

CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

(Committee Rooms A/B - Neath Civic Centre)

Members Present:

28 April 2016

**Presiding
Chairperson:** Councillor H.N.James

Councillors: A.Carter, Mrs.A.Chaves, Mrs.J.Dudley, M.Ellis,
R.G.Jones, J.D.Morgan, Mrs.S.Paddison,
Mrs.K.Pearson, M.Protheroe, D.Whitelock,
Mrs.L.G.Williams and A.R.Lockyer (present
from minute number 5 onwards)

**Co-opted Voting
Members:** Mrs.M.Caddick and Ms.H.Dale

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

**Officers In
Attendance** A.Evans, A.Jarrett, C.Millis, Mrs.D. Berni,
N.Thomas, M.Lazarus, M.Daley, Ms.J.Hoggan,
Mrs.N.Hire, D.Harding, J.Hodges, M.New and
Ms.C.Gadd

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

1. **DECLARATION OF INTEREST FROM MEMBER**

The following Co-opted Non Voting Member made a declaration of interest at the commencement of the meeting.

A.Hughes Report of the Head of Participation re: Review of School Music Service, as his daughter is the joint manager of the West Glamorgan Music Service.

2. EARLY YEARS AND CHILDCARE UNIT REPORT CARD

The Committee received the Early Years and Childcare Unit Report Card 2015/16, as detailed within the circulated report.

Members were informed that the Unit sought to support all childcare providers throughout the County Borough with its main aim of keeping childcare settings open to ensure that the Local Authority meets its statutory duty of providing sufficient childcare places for those parents or carers who wanted them. The team was made up of three staff, one full time and two part time. It was noted that a three year delivery plan had been developed as part of the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment and it guided the work of the Unit. The team encouraged all groups to work towards a Quality Assurance kite mark to ensure parents could be confident that their child was receiving childcare that was second to none. There had been a number of referrals into the O Gam I Gam scheme to promote and encourage the development of the accessibility and affordability of a range of quality and integrated registered childcare and play provision.

It was noted that 34 settings engaged with the Healthy and Sustainable Pre School Scheme, which had a number of criteria to meet to achieve the award. Members queried if the key action going forward to engage 10 new settings for this Scheme would be achieved. Officers explained that they had only started to undertake this data collection and it should be achievable as it was consistent with other areas. Members asked if a school was a fair trade school would this contribute to it being classed as a Healthy and Sustainable Pre School. It was explained that it would as environment was included in criteria.

It was highlighted that the team had a £200k budget that was managed rigidly and was a mixture of core and grant funding. The team worked with a range of key partners. The key actions for next year were highlighted to Members and it was noted that it was lot of work undertaken by a small team.

It was highlighted that there had been 315 deregistered childcare places during 2015/16 and Members asked what the reasons were for this. It was explained that it was mainly due to a lack of demand or sustainability. It was noted that some of the providers had opened in other venues and some had moved outside of the area. Members asked if the decline in the number of providers was part of a long term trend. Officers explained that this was not the case. It was

agreed that officers would circulate to the Committee a breakdown of the different type of providers by area.

Members commented that the report card was very informative and the website for the Service was very good. It was noted that some of the graphs in the report card were difficult to see clearly. Members queried the accuracy of the timescales for the figures for the parents' satisfaction levels of childcare and officers agreed to check this information.

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

3. **MINORITY ETHNIC ACHIEVEMENT SUPPORT TEAM REPORT CARD**

The Committee received the report card for the Minority Ethnic Achievement Support (MEAS) Team, as detailed within the circulated report.

Members were informed that MEAS was a small peripatetic team in the Education Development Inclusion Service, which supports Ethnic Minority learners at risk of underachievement and learners with English as an additional language in Neath Port Talbot schools and post 16 provision. They engage with a number of partners to provide support for these learners, families and schools to ensure attainment and achievement. It was recognised that it was important for the team to be involved with the families and assist with integrating them into the community.

It was explained that MEAS was funded through the Education Improvement Grant and currently received extra funding for Arabic bilingual teaching assistants from the Home Office. It was noted that the Service receives the smallest grant allocation of the Education through Regional Working (ERW) consortium Local Authorities. The Service was funded annually and had cuts to their funding in the last three years, which had resulted in some redundancies last year. There was continual pressure to meet demand with the current level of funding. Members recognised the difficulties with the uncertainty of grant funding. It was noted that team ensured that staff were given the opportunity to develop skills to help them move on if required.

