

CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Members Present:

4th December, 2014

Chairman: Councillor A.R.Lockyer

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

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

Officers In Attendance N. Jarman, A.Jarrett, Mrs.A.Thomas, C.Millis,
Ms.B.Evans, C.Glover, G.Williams, Ms.R.Dobbing
and Ms.C.Gadd

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

1. **MEMBER'S DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

The following Member made a declaration of interest at the commencement of the meeting:

Cllr.P.A.Rees - Report of The Head of Resources and Commissioning
- Governance Arrangements for the New Single
Special School Replacing Ysgol Hendre Special
School, Velindre Community School and Bryncoch
Pupil Referral Unit, as he is Chairman of Governors
of the Bryncoch Pupil Referral Unit.

2. **MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 23RD OCTOBER 2014**

Noted by the Committee.

3. **SCRUTINY FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2014/15**

Members requested further information on the staff appraisals system and the implementation and structures being put into place. It was highlighted that the appraisal system was a corporate system. Officer agreed to bring a report to a future meeting on how it was being implemented in Children and Young People's Services.

It was queried why the eight key priority performance grids were not included with the performance information for Children and Young People's Services. It was agreed that the Scrutiny Officer would establish why they had not been included following the meeting.

4. **PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY - CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES**

4.1 **Presentation and Report of the Independent Support Team on Progress to date on the Improvement of Children's Services in Neath Port Talbot**

Members received a presentation from the Independent Support Team (IST) on the progress to date on the improvement of Children and Young People's Services, as detailed within the circulated report.

The IST had been monitoring and supporting the improvement journey since January 2013. The team had been working with the Service and its partners in an advisory capacity to bring their extensive experience to bear on improving the structures and processes across the safeguarding systems.

Members were informed that there had been operational and practice improvements. This included information systems being repaired and guidance, policies and procedures put in place to ensure compliance, mandatory training, clear expectations of staff and managers and improved partnership working. These improvements provided a framework to move forward. However, it was important to sustain improvement and build on strengths. There had also been improvements in the workforce and Neath Port Talbot was represented more positively and was a safer place to work. There were still challenges and improvements to be made and this included quality assurance work to be driven forward and there were still high numbers of Looked After Children in Neath Port Talbot.

Improvements were still required in early intervention work, however it was explained that not everything could be done at once. The Think

Families Partnership Board had made progress in this area and the next challenge was to reduce the number of Looked After Children.

Members highlighted that the report referred to attention being given to revising the Council's Harassment Policy and requested more detail on this. It was noted that some employees misinterpret strong management and the current harassment policy supports the employee but does not support the manager being complained about and a balance was required. One of the recommendations from the Independent Support Team was for the Supervision Policy to be embedded in practice. Members asked for more detail about this, as they had been given reassurances that supervisions were happening and improvement had been seen through performance monitoring. They were informed that supervisions were taking place and the next steps were to ensure that training plans for individuals suited the needs of the Service as well as being of benefit to the individual. Members also asked about the system used for supervision as it was recognised that good supervision adds value and allows for personal development. They were informed that the Supervision Policy was being revised to ensure there was a good process in place and it included all aspects required. It was noted that the Committee had identified it as a priority. Members had requested information on the implementation of the appraisal system earlier in the meeting and they requested that this report also include information on supervisions.

Members highlighted the need for improved support from Children and Adolescence Mental Health Services (CAMHS) for the development of effective therapeutic services. Members who also sat on the Corporate Parenting Panel noted that the Panel had written to the Health Board regarding their concerns for the lack of services for Looked After Children. It was noted that this had also been a concern raised by some of the social work teams when the Improvement Member Panel had visited them. The Committee expressed concern about a lack of CAHMS service in this area and requested to be kept up to date with any progress in this area.

The IST had suggested that to assist the Corporate Parenting Panel to improve the educational attainment of Looked After Children, the establishment of a "virtual school" may be useful. Members queried what this was and it was explained that virtual schools was an English initiative and it would be a sub group of the Corporate Parenting Panel, which would act like governors. They would consider the performance of individual Looked After Children and challenge where they were not performing. It was noted that this had also been raised in the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Members highlighted the recommendation for Adult Services to be more involved in commissioning services and to provide more support and assistance to vulnerable adults. They felt that there needed to be more joint working and support in this area. Officers informed them that Social Services was looking at developing a common commissioning unit for both Adults and Children and Young People's Services, which would help to resolve this issue.

