

CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Members Present:

23rd October 2014

Chairman: Councillor A.R.Lockyer

Vice Chairman: Councillor Mrs.D.Jones

Councillors: Mrs.A.Chaves, Mrs.J.Dudley, M.Ellis, R.G.Jones,
Mrs.S.Paddison, Mrs.K.Pearson and
Mrs.L.G.Williams

**Co-opted Voting
Members:**

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

Officers In Attendance A.Jarrett, Ms.L.Hedley, Ms.H.Reid, J.Hodges and
Ms.J.Thomas 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
22ND SEPTEMBER 2014**

Noted by the Committee.

Members had requested further information on the Looked After Child who had been permanently excluded from school that had been identified in the previous meeting of the Committee. The Head of Children and Young People's Services informed Members that there had been some confusion of who would be reporting back to the Committee on this issue. It was agreed that a full answer would be circulated to Members following the meeting.

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

The Forward Work Programme was noted by the Committee.

Members requested that a detailed report on Youth Clubs, once the budget proposals had been agreed, to be brought to the Committee. It was also asked that behaviour in schools to remain on the scrutiny work programme and to include Statements of Special Educational Needs and the work of the Hubs.

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

3.1 Implementation of a Single Youth Justice Service Across Western Bay

The Committee received a report on the progress being made with the creation of the Western Bay Youth Justice and Early Intervention Service and to progress the creation of the new management team, as detailed in the circulated report.

Officers updated the Committee on the progress that has been made in amalgamating the three areas (Swansea, Neath Port Talbot and Bridgend). The amalgamation was to realise cost savings with no reduction of service delivery and to improve the service and it would be achieved through restructuring the service across Western Bay. Members queried how this would work in practice. They were informed that there were a range of expertise in the three areas and by bringing them together a wider range of services could be offered across the amalgamated areas and it was a positive move forward.

It was highlighted that the initial set up costs were being met by a grant from Welsh Government and it was clarified that this would be a one off grant. Members asked if the amalgamation would still be happening if there had not been a grant available. It was noted that it is a directive from Welsh Government and had to be implemented, however, it is also the best way forward.

It was noted that there had been a delay in recruiting an overall manager and the 3 locality managers due to trade unions negotiations in Bridgend Council. The proposals regarding these posts would be submitted to Personnel Committee for approval if agreed by Cabinet Board.

Members asked if contingency planning had taken place for the impact of Williams and potential new arrangements for local government. It was noted that the new service had to be set up and it was agreed that it would match the ABMU footprint. Assumptions could not be made on what may happen and changes would have to be considered at the time.

The Committee was supportive of the proposals. Following scrutiny it was agreed that the report be noted.

3.2 The Western Bay Safeguarding Children Board (WBSCB) Annual Report and Business Plan

The Committee received the Western Bay Safeguarding Children Board (WBSCB) Annual Report and Business Plan, as detailed in the circulated report. The Annual Report highlighted the achievement of the Board over its first full year and also identified the challenges. The business plan focussed on how the Board would respond to its strategic priorities.

The WBSCB was established in April 2013 and Members were informed that due to its successful early establishment the Board had structures and processes set up to produce and publish reports and business plans, as required. Members highlighted that it was a good report that was clear and set out the aims and objectives well.

Members queried why two priorities in the Business Plan, Parental Substance Misuse and Parenting Capacity, did not have outcomes established and asked what the timescales for establishing them were. It was noted that they were regional priorities and a lot of work had been done in these areas and it was anticipated that outcomes would be established shortly. Members also asked if Swansea Council was still undertaking work with UNICEF on the rights of the child. Officers were unsure if this work was still happening and would find out.

Members highlighted that the Child Practice Review Management Group had considered 20 cases for review and queried whether that was the target they expected to reach. Officers explained that it was hard to know what to expect and it was positive that practitioners were happy to put forward cases. It was noted that not all cases put forward had reached the threshold for review, however, they had still been used to identify opportunities to improve future practice.

Members asked how the Board was planning on strengthening reporting structures. It was highlighted that governance arrangements were not consistent across organisations and this would need to be addressed so that all organisations would receive the same information in a timely manner.

Members queried if members of the Board, who had not fulfilled the agreed attendance, had impacted on the work of the Board and what had been done to address it. They were informed that performance was being monitored and the organisations that were not reaching their agreed attendance would be written to and held to account. It was highlighted that overall the Board was working well and there was commitment from all three areas in the region.

Members asked if views of stakeholders were being taken on board. It was noted that participation and engagement undertaken by the Board needs improvement. However, the Board had done well in ensuring organisations were engaging stakeholders, for example, child protection reviews had shown improvement in including the voice of the child.

It was explained that early intervention and prevention sits outside the remit of the Board and that arrangements were on an individual Local Authority basis. It was highlighted that the Think Families partnership was taking forward this work in Neath Port Talbot. Children's Services and Team Around the Family work together and pass relevant information onto other agencies. Members also queried that in relation to babies who become looked after health visitors would be key to the process and was there a lack of consistency in reporting information. This was further expanded to schools passing on concerns to the Health Board and Social Services. It was explained that the Board would not look at consistent practice but would ensure there were consistent protocols in all areas.