The team also bids annually for funding from other organisations such as the Black History Association Wales to undertake additional events and activities. Some of the additional events and activities

undertaken across schools were highlighted to Members. It was noted that there were two visiting Chinese teachers, fully funded through the British Council, in Neath Port Talbot for one year. Their main focus was sharing Chinese language and culture with schools and in return they were learning about the Welsh education system. Work such as this was recognised as being important in preventing families settling in the area becoming isolated and invisible. It also fitted in with the global citizen work of schools.

It was highlighted that the additional temporary funding by the Home Office had ensured support for Syrian Refugee learners and there had been positive results. Some Members who had refugees in their wards commented on the level of preparedness there had been by the Council on preparing the accommodation and school to ensure that families could settle into the area. Members asked if the funding from the Home Office would continue and it was explained that funding per person would reduce from January 2017 onwards. It was expected that there would be more families coming into the area and they would also be funded which would allow the team to keep the teaching assistants.

Members were provided with some additional information on the work of the team. It was highlighted that in addition to the advice and support to schools the team undertook a lot of work to promote multiculturalism and translation work. One significant piece of work was supporting first language GCSEs which involved a lot of transition support. So far the team had achieved 100% success rate, mainly A*- A grades for all first language examinations taken, which includes, Polish, Mandarin, Japanese, Russian and Spanish. It was noted that there were currently 58 different languages recorded as spoken within the area. Part of the role of the team was to teach teachers how to support children.

It was noted that results showed that bilingual students out performed monolingual students and this included other subjects as well as languages. Members recognised this and were pleased that children were encouraged to use their first language and retain those skills.

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

4. **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 with the circulated report, for indicators:

- Priority Indicator 5 – Number of looked after children by placement type.
- Priority Indicator 6 – the number of children who have been discharged from care and then subsequently re-admitted.
- Priority Indicator 7 – the number of cases held within the service categorised by status – child protection, looked after or child in need.
- Priority Indicator 8 – The number of cases “stepped down” from Children and Young People Services to Team Around the Family.
- Priority Indicator 9 – The percentage of children looked after during the year with a Personal Education Plan within 20 school days of entering care or joining a new school.

Members were informed that progress continued to be made by the Service. It was highlighted that the number of Looked After Children in Neath Port Talbot was 378 at 31 March 2016 and this was the lowest since June 2010.

For Priority Indicator 5 it was noted that there had been a slight increase in residential placements and even though it was small numbers they were high costs. Reassurances were given that this was being carefully monitored by the Senior Management Team.

In regards to Priority Indicator 6 it was highlighted that two children had been readmitted into care in March 2016. The reasons for this were explained to Members and had been looked at by the Senior Management Team. Members noted that there had been an increase in children being readmitted during August and asked if there were any trends during school holidays. Officers explained that there did not seem to be any trends at holiday times. However, the Service would expect to see more issues at those times and they would continue to monitor this to identify if there were trends appearing.

Priority Indicator 8 outlined that there had been an increase in the number of cases that had been stepped down to the Team Around the Family. Members asked why there had been a significant

increase in stepped down cases between February and March. In addition were the cases that were stepped down and those stepped up the same cases, as they would be concerned with families having to work with different professionals. It was explained that circumstances for families may change and there was potential for families to reach the threshold again to be stepped up. It was agreed that officers would look into this and report back to Members.

Members asked if there continued to be cases stepped down to the Team Around the Family did the Team have the capacity to deal with them. Officers explained that the Team would work with families until they were no longer needed and the cases would be closed, which would result in the figures stabilising. The current figures did not show the number of families leaving the system. Caseloads were monitored regularly and the necessary steps would be taken if more capacity was required. It was highlighted that there were no waiting lists for the Team at the moment and the data on interventions indicated that they were having a positive impact. It was agreed that a report would be brought to a future meeting that included the data and outcomes for the work of the Team Around the Family.

Members noted that for Priority Indicator 9 there had been delays in some looked after children receiving a Personal Education Plan within 20 days and asked why this was the case. Officers explained that this tended to occur when a child changed schools and more work was required to address this. It was noted that care plans would be in place for those children.

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

5. **PRE-SCRUTINY**

The Committee scrutinised the following matters:

Cabinet Board Proposals

5.1 Fostering Statement of Purpose

Members noted that there was a typographical error on page 15 of the appendix to the report. It was requested that the sentence “To safeguard and protect the welfare of children and young people and to ensure their physical, emotional and intellectual development” was changed to “To safeguard and

protect the welfare of children and young people and to assure their physical, emotional and intellectual development”.

