of being revised and what additional support and improved remuneration could be put in place was being considered. Members were informed that the revised strategy would be brought to a future meeting for consideration.

Members queried how long the approval process for foster carers took and it was explained that it was variable as it would depend on the individual, on average it was around six to eight months. It was noted that there had been slight dips and increases in the number of in house approved foster carers and overall it remained fairly consistent numbers. There would be deregistration of some foster carers and registration of new ones. Members queried how foster carers could be encouraged to stay registered. It was explained that there were sometimes positive reasons for deregistration, such as foster carers taking out Special Guardianship Orders or adopting a child they were fostering and such options were encouraged through the Permanency Strategy. Members asked if foster carers would lose their fees if they undertook these options and they were informed that for Special Guardianship Orders they did not and for adoption they would still receive an allowance for some time. Members asked what the differences were between Special Guardianship Orders and adoption. It was explained that UK law allowed adoption to be undertaken without the permission of the parents if a court ruled that they would receive a better standard of care. Special Guardianship Orders provided longer term commitment to a child and the foster carers had parental powers. The Orders were used where adoption was not appropriate and took the child out of the looked after system.

Members asked if relative carers received the same support and remuneration packages as foster carers and officers informed them

that they had the same support and payments. The difference was not financial and it was explained that relative carers would have only been approved to care for specific children. It was confirmed that relative carers were included in the in house foster carer figures.

Following scrutiny, it was agreed the report be noted.

4. **MONITORING OF SCHOOLS STANDARDS BY THE SCHOOL STANDARDS PARTNERSHIP GROUP**

The Committee received the report on progress of the School Standards Partnership Group, as detailed within the circulated report.

Members were informed that the Group had been set up in January 2015 to support school improvement. The aim of the Group was to enhance monitoring of standards of individual schools and the outcomes of the monitoring were to be reported back to the Committee. It was explained that the meetings were informal and non-public. It was highlighted that this was the first report to feedback the themes that had been identified during the meetings. In total, nine schools had presented to the Group and they were a range of schools including primary, secondary, special and federated. The common themes identified by the Group were outlined to the Committee. It was noted that the themes had led to opportunities for further training of Members by key officers and the training would be open to all Members of this Committee as well. Members asked if the training based on the common themes would be given to governors and it was highlighted that the majority of it was already covered in the training programme. It was noted that it was sometimes difficult to get governors to attend training.

It was noted that headteachers, governors and pupils presented to the Group and the same framework was followed by all schools. Members asked what follow up was undertaken with schools following the meetings. Officers explained that the Head of Service contacted the headteachers after each meeting for two way feedback and Challenge Advisers also received informal feedback from schools during their visits. Members queried if any of the common themes were of particular concern and if schools had specific concerns that were not part of the common themes how were they addressed. It was noted that none of the themes were more of a concern than others. Officers informed them that Challenge Advisers would be aware of concerns of specific schools and part of their visits involved

identifying areas for improvement and there was ongoing support for schools.

Members of the Committee that also sat on the Group provided feedback that they were positive meetings. It was noted that originally schools had been apprehensive about attending the meetings but once schools had been through the process they had found it to be a positive experience and had felt supported. It was a two way communication and schools were able to inform the Group of good practice and what additional support they would like. It was highlighted that at one meeting the Head Boy and Girl had attended and they had some good ideas. The Committee queried if the representatives at the meeting had included any other school staff than headteachers. It was explained that at the moment it was just headteachers and no other staff that had been involved.

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

5. **PROGRESS UPDATE ON MANAGING SITUATIONS AT HILLSIDE (YOUNG PEOPLE)**

The Committee received an update on the progress made in the review of the processes of managing incidents within Hillside, as detailed within the circulate report.

At a previous meeting Members had requested clarification on the Centre's response and processes of managing incidents within the home. It was outlined that there were procedures were in place to safeguard young people and where necessary a process of reporting and contacting the Police. However, it had been acknowledged through internal review that there was a need to improve the processes and practice through a joint protocol with external agencies, including South Wales Police. It was noted that it was important not to increase the prosecution of Looked After Children.

Officers highlighted that there would be a detailed and comprehensive report that would include the proposals for the protocol at a future meeting.

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

6. **PRE-SCRUTINY**

6.1 **Hillside Secure Children's Home – CSSIW Inspection**

The Committee received the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) report on Hillside Secure Children's Home, as detailed within the circulated report.

