

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 21 June 2016

Present:

Councillor Reid – in the Chair

Councillors Sameem Ali, Shaukat Ali, Midgley, Madeleine Monaghan, Reeves, K Simcock, Stone and Taylor

Co-opted Voting Members:

Mrs B Kellner, Representative of the Diocese of Manchester

Co-opted Non Voting Members:

Mr L Duffy, Secondary sector teacher representative

Ms J Gudgeon, Primary sector teacher representative

Councillor Bridges, Assistant Executive Member for Children's Services

Dave Callahan, Action for Children

Len Pilkington, Action for Children

Apologies:

Councillor Hewitson

Ms E Holt, Parent governor representative

Ms L Leonard, Representative of the Diocese of Salford

CYP/16/07 Minute's Silence

The Chair paid tribute to Jo Cox MP, who was murdered last week. She spoke about her work to support the most vulnerable people in society, including children and families fleeing from Syria. She noted that Mrs Cox was the niece of former scrutiny Chair, Alistair Cox, and encouraged members to attend a vigil in Manchester city centre the following day. The Committee held a minute's silence.

A member requested that a letter be sent on behalf of the Committee to Alistair Cox to express condolences and let him know that members were thinking about him and his family at this difficult time.

Decision

That a letter be sent on behalf of the Committee to Alistair Cox to express condolences for his family's loss.

CYP/16/08 Minutes

The Chair informed members that, since the previous meeting, David Ashcroft had resigned as the Independent Chair of the Manchester Safeguarding Children Board. The Strategic Director of Children's Services reported that cover arrangements for the post were being finalised.

Decision

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 24 May 2016.

CYP/16/09 Elective Home Education

The Committee received a report of the Director of Education and Skills which provided an overview of the statutory requirements regarding elective home education (EHE) and information on EHE in Manchester. The Director of Education and Skills introduced the report across its main themes.

Officers answered members' questions on how home educated young people access Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG), the monitoring of their academic achievement and post-16 outcomes and work with Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) on unregistered schools. Members discussed the data on home education in Manchester and the variations in the prevalence of EHE across the city.

The Director of Education and Skills advised members that this was a challenging area as the local authority had limited rights within the legislation and means by which to engage with parents. The Head of Education Strategy, Access and Inclusion outlined the approaches the Council took to try to engage with parents and ensure that children were safe and receiving a suitable education. She reported that the EHE policy was currently being revised to strengthen this approach, including insisting on seeing the child and listening to their views. The Safeguarding Lead for Education reported that most parents of home educated children did engage with the local authority but a small minority did not. She outlined other approaches the Council used to try to engage with families, including running events across the city and liaising with other organisations which worked with these families. A member requested that the updated Manchester EHE policy be considered by the Committee when it became available.

The Director of Education and Skills highlighted that, where children had never attended school, the parents did not have to inform the local authority that they were home educating so the Council might not have the child on their records. Members expressed concern that the local authority was not aware of some children and that this could leave children at risk of harm, including radicalisation. The Head of Education Strategy, Access and Inclusion informed members that the Council checked health data to identify families who had not applied for a reception place for their child and commissioned One Education to visit the families and assist them to apply for a school place or notify the Council if the family were home educating. However, she advised members that not all children would be identified through this method, as families were moving in and out of the city, and that some parents said they were home educating but refused to provide any further information.

The Chair asked if some of the children who were being home educated were awaiting school places. The Director of Education and Skills informed members that parents who had applied for a school place would have been offered one, however, some parents might choose to home educate until a place became available at their preferred school.

The Chair also gave her opinion that EHE did not have the rigour that schools had and that children could be isolated and miss out on socialising with their peers. A member reported that she was taken out of school at 12 years old and asked for assurances that what happened to her could not happen to other children. The Head of Education Strategy, Access and Inclusion gave her assurances that there were regular visits to homes where parents had chosen EHE.

Decision

To request that the updated Manchester Elective Home Education policy be considered by the Committee at an appropriate time

CYP/16/10 The Provision and Rates of Funding for the Free Early Education Entitlement for 2, 3 and 4 year olds

The Committee received a report of the Director of Education and Skills which provided an update on the provision of, and rates of funding for, Free Early Education Entitlement (FEEE) places for 2, 3 and 4 year olds in schools and settings. The Director of Education and Skills provided an overview of the report.

Members discussed the need for additional places and how this could be addressed. The Chair expressed concern that some schools were not offering provision for three-year-olds. She also emphasised the importance of early years stimulation and learning in the development of children's brains.

The Head of Schools Quality Assurance and Early Years reported that the Council was working to strengthen partnerships between schools and private providers, particularly in areas where schools were expanding the number of school places but were not expanding their nursery provision. She advised that schools were being encouraged to build relationships with nearby private providers as many of the children in these setting were likely to transfer to the school's reception classes.