5.2 Neath Port Talbot Fostering Service Regulation 42 Quality of Care Report 2015/16

Members noted that it was a good report and requested that an update report against the recommendations was brought back to the Committee. Members also requested a report on placement breakdowns was brought to a future meeting. It was agreed that these reports would be scheduled into the Forward Work Programme.

5.3 Foster Carer Recruitment Strategy and Finance Policy

The Committee received the report on the Foster Carer Recruitment Strategy and Finance Policy that outlined the proposals to increase weekly payments and the payment of a retainer for foster carers for children aged 11 plus, as detailed within the circulated report.

Members were informed that increasing weekly payments and the payment of a retainer would support the recruitment and retention of foster carers for teenagers in order to reduce the number of young people placed in independent foster placements. It was noted that this would enable the Council to make greater savings. It was highlighted that the Looked After Children Strategy had successfully reduced the number of looked after children and the Service was more successful in keeping children at home. The Service had to ensure that it was meeting the needs of those children and young people in care. The aim of the Recruitment Strategy was to identify the profile of looked after children and foster carers in order consider the key issues which needed to be addressed to have a positive impact on recruitment and retention of skilled and experienced foster carers.

It was highlighted that there had been a continual reduction in requests for people to become foster carers. The majority of enquiries were for people considering becoming foster carers for children under 10 years old and in particular children under 5 years old. There were difficulties in finding foster carers for teenagers and often had to use independent fostering agencies.

The Service had managed to reduce the number of independent placements but there was a need for more in house foster carers for teenagers. The team had looked at the barriers and what needed to be done differently. The Strategy focuses on 11plus recruitment, handling enquiries differently and what could be done to attract foster carers to the Council rather than independent agencies and other Councils.

The Strategy recommends that there was an increase in foster carer payments in order to ensure the Council was able to provide a competitive fee to match the local market. It was also recommended that up to a six week retainer was paid to foster carers for teenagers. The cost of these measures would be around £202k and would be offset by anticipated savings in external placements. It was highlighted that the costs were worked out on the worst case scenario. Members recognised the positive steps being taken to increase recruitment and retention of foster carers. It was recognised that the increase in fees would encourage more foster carers to enhance and develop their skills. Some of the cohort of carers for under 10 years old would be encouraged to progress and consider caring for teenagers.

Members queried why it had taken this time to increase the fees paid and develop the Strategy. Officers explained that the focus had been on improving the Service, making it more stable and reducing the number of looked after children. This work had taken up a lot of resources and reducing the number of looked after children had allowed some resources to be redirected into funding this Strategy.

It was outlined that there had been some increases in placement breakdowns and skilled carers were needed to maintain young people in foster placements with Neath Port Talbot carers. Support services were also required for those children who had the most challenging behaviours. It was explained that work was being undertaken with the clinical team within Hillside Secure Unit to support foster carers to manage behaviour of looked after children with complex needs. Members were pleased that positive messages were being given to foster carers that the work they did was valued and the Council would provide them with appropriate support.

Members queried if a child reached 11 years old whilst in care would they stay with the same foster carers or would they have

to change placements. It was explained that foster carers provided different levels of support some were short term and others were long term. If a child was in a long term placement then where possible they would try to ensure the child remained in the same placement and the new strategy would help to address this with the different options it offered.

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

5.4 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment Year Three Action Plan

The Committee received the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment action plan for 2016/2017 in Neath Port Talbot, as detailed within the circulated report.

Members were informed that a key part of the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment was the three year action plan. It was explained that this was year three of the plan. The report highlighted the key actions that would be implemented in during 2016/17 in the context of the overarching three year plan. The actions had been derived in support of the 12 priorities identified in the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment.

Members queried why the information pack for employers to provide parents/carers had not been completed and would it need to be bilingual. Officers explained that it had started to be developed and the completed pack would be bilingual. There was a Welsh speaker in the team, which would assist with this.

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

5.6 Home to School Transport Appeals Panel

The Committee received the report to establish and convene a Home to School Transport Appeal Panel in order to hear any appeal lodged by a parent/guardian in relation to the Authority's application of the Home to School Transport Policy, as detailed within the circulated report.

Members were informed that grounds for appeal would be for two reasons. One reason would be that the appellant believes that Local Authority has not applied the Policy correctly. The

second reason was that the appellant was able to cite any special/exceptional circumstances which they believe should be considered. An Appeals Panel would be set up within 28 days of receiving an appeal and the appellant could appear in person or provide written evidence. It was highlighted that it was proposed that the Panel would comprise of senior officers that were outside of the Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning Directorate. Following this procedure if the appellant was not satisfied with the way the appeal had been undertaken they could complain to the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales.