Members provided feedback on the WBSCB Website, overall it was very informative, however, there was some concern raised over the pictures used for different issues. The use of boys and girls to represent different issues seemed to imply that the issues were gender specific and it was suggested that cartoon images maybe be a better option. Members also commented that it would be useful to have the number for Childline available on the website. Officers thanked Members for their observations and would take them back and reconsider the use of some of the pictures on the website.

Following scrutiny it was agreed that the report be noted.

3.3 Children's Services Workforce Report

Members received a report on Children and Young People's Service Workforce, which included information on leavers and sickness absence, as detailed in the circulated report.

The Committee was informed that it was a good news story in relation to leavers. The number of leavers has significantly reduced since 2012 and was now a reasonable number of nine so far for 2014. It was highlighted that there had been a lot of positive comments during from the exit interviews. It was noted that the report contained recommendations for improvement and they were mainly building on what has already been put in place.

Members queried that out of the nine leavers, six managers would not have sought to retain them, however some remained in the employment of Council and asked why this was the case. It was clarified that they were not suited for Children's Services but they were more suited to other areas, such as Adults Social Services.

Members noted that part of the recommendations was the lack of an appraisal system and the Committee were supportive of a system being introduced. It was explained that supervision was the main way of monitoring work and they should happen every 28 working days, the next stage would be to introduce an appraisal system. It was also recognised that progressing social workers from a grade 8 to a 9 had positive results and the employees who had done this had been of a high calibre.

Members asked if there was any correlation between the figures of length of service and number of leavers, as the figures indicated that there was a higher number with two years and under of service. It was explained that there were a mixture of reasons for leaving. For some it was their first job and the support given to those new in post was being considered to see what improvements could be made. Members also asked if the working environment had any influence on employees leaving. It was noted that this was not generally a reason, however, there had been an issue with the Sandfields Team and this was the reason for them being relocated.

It was queried if the Council still developed its own social workers, where they were provided with the opportunity to train and in return agreed to stay for so many years. It was confirmed that this still happened and there were roughly four a year and they had to stay for

two years. However, it was noted that new recruits could leave when they wished.

In regards to sickness absence the reporting period 1st January to 31st August 2014 the number of calendar days lost to sickness had halved in comparison for the same period in 2013 and there had been a reduction in long term sickness. Stress was also stated as being less of a reason for being off than in previous years. It was noted that there had been a spike in sickness in August, which appears to be down to chronic conditions and operations. HR Officers had been working with team managers to manage sickness and there had been increased training. Members asked if managers matched sickness absence against such things as school holidays. It was confirmed that patterns were looked for in sickness absence and if there was specific triggers.

Members asked if the sickness data being presented to them was the same as the information received by Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee and it was confirmed that it was as it was corporate data.

Members queried which team had 24% of calendar days lost to sickness absence as the graph was in black and white and this information was not clear. It was also asked what the reasons were for this. Officers agreed to find out this information and report back to the Committee.

Members were pleased to see the reduction in sickness absence and the work of the HR Officers and the Teams in addressing this. It was also noted that Members had had a part to play in improving the morale of staff, by demonstrating their interest and appreciation of the work done by social workers.

Following scrutiny it was agreed that the report be noted.

3.4 Update on Inclusion Review

Members received an update on the progress of implementing recommendations arising from the Inclusion Review, as detailed in the circulated report.

Members were informed that the Head of Resources and Commissioning was the Inclusion Champion. This was at his request as he wanted to ensure change was driven through at pace. It was also noted that there was an Inclusion Review Group to assist with the progressing the changes. The work has been mainly positive and there had been progress in some areas, however, there were concerns

regarding exclusion rates. It was highlighted that the appeals to the Special Educational Needs Tribunal for Wales had reduced from seven the previous year to two last year. One was retrospective and not included in the figures in the original report. Members were informed that this was a good achievement for the Local Authority. It was noted that some actions would be on hold until more is known about Welsh Governments intentions on statutory reform. Members asked if the timescales for the statutory reform and they were informed that it was likely to be in the Summer 2015.

Members queried what was meant by the term “person centred planning” and it was clarified that it would put the pupil at the heart of planning for their future and they would be consulted and involved from the beginning. In particular this would have an impact at the transition period between primary and secondary school and between secondary school and college. Parents would also be involved, which would be especially important in relation to additional learning needs, Members were pleased to hear this.

Members queried if the Co-ordinator Support for Inclusion was an additional post and if there were any additional costs. It was clarified that this post would be the restoration of a full post and was not an additional post. It was highlighted that finance for education was a concern, particularly with the anticipated increases in statutory responsibilities for local authorities when the broader definition of additional learning needs replaces special educational needs and the age range is extended from 0-25 years old.

Members asked what the Therapy Groups were and it was clarified that speech and language therapy groups would be offered across several schools when there were not enough pupils with similar needs in one school to compile a suitable group. The Health Board would be running the sessions.

Following scrutiny it was agreed that the report be noted.

4. Access to meetings to resolve to exclude the public for the following item(s) pursuant to section 100a(4) and (5) of the local government act 1972 and the relevant exempt paragraphs of part 4 of schedule 12a to the above act.

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

5.1 The Children's Home (Wales) Regulations 2002

This report was withdrawn from consideration at today's meeting.

CHAIRMAN