A member expressed concern at the differences between schools in what parents were expected to pay for and that some schools required parents to pay for additional hours above the free entitlement. The Director of Education and Skills reported that the funding arrangements for early years provision had changed and that the current funding formula was based on levels of deprivation, with schools then having discretion on how to spend the funding they received. The Chair encouraged members who were school governors to look into their own school's policies on charging parents.

A member reported that student nurses in receipt of bursaries were not eligible for the targeted FEEE offer. He informed members that it was proposed to replace the bursaries with student loans and asked the Director of Education and Skills to raise the issue of FEEE eligibility for student nurses in his discussions with the Department for Education (DfE). The Director of Education and Skills agreed to this.

The Chair expressed concern at the rates paid to childminders in Manchester. The Director of Education and Skills reported that this would be considered by the Schools Funding Forum as part of a wider review.

Decisions

1. To note the report
2. To note that the Director of Education and Skills would raise the issue of Free Early Education Entitlement eligibility for student nurses in his discussions with the Department for Education.
3. To note that the Schools Funding Forum would consider the rates of pay for childminders as part of a wider review.

CYP/16/11 School Calendar

The Committee received a report of the Director of Education and Skills which provided an update on the legislative framework which informed the approach to setting the school calendar. The Director of Education and Skills introduced the report across its main themes.

The Committee discussed the reasons for the differences in term dates between schools in Manchester and across Greater Manchester and what action could be taken to address this. Members noted that Roman Catholic schools chose to be in school during Holy Week and, therefore, had different term dates from other schools around Easter. The Chair reported, however, that there was not consistency between Roman Catholic schools on their holidays and expressed concern that the Diocese of Salford was not taking action to harmonise holidays.

The Chair reported that the school calendar for 2016/2017 had already been set but recommended that action be taken to better align school calendars for 2018/2019. In response to a question from the Chair, the Director of Education and Skills advised that he would raise this through the chair of governors briefings and that he would also discuss with the Executive Member for Children's Services whether the Council wanted to break from the current Greater Manchester approach, which was based upon recommendations from the Local Government Association (LGA). The Chair reported that she would also discuss this with the candidates for the position of Mayor of Greater Manchester, advising that there should be a harmonised approach across Greater Manchester. She recommended that the Committee receive a progress report within 12 months.

Decision

1. To recommend that the following actions be taken to better align school calendars for 2018/2019:
 - to request that the Director of Education and Skills raise this issue through the chair of governors briefings
 - to request that the Director of Education and Skills discuss with the Executive Member for Children's Services whether the Council wanted to break from the current Greater Manchester approach
 - that the Chair discuss the adoption of a harmonised approach across Greater Manchester with the candidates for the position of Mayor of Greater Manchester
2. That the Committee receive a progress report within 12 months.

CYP/16/12 An Update Relating to Multi-systemic Therapy (MST) and Treatment Foster Care – Oregon (TFC-O)

The Committee received a report of the Strategic Lead Commissioner for Children which updated members on the progress of the use, by Manchester City Council, of the evidence-based interventions Multi-systemic Therapy (MST) and Treatment Foster Care Oregon (TFCO). The Strategic Director of Children's Services and the Head of Looked After Children's Services introduced the report across its broad themes. The Committee welcomed Dave Callahan, MST Supervisor, and Len Pilkington, Programme Manager for the TFC-O fostering service.

The Assistant Executive Member for Children's Services reported that MST supported the Council's aim to reduce the number of children becoming Looked After but noted that it was an expensive intervention and was only being used for a small number of young people. He advised that the report included a lot of detail on the outcomes and welcomed the scrutiny of the Committee on its effectiveness.

Members welcomed an encouraging report but emphasised the importance of continuing to monitor the long-term outcomes for young people following these interventions. The Chair reported that there was already international evidence available on the long-term effects of the interventions. The Committee requested a further report at an appropriate time to include case studies and longitudinal studies of the impact of MST and TFC-O.

A member welcomed that school exclusions for young people reduced following the use of MST but expressed concern at school attendance levels. Mr Callahan reported that school attendance had been identified as an area of concern during the evaluation process for MST. He advised members that the issue mainly related to young people attending the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) and work was now taking place with the Head and staff of the PRU to address this. A member requested that the Committee continue to monitor the impact of MST on school attendance.

The Committee discussed whether the use of MST should be expanded further. The Strategic Director of Children's Services reported that the Council needed a range of interventions to suit the needs of individual children and young people. The Chair recommended that the Council consider the use of Social Impact Bonds to fund MST. The Strategic Director of Children's Services reported that all commissioning was being reviewed and Social Impact Bonds would be considered as part of this.