Members commented that they understood the necessity of developing the Appeals Panel and queried that as it was a Policy agreed by Members for officers to exercise why it was proposed to be an officer and not a Member Panel. Officers explained that they had looked into the legalities of the Panel and there was no obligation for it to be an officer or a Member Panel. It was highlighted that there was a mix of panels within the Council and some were officer led panels and some were Member led. Members noted that the subject was very controversial and it would have been useful if it could have been a mixed panel of officers and Members. It was noted that this was not practicable and it had to be one or the other. Some Members felt that if the Panel was Member lead it would be more transparent to members of the public to understand.

Officers explained that unless particular functions had been specified in the Constitution of the Council then it would be an executive function and this would result in the Panel being made up of Cabinet Members.

It was noted that the Home to School Transport Policy would be reviewed in the autumn and as part of this process they would also review the appeals process. In the interim a Panel was required for the current Policy as appeals had been received.

Members queried if there had been appeals previously and officers confirmed that there had not. Members queried how parents appealed decisions and they would have liked more information on the process in the report. Officers explained that the Policy was clear on the two areas that could be subject to appeal and once a decision was communicated to parents there was information at the bottom of the letter explaining that if they were dissatisfied they could appeal and on what grounds. It was explained that it was a decision for parents if they appealed and

how much information they included. Some Members felt that it would be difficult for some parents to explain what was wrong with the way a Policy was being applied and would like further information included in future policies. Officers would take on board these comments in reviewing the Policy.

Members asked if it would be acceptable for local Members to attend the Panel with appellants. It was confirmed that parents would be able to bring someone to support them to the Panel. It was agreed that a statement to this effect would be included in the procedure document.

Members asked if a third reason of equality of opportunity should be considered for grounds of appeal. Officers explained that this was not stated in the current Policy and the procedure could only be in line with existing content of the Policy and appeals were not on the substance of the Policy but the way it had been applied.

Some Members highlighted that it would be difficult for Members to sit on a Panel as the majority of Members had been involved in discussions around the subject, which had been very controversial. It would be a better option for the Panel to be made up of officers that were independent of these discussions and the Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning Directorate.

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

5.7 Review of School Music Service

(A.Hughes reaffirmed his interest and left the meeting for this item only).

The Committee received the report to approve withdrawal from the current joint West Glamorgan music service and to establish a new music service to support Neath Port Talbot schools from 1 September 2016, as detailed within the circulated report.

Members were informed that following a joint consultation between the City and County of Swansea and Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council it was proposed that the West Glamorgan Music Service was disaggregated and that a single music service was established to deliver music provision under

a service level agreement. Members commented that as the City and County of Swansea had already made their decision to disaggregate the Service, Neath Port Talbot had no other viable option. Members were disappointed that Swansea was withdrawing subsidy of their Music Service after August 2016. It was highlighted that Neath Port Talbot Council would continue to subsidise their Music Service for the financial year 2016/2017.

Members asked if there would be an increase in costs to parents/carers with the changes to the Service. Officers explained that in Neath Port Talbot there would be a small increase, but it would be manageable and it was comparatively less than in other Local Authorities. There would be a bigger increase in Swansea due to the withdrawal of the subsidy.

Officers highlighted that there had been some misunderstanding during the consultation that the Service was going to be withdrawn. This was not the case; a different way of delivering the Service had to be put into place. It was noted that there was currently a strong buy back profile from Neath Port Talbot schools with only a few schools indicating that they would be withdrawing. Members were pleased that the majority of schools had indicated that they would be taking up the Service and recognised the importance of music as part of the curriculum.

It was highlighted that schools in Neath Port Talbot were serviced by some staff employed by Swansea and vice versa. A skills audit would be undertaken and Neath Port Talbot staff would be placed in Neath Port Talbot schools based on their skill set and musical specialisms. Where there were surplus areas these places would be negotiated with the City and County of Swansea and vice versa.

The Committee queried how the Service would be managed as there were currently two managers in Swansea and one in Neath Port Talbot. It was explained that if interviews were required then they would be held, however, jobs in the Neath Port Talbot Service would be ring fenced for Neath Port Talbot employees in the first instance. Members asked how many teachers were included in the salary costs and they were informed that there were 31 teachers, not all full time equivalents and paid at different rates.

A complete inventory of assets/instruments would be undertaken and they would be split on an equitable basis. Any school pulling out of the Service Level Agreement would have assets removed from the school. It was noted that instruments that had been bought by the Friends of West Glamorgan Youth Orchestra belonged to the children that played in the orchestra and would stay with them.