Members were informed that improvements had been made since the last inspection. This included the multi-disciplinary approach for young people, review of procedures following physical intervention and review of training. One of the observations by Inspectors had been highlighted that staff requested improved secure facilities to store their personal belongings. Officers explained that there were lockers but some of the keys had been misplaced and actions were being taken to address this. It was noted that there had been a mixed response to questionnaires about the opportunity to contribute ideas and make suggestions about the operation of the Centre. It was highlighted that changes, such as the new rota, would allow more time for staff to take forward suggestions. There would also be regular management days to develop ideas and to shape training. It was noted that they were considering the idea of partners supporting additional activities. The report highlighted that there had been a change in leadership, which had resulted in positive changes.

It was outlined that one recommendation was for all staff to receive medication training. Members asked about this recommendation and it was explained that the deputy managers had received medication training and there would always be a deputy manager on duty. Advice had been given by the Health Board and Pharmacists that this was sufficient and would be rechecked. It was noted that there was a nurse at the Centre on a daily basis. It was highlighted that no young person, who required it, went without periodic medication.

Members noted that the report suggested the mentoring of key workers to enable them to be more dynamic in their approach. It was explained that previously staff had requested clear guidance and booklets had been produced to support staff in key working processes. However, some staff followed them too rigidly and should be more flexible in their approach. This recommendation had been taken on board and was being addressed. It was highlighted that the processes were good but staff need to be more flexible in responding to the specific needs of children rather than tick box exercise and for there to be greater consistency.

Members were pleased that there was a multidisciplinary approach to outcomes and quality clinical support for staff. The developments such as the new rota for staff were also positive. Members asked if improvements had been seen with these new approaches. Officers informed them that they were still at the early development stages and information on this would be reported back to a future meeting. Members queried if the manager of the centre received enough support and it was confirmed that they did and there was a good senior management team.

It was highlighted that the Centre was dealing well with challenges. It was agreed that a visit to the Centre would be arranged and if possible tied into an open day.

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

6.2 Update on the Looked After Children's Strategy

The Committee received the update on the Looked After Children's Strategy which was approved and implemented in January 2015, as detailed within the circulated report.

Members were informed that the number of Looked After Children had decreased over the past 18 months in line with the targets set by the Strategy and the Forward Financial Plan. The number had reduced to 387 as at 21st December 2015 and Neath Port Talbot was no longer the highest rate per capita in the UK and further work was required to ensure that targets continued to be achieved and surpassed. Members asked if there was enough capacity in family support services if there was an increase in the amount of families referred to them for early intervention and prevention work. Officers explained that the Team Around the Family were a key part of this work and there were the same number of intervention services and they were targeted in the right places at the right time. If there was a significant increase in the number of referrals then this would be revisited.

Officers highlighted that as previously discussed work was being undertaken to recruit and retain in house foster carers, particularly for young people aged 11 and over. It was noted that Neath Port Talbot currently pays less per week than neighbouring local authorities. Members highlighted that paying

more could attract good quality foster carers. It was noted that it was also important to have the right support available to foster carers and not just financial remuneration. A report and policy on this matter would be brought to a future meeting. It was noted that some agency foster carers had been recruited by the Council, as they provided better support. Some independent foster carers struggle to get placements as the number of looked after children was reducing and the Council tried to use in house foster carers where possible. It was noted that it was also partly due to the reduction in number of looked after children, however, not all local authorities were reducing their number of looked after children. It was highlighted that local authorities were getting better at placing children in county.

Members queried how much contact families had with children who were looked after. Officers highlighted that it varies depending on the circumstances and would be part of the children's care plans. It was also highlighted that Service was working with the model from Hillside to help manage behaviour.

Following scrutiny, it was agreed the report be noted.

6.3 Update on the CSSIW Action Plan

The Committee received the report on the progress made with regards to Children and Young People Services compliance against the 15 recommendations contained within the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) Inspection Report published in April 2015, as detailed within circulated report.

Members were informed that the Service was focussing on outcomes and further improvements were being made. It was outlined that there were a broad range of recommendations and some of them would continue to be ongoing as by nature they were not start and finish. Members were provided with a summary of actions that had taken place in Children's Services and future planned work.

Members requested that the work of the Improvement Member Panel was included against Recommendation 1 and officers agreed that it would be in the future. It was asked if looked after children were provided with child friendly questionnaires. Officers informed them that consultation documents had been revised, with input from children and young people, to make them more accessible. It was highlighted that this work was in

line with the new Health, Social Care and Well Being Act as there was an expectation for more consultation with people using services.

It was confirmed that Recommendation 3.2 - arrangements for deputy team managers and consultant social workers should be reviewed to ensure the capacity to carry out their responsibilities is consistent across the service - had been completed as mechanisms had been put in place to ensure this was undertaken. It was highlighted that some of the recommendations were quite hard to put into action plans and they would be closed down once mechanisms were in place to address them. It was explained that CSSIW would monitor the Service via the regional team and results would be included in the annual report for social services.