Decisions

1. To receive a further report at an appropriate time to include case studies and evidence from longitudinal studies, including international evidence, and to further consider the impact of Multi-Systemic Therapy on school attendance.
2. To request that the Strategic Director of Children's Services consider the use of Social Impact Bonds to fund Multi-Systemic Therapy.

CYP/16/13 Ofsted Subgroup membership

The Committee agreed to add Councillors Reeves, K Simcock and Taylor and Mrs Kellner to the membership of the Ofsted Subgroup.

The Chair of the Ofsted Subgroup reported that the next meeting of the Subgroup would take place on Tuesday 27 September at 5.30 pm, rather than at 10.00 am, as originally arranged. The Committee noted that members had different preferences on the timings of meetings and the Chair of the Subgroup would take a view at a later date on the timings for other future meetings of the Ofsted Subgroup.

Decision

To add Councillors Reeves, K Simcock and Taylor and Mrs Kellner to the membership of the Ofsted Subgroup.

CYP/16/14 Demand and Capacity – Investing to Succeed in Children’s Social Care

The Committee received a report of the Strategic Director of Children’s Services which proposed an adjustment to the investment strategy for Looked After Children (LAC) and outlined how Children’s Services would deliver the required improvements. The Strategic Director of Children’s Services introduced the report across its main themes.

The Assistant Executive Member for Children’s Services acknowledged that this was a significant investment but emphasised that it was important in order to improve outcomes for children and young people. He advised that progress had been made in a number of areas such as quality of social work practice and leadership but that capacity was still an issue so this was the right time to invest to increase capacity. He also clarified that this was additional to the money originally agreed in the LAC Investment Plan. The Strategic Director of Children’s Services reported that a number of key factors were in place to improve children’s services, including the support of the political leadership, staff commitment and a focus on improving practice.

Members supported the proposals but requested that the Committee monitor progress and ensure the investment was achieving the anticipated outcomes through regular reports. The Chair reported that the Committee received updates on the Post Ofsted Improvement Plan at every meeting.

In response to a member’s question, the Strategic Director of Children’s Services reported that the Ofsted monitoring arrangements had changed. He reported that the Council was preparing for a full inspection and a monitoring visit was being arranged between Ofsted and the Council; early indications were that this was likely to take place in August or September.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Strategic Director of Children’s Services reported that the Council was continuing to work with Frontline, that recruits from the Frontline programme were well-prepared for the role and that retention rates for this cohort of staff were good.

The Committee discussed the higher demand for social work services in the north of the city. The Strategic Director of Children's Services reported that the demand for services had been taken into account when considering staffing levels so additional social workers would be recruited in the north of the city to meet this demand.

Decision

To endorse the recommendations that:

The Executive is requested to: -

1. Note the progress made to date and approve (subject to approval by Council of use of reserves) the proposals set out in the report.
2. Request the Council to increase the Children's Investment Fund Reserve by a further £10.160m for the period 2016/17 to 2020/21 to be funded from the Council's reserves. This is to meet the expected additional resourcing requirements set out in the report and listed below:
 - £4.905m for 2017/2018
 - £1.065m in 2018/19
 - £0.311m in 2019/20
 - £0.311m in 2020/21
3. Delegate authority to the City Treasurer, in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance, to approve the additional draw down from reserves of £3.568m for 2016/2017 and for future years ensuring that the £10.160 is not exceeded. The City Treasurer will review an updated business case outlining progress before the request is made.

The Council is requested to: -

1. Note the increased demand and approve the additional resources by use of the Council's reserves, in 2016/17 of £3.568m
2. Approve the additional resourcing requirements totalling £10.160m to be transferred to the Children's Investment Fund Reserve and to be funded from the Council's Reserves.

CYP/16/15

Overview Report

A report of the Governance and Scrutiny Support Unit was submitted. The overview report contained key decisions within the Committee's remit, responses to previous recommendations and the Committee's work programme.

The Committee had received a revised agenda with one late report (Demand and Capacity – Investing to Succeed in Children's Social Care) for the 21 June 2016 meeting. The Chair had agreed to add this report to the agenda at the request of the Strategic Director of Children's Services. One report (Post Ofsted Improvement Plan Update: Signs of Safety) was withdrawn from the agenda to allow time to consider this new item.

A member requested that the proposed changes to Lancasterian School be considered at a future meeting. The Chair encouraged members to let her or the

Committee Support Officer know if there were any other items they would like to add to the work programme.

Decisions

1. To agree the work programme.
2. To consider the proposals for Lancasterian School within a future report to the Committee.