It was noted that the music centres, orchestras, ensembles and bands would continue to operate jointly as these were self-funding. Members highlighted that the decisions made by the City and Council of Swansea would have an impact on these groups as it was possible that it would result in fewer children taking up a musical instrument.

Members thanked officers for all the work that had been put into developing the new Service and recognised that there was still a lot of work to be undertaken.

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

6. **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.

7. **PRE-SCRUTINY**

The Committee scrutinised the following matters:

Cabinet Board Proposals

7.1 The Children's Home (Wales) Regulations 2002

The Committee received the monthly reports from the Children's Home (Wales) Regulations 2002 visits from November 2016 to February 2017, as detailed within the circulated report.

Members highlighted concerns that certain information and logs were not available at the time of the visits, as this issue had been raised before. Officers had noted this and explained that the visits were unannounced and the logs were onsite either at a centre meeting or being used by staff. It was explained that the officer visiting had not requested the logs. Members were informed that significant improvements had been made following these reports. The new processes have ensured better access to information and the documentation for officers had also improved. It was noted that risk assessments were now signed off by team managers at weekly multidisciplinary meetings.

It was highlighted that there had been some complaints about a pool table being removed from one of the Units. It was explained that it had to be removed due to an incident. The tables were now accessible but not in the main lounge area. It was highlighted that some of the issues with bedrooms and bathroom facilities were being addressed through the modernisation process. It was noted that there were ongoing problems with power surges affecting the heating and hot water.

It was noted that it had been suggested that sanctions should be more consistent and relatable to the behaviour. Officers agreed that there was some need for improvement in consistency and staff understanding the process.

It was highlighted that the changes to the staff rota had been implemented and had resulted in significant improvements. Staffing rotas were now comparatively better than other areas. Officers explained that good progress had been made in developing the multidisciplinary team, including mental health services and they were delivering positive outcomes.

It was highlighted that since January 2016 there had been a change in reporting officers, which had also improved reporting arrangements and reports were received in a timelier manner. Members asked if there were positive reinforcements to improve behaviours of young people. Officers explained that there was an award system in place that ranged from bronze to platinum level and the young people could gain different privileges from moving up the levels. It was agreed that the scheme would be circulated to the Committee for information. It

was noted that the responses to behaviour was tailored to the needs of the children and young people.

Members commented that there had been some positive changes taking place in Hillside.

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

7.2 The Manager's Report on Hillside Secure Children's Home

The Committee received the Managers Report on Hillside Secure Children's Home, which provided information on staff and service planning and development for the period 1 November 2015 to 28 April 2016, as detailed within the circulated report.

Members were informed that there had been some admissions of 11 year olds, which was an unusual occurrence and an indication of the complexities of young people that the Service was dealing with. It was highlighted that there had been three young people from Neath Port Talbot admitted into Hillside during this period. The higher number of admissions was historically from Children's Homes. It was highlighted that Hillside had also responded to the increased need in providing secure beds for Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) requests from the Police and Emergency Duty Team.

It was highlighted that education attendance was quite stable. It was noted that a lot of the young people had a low level of education and it was a challenge to the professionals to meet need. The young people had written to three influential people and had received a response from the Pope, which was a boost for them. Members were informed that a Speech and Language Therapist would be employed for two days a week. Members were pleased with this positive development.

It was noted that there had been some staff turnover and this was due to them leaving for other opportunities or retirement. There had been some recruitment into posts and overall the team was stable. There had been a lot more training opportunities for staff and the new rota system had assisted with staff having the time to attend training sessions. It was noted that sickness absence was higher than the Council average and it was a challenging environment to work in.

However, the appropriate policies were being followed to manage this.

The average length of stay was two months and six days. It was highlighted that by the time young people arrive at Hillside they could have been through up to 24 different placements which would have further traumatised them. If young people could be admitted to Hillside sooner and for longer periods they could have more of an impact with the resources they now had available.

The Trauma Recovery Model that was being used in Hillside was proving effective and all staff were receiving this training so there was a consistent approach to interactions with young people. Staff had also been taken through a walkthrough of the first 24 hours of being admitted to secure care so they could view it from the perspective of the young person. This process provided a number of positive outcomes including admission information and aesthetic appearance of admission areas and family room. Members were pleased that the Clinical Team was being developed and the approach being taken by Hillside.

Members queried when a visit to Hillside could be arranged and it was noted that there was an open day on 28 June 2016, further information would be circulated to Members.

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

CHAIRPERSON