Members asked why care plans were not being sent to the child with the language used being age appropriate. Officers informed them that the Principal Officer for this area was addressing this issue and it was recognised that the care plan was about the child and that they should have access to it. Members also expressed concern that the Independent Reviewing Officers were not routinely seeing the child alone. It was explained that this was part of improving the Quality Assurance Framework and improving the quality of practice, which the Service was now focussing on. A lot of work has been done with Independent Reviewing Team and part of that had been about seeing children and preparing them for reviews.

Members noted that there were a lot of meetings that were attended by the same officers and queried if this was going to be streamlined. It was pointed out that the meetings had been set up to tackle issues and were required at the time. It was agreed that the next step was to build on this and establish the best working arrangements and rationalise the meetings to ensure they were fit for purpose and appropriate.

The Committee thanked the Independent Support Team for their work and assistance. It was recognised that Children and Young People's Services had come a long way, however, there was still improvements to be made and it was important to sustain continuing performance.

Members requested a progress report on the recommendations to be brought to a future meeting of the Committee.

Following scrutiny it was agreed that the report be noted.

4.2 Children and Young People Services - Performance Report

The Committee received the performance management information for Children's Services for the second quarter period (April 2014 – September 2014) and the half year progress for the Corporate Improvement Plan Improvement Objectives, as detailed within the

circulated report. Appendix 2, the Social Services All Wales Annual Performance Indicator Comparison, was withdrawn from consideration at today's meeting.

It had been explained earlier in the meeting that the eight key performance grids had not been included in the papers and Members were provided with a verbal update informing them that there had been no significant change. The number of re-referrals had risen last month and this was due to four sibling groups being reported in the same month. The information would be circulated to the Committee following the meeting.

Members queried the percentage of Initial Assessments completed (SCC/011) and the number that had been completed without the child being seen by a social worker and whether they were desktop assessments. Officers confirmed that this was correct and the cases would have been serious enough to be moved straight to a child protection case to prevent any delays.

In relation to the percentage of looked after children's reviews carried out within statutory timescales, Members noted that there had been an improvement, however, there were still some reviews which had not been achieved. Members requested further information on this performance indicator including the reasons why some were not meeting the statutory timescales.

Members highlighted that there were still Looked After Children without Personal Education Plans (PEPs) (SCC/024) and they would like to see this addressed. Officers explained that where they had not been completed it was because the child was doing well in school. However, they were working with Education Services to ensure that all Looked After Children had PEPs.

Members queried why there was no comparison with the previous year as was included in the performance reports to Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet Board. It was noted that there had been some confusion on the reporting of performance information, which would be resolved outside of the meeting.

Following scrutiny it was agreed that the report be noted.

5. **PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY - EDUCATION, LEISURE AND LIFELONG LEARNING**

5.1 **Annual Report on Pupil Performance 2013-14 and Performance Indicator Monitoring 2nd Quarter 2014/15**

The Committee received a presentation on Annual Pupil Performance for 2013-14, performance indicator monitoring second quarter (1st April 2014 to 30th September 2014) and half year progress on the Corporate Improvement Plan Improvement Objectives, as detailed within the circulated reports. Members were also provided with supplementary information on standardisation and moderation to clarify how they were used by Education Services. The presentation set the context for Neath Port Talbot data and comparison with other Local Authorities in Wales and attainment, attendance and inclusion were the main focus.

It was highlighted that there had been an improvement in literacy and numeracy outcomes at all key stages. It was noted that Neath Port Talbot's ranking for key stages 2 and 3 was low in comparison with other areas. However, it improved dramatically at key stage 4 and exceeded the Welsh average. The reasons for this were being looked into and addressed, which included ensuring that there was an excellent standard of teaching across all schools in the County Borough. Members were also informed that the Service was dedicated to narrowing the attainment gap between those children in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM) and those that were not. It was emphasised that the focus was on improving the attainment of FSM pupils and not lowering the standard of non FSM pupils.