Members asked who would be delivering the risk assessment training and whether it would be external or internal trainers. Officers informed them that there were ongoing discussions regarding this.

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

7. **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.

8. **PRE-SCRUTINY**

8.1 **Supported Lodgings Service – Contract Extension**

The Committee received the report to seek Member approval to extend the current contract arrangements with Dewis Limited for a period of 3 months until 30th June 2016, with the option in favour of the Council alone to extend for a further 3 month

period until 30th September, as detailed within the circulated report.

Members were informed that the proposed recommendations were to negate any gaps in service and there were no additional financial implications. Members noted that the proposals would be in the interests of young people during the transition period whilst the commissioning, tendering and procurement exercise was undertaken and the results of the completed exercise were implemented.

Members requested that in the Equality Impact Assessment section of reports officers included the reason why it was not required. It was explained that in this instance it was not a change to the current service or a development of a new service.

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

8.2 School Improvement Performance, Priorities and Capacity

The Committee received the report from the Education through Regional Working (ERW) consortium on school, performance, priorities and capacity, as detailed within the circulated report.

The report informed Members of how schools were categorised, an update on verified data, the progress of priorities within regional business plan for school improvement and information about challenge adviser capacity. Members had previously requested the structure of the support staff for schools from January 2015 to January 2016 and officers would follow this up.

Members queried if there was any correlation between categorisation of schools and other factors such as school size, the amount of Free School Meals (FSM) pupils and levels of deprivation. Officers confirmed that circumstances would have an impact, however, there was not in depth analysis on this data available. It was highlighted that Neath Port Talbot had fewer small schools now. It was explained that high numbers of FSM pupils were a challenge, especially in how effectively schools used the Pupil Deprivation Grant. Members asked about the recent changes to the Grant and in particular the Looked After Children element. It was asked if there was

enough funding and were there gaps in provision. Officers explained that Welsh Government wanted a more co-ordinated, strategic approach and part of the funding was being facilitated by ERW. Officers would provide Members with more detail. It was noted that the Corporate Parenting Panel would be receiving a presentation on this matter and following feedback from Members, it was agreed that a similar report would be presented to a future meeting of this Committee.

Members commented that performance of boys achieving at key stage 2 and 3 had declined in Neath Port Talbot. Officers highlighted that a better understanding was required of what was happening in this area and it was recognised that the Head of Participation had started to undertake this work. The performance of boys would be a priority area for development in the local business plan.

Members highlighted that the infrastructure of ERW was made up of several groups and it was asked where the voice of the child fed into the process. Officers explained that it did not directly feed into the process at the moment. However, it was captured at school level through such activities as school councils. This would also be picked up with Challenge Advisors who would monitor it as part of core visits, as lesson observations allowed challenge advisers to speak to children and young people about their learning but this was not a systematic approach.

The Committee also queried the membership of the Trade Union Reference Group and how were trade unions represented as there were no trade unions listed in the membership. Officers would find out this information and circulate it to Members. Members highlighted that due to the number of groups it was important that there was clear communication between them. It was also noted that the groups would dynamically change and the information should be kept up to date. It was highlighted that in the structure there was no capacity for the lead Cabinet Members from the six local authorities to meet and discuss cross cutting topics. Officers would feed this back to the Managing Director of ERW.

It was highlighted that when categorisation was first introduced some schools felt that it was a badge. A lot of work had been undertaken to ensure it was recognised that categorisation was to ensure that schools received the right support at the right

time. Members noted that different schools in the same category received differing amounts of days of support and queried why this was the case. Officers explained that support was on a case by case basis and the amount of support required would vary between schools. It was highlighted that Neath Port Talbot had a good record of improvement. It was important to know how to support schools and Members asked how this could be improved. It was explained that it was about working together with schools, with the right resources at the right time. Schools understand that support would be proportionate to need.

Members fed back from schools that the support they had received had worked well. Members informed officers that some schools had noted that they had been pleased with the support for Welsh second language and in particular liked the Athrawes Fro scheme as it was a flexible framework. Members also asked if more work could be undertaken to link better with pre-school. Officers recognised that this was an area that required improvement as the outcomes in the foundation phase in Neath Port Talbot had declined and more engagement was needed with parents and wider services for better joined up services.

It was outlined that the ERW had been driving forward regional working and compliance with the national model. It was noted that the ERW Business Plan was scheduled to be taken to Council in March.

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

CHAIRPERSON