It was noted that a consistent approach to managing behaviour was required across schools as there had been an increase in the number of days lost to exclusions. The most concerning statistic indicated that the highest percentage of the days lost was in relation to pupils with additional learning needs. It needs to be identified what action or support could have been provided prior to the point of the pupil being excluded. Members were informed that work was being undertaken to address behaviour in schools and this would be reported to the Committee at the next meeting.

Members asked for clarity on how key stages 2 and 3 were assessed and they were informed that it was by teacher assessment. It was highlighted that this was where standardisation and moderation would be applied to ensure that pupils were being assessed in the same way. Schools were also challenged about the difference in key stages as

part of the core visits. Members were informed that a new pupil tracking system had been put in place by some schools to improve accuracy of assessments. It was noted that it was encouraging that pupils were performing at key stage 4 as this was assessed externally through GCSEs. Members commented that achievement at key stage 4 was a reflection on the schooling a pupil had received at all stages. The Committee noted that two of the schools proposed for closure had achieved well. Officers highlighted that this was a small cohort and the proposals were based on wider considerations than results alone. Members asked for reassurance that schools aimed to improve performance for all pupils including those who were achieving already. Officers informed them that teachers would provide work at different levels to suit the needs of the pupil.

Members requested clarity in relation to Child Development Assessment Profile (CDAP) and why there were no figures recorded for reception for 2012/13 and 2013/14. They were informed that the data collected was not compulsory and was now only collated at nursery level in the first three weeks of entry. Concern was expressed about the low scores attained by some children upon entering nursery. Neath Port Talbot continued to collect the data to provide baseline data for pupils. It was agreed there was some concerning data and it was suggested that it would be useful to share the data with services such as Flying Start.

Members highlighted that there were some good practice in some schools in relation to behaviour and asked if this could be shared with other schools. Officers informed them that this would be reflected in the work being undertaken around behaviour and it would identify any training staff required. It was also noted that schools worked together as a group to improve. Members asked if a school did not have many pupils with additional learning needs would their improvement still be tracked and it was confirmed that data could be disaggregated for that child.

Members noted that a large proportion of exclusions had been due to violent behaviour and queried if this was a reflection on societal change or were schools more ready to class behaviour as violent. It was outlined that there was not much change in the classification of behaviour and schools had to be clear on what acceptable behaviour was and what was not. It was noted that there was more drug and alcohol misuse seen in society and more children experienced violent behaviour around them. It was emphasised that it was important to look at the circumstances that caused the behaviour and what could be done to address issues at an earlier stage.

It was noted that the Council's Minority Ethnic Achievement Support Team was doing a good job in addressing the needs of pupils whose first language was not English or Welsh. Older pupils were also very helpful in assisting younger students.

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

6. **PRE-SCRUTINY**

The Committee scrutinised the following matters:-

Cabinet Board Proposals

6.1 Family Support Service – Family Action Support Team (FAST) Contract Service Specification Variations from 8th December 2014 up to March 2016

The Committee scrutinised the report which prepared variations to the current Family Action Support Team (FAST) contract between Neath Port Talbot Children and Young People Services and Action for Children, as detailed within the circulated report.

Members were informed that the contract no longer met what the requirements of Children and Young People's Services and the proposed variations would bring the service into line with the current needs of children and young people. The expectations and monitoring of the service was identified as needing to be improved. It was explained that it was one part of the Family Strategy and the Committee would see the full strategy in the new year. There were three areas of need that the variations would target which were: Rapid Response Service, Re-unification Service and Family Outreach.

Members asked whether following families receiving the Rapid Response Service would there be anything in place once the support was withdrawn. It was explained that a crucial part of the plan for the family was to identify ongoing support. The model would be built around crisis intervention where families would be worked with at crisis point and then the right support services would be available to them.

Members were in favour of the idea of payment based on results and queried how this would be measured. It was highlighted that previously there had been no incentive for services to perform well

and the intention was to address this. Funding would be split into three areas, which would cover managerial costs, volumes and outcomes and if the organisation reached the targets set then they would receive a top up fee. The contract being broken down into unit costs would help to reduce waiting lists and the Council would have control over how the money was spent and outcomes would be more measurable.

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

6.2 Play Sufficiency Assessment Action Plan – Year 2

The Committee received the Play Sufficiency Action Plan for Year 2 developed from the Neath Port Talbot Play Sufficiency Assessment, as detailed within the circulated report.

Members commented that they were pleased to see information sharing between the Council's Planning Department and the Play Team to ensure there were adequate open spaces.

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

6.3 Securing Sufficiency of Play Opportunities

The Committee received the report on the commencement of the duty on local authorities to secure sufficiency of play opportunities under the Welsh Government's statutory guidance 'Wales: A Play Friendly Country', as detailed within the circulated report.

Members commented that working closely with both internal and external partners to maximise resources to provide a range of play experiences for children and young people was important, especially if there was going to be the cessation of Summer Play Schemes. It was noted that a lot of communities had good places to play and it was important to target areas that did not have as good resources. It was noted that there were a lot of low cost ideas that could be utilised by organisations working together.

Members also highlighted the importance of Council departments working together. For example, a budget proposal that had been considered by Economic and Community Regeneration Scrutiny

Committee and Cabinet Board was to reduce the opening hours of Margam Park and this would have a further impact on play opportunities for children and young people.

Members asked if the play bus was still in existence and officers would find out and inform Members.

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

6.4 Western Bay Regional Adoption Service

The Committee received a report updating Members on the progress of the implementation of the Western Bay Regional Adoption Service, as detailed within the circulated report.

Members had previously been made aware that Welsh Government had directed Local Authorities to regionalise their adoption services. The aim was to increase the number of the children adopted and speed up the process. It was emphasised that in developing the regional arrangements it was important that the performance of the service was not detrimentally affected. The three Councils that were making up the Western Bay Regional Adoption Service all had high number of Looked After Children and it was vital for there to be more adoptive families. It was explained that by regionalising the service there would be a bigger pool of expertise and more flexibility in the services delivered. It was explained that there were higher financial implications at this point, however, the assumption was that by increasing the number of adoptions, savings would be made in the future.

Members asked if the recent developments in Local Government reorganisation were going to have an impact on the setting up of the Western Bay Regional Adoption Service. It was highlighted that it could in the long term, however, the regional service would be set up by January 2015 and it is anticipated that any local government reorganisation would not happen for at least two years. The regional service would have to be looked at this point and decisions made then.

Members queried if one area used more adoptive families than others would it cost that Council more money. It was confirmed that there would be two aspects to the costing. Firstly the fixed costs that included staff and offices and secondly, the variable costs of the number of adoption cases. With regards to the variable costs,

Councils would pay for what they used. However, the cost for adoptions would be the same regardless of which Council the adoptive family was from, as the best match would be made. The intention was to grow more of our own adoptive families through these regional arrangements.

It was noted that the Western Bay Adoption Service would be based in Port Talbot Civic Centre. The main aim was to provide better outcomes for children and young people.

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

7. **URGENT ITEM**

Because of the need to deal now with the matter contained in Minute No. 7(i) below, the Chairman agreed that this could be raised at today's meeting as an urgent item pursuant to Section 100B (4) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972.

Reason for Urgency:

Due to time element.

(i) Early Intervention and Prevention Reserved Lots

The Committee received a report on a proposal to enter into two partnerships with Calan DVS and NSPCC to deliver enhanced services in the areas of Domestic Violence and Thriving Families (Reserved Lots), as detailed within the circulated report.

It was explained to Members that as part of the current re-commissioning of Early Intervention and Prevention Services, the lots containing Domestic Violence and Thriving Families Services were deliberately reserved for further exploration of the extent of the existing service in both areas. With the assistance of the Council, Calan DVS and NSPCC were successful in their applications for significant additional external funding for provision of such services. Calan DVS would be providing Domestic Violence Services and the NSPCC the Thriving Families Services. The Council would use the relatively small funding available for commissioning complimentary services and enhancing existing services. It was noted that these proposals had been agreed with Welsh Government as the Council's money was from Family First funding. It was highlighted that these

proposals provided best value for money and the provision of a good service.

Following Scrutiny the Committee was supportive of the proposals to be considered by the Cabinet Board. Following scrutiny it was agreed that the report be noted.

CHAIRMAN