

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 6 September 2016

Present:

Councillor Reid – in the Chair

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

Co-opted Voting Members:

Ms E Holt, Parent governor representative

Mrs B Kellner, Representative of the Diocese of Manchester

Mr A Muse, Parent governor representative

Co-opted Non Voting Members:

Mr L Duffy, Secondary sector teacher representative

Ms J Gudgeon, Primary sector teacher representative

Councillor S Newman, Executive Member for Children's Services

Councillor Bridges, Assistant Executive Member for Children's Services

Ms Monika Neall, Chair of Governors at Alma Park Primary School

CYP/16/26 Minutes

Decision

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 19 July 2016.

CYP/16/27 Academisation of Schools

The Committee received a report of the Director of Education and Skills which provided a summary of the current position with regards to the academisation of schools in Manchester and considered the implications for the city. It also provided a summary of the current status and activities of the Manchester Schools' Alliance (MSA). The Director of Education and Skills introduced the report across its main themes.

The Committee discussed some of the issues surrounding academies including the fragmentation of the education system, the use of unqualified teachers and budgetary control for schools in multi-academy trusts.

The Executive Member for Children's Services informed members that the Council had recently passed a motion against the forced academisation of good and outstanding schools but advised members that the Council would support and work with all types of schools to achieve the best outcomes for Manchester children.

A member reported that some schools were concerned about being forced to become academies and were considering converting before they were forced to. The Director of Education and Skills reported that schools wanted more information

on academisation and their options including joining a multi-academy trust, forming their own multi-academy trust, becoming a single academy or remaining as a local authority-maintained school and that this would be incorporated into an information booklet which was due to be published next month.

In response to a member's question, the Director of Education and Skills reported that over two-thirds of schools were members of the MSA. He reported that the MSA acted as an umbrella organisation for a wide range of groups and networks, such as the secondary heads group and curriculum networks and that, therefore, all schools were engaged in aspects of its work but a minority had not paid to become members. The Chair recommended that the MSA be promoted to encourage schools to become full members.

Decision:

To recommend that the Manchester Schools' Alliance be promoted to encourage schools to become full members.

CYP/16/28 Planning for Permanence

The Committee received a report of the Strategic Director of Children's Services which set out the Council's approach to achieving permanence for Looked After Children (LAC) and children at risk of becoming looked after. It detailed the different kinds of permanence for children and provided data about children for whom permanence had been secured in 2015/16. It also provided a summary of the activity and impact of the adoption and fostering services in Manchester during 2015/16. The Strategic Director of Children's Services and the Head of Service for LAC introduced the report across its main themes.

A member welcomed the progress made in this area. In response to a member's question, the Head of Service for LAC reported that the whole adoption process had been reviewed and streamlined to safely and appropriately move children to a permanent home in an adoptive family as quickly as possible. He outlined the improvements made in educating and supporting social workers, finding appropriate families for children and working closely with legal services. He also informed members about Fostering To Adopt placements, where children could be fostered by the family which was going to adopt them before the legal adoption process had been completed. The Executive Member for Children's Services reported that the establishment of a Regional Adoption Agency was a positive step as some local authorities had more people wanting to adopt than children waiting for adoption.

The Committee discussed recruitment and retention of internal foster carers. In response to a member's question, the Strategic Director of Children's Services informed members that the service had reviewed their list of registered internal foster carers and had de-registered those who were no longer taking foster care placements. The Head of Service for LAC reported that more children were now being fostered internally as the Council had recruited more foster carers who could foster sibling groups and children in the relevant age groups.

The Chair recommended that the Committee receive a further report at an appropriate time and informed members that the Corporate Parenting Panel was monitoring progress in this area on a regular basis.

Decision:

To receive a further report at an appropriate time.

CYP/16/29 Improving Outcomes for Care Leavers

At the request of the Strategic Director of Children's Services, the Chair agreed to change the agenda order and consider this report next.

The Committee received a report of the Strategic Director of Children's Services which provided an overview of the services offered to care leavers, their progress and the Council's activity to improve their outcomes. The Strategic Director of Children's Services and the Head of Service for LAC introduced the report across its main themes.

Members discussed a number of issues affecting care leavers, including accommodation and the importance of regular school attendance in achieving positive outcomes into adulthood. The Committee discussed the apprenticeship opportunities for LAC and care leavers and the Chair recommended that these groups be prioritised for apprenticeships with Manchester City Council.

The Executive Member for Children's Services highlighted the positive achievements of many of Manchester's care leavers, including the 77 care leavers who were currently at university. She reported that this was higher than in many areas, due to the Council's work in supporting care leavers. She outlined the support provided for care leavers in Manchester but advised that further work was needed, particularly in reducing the number of care leavers who were not in education, employment or training (NEET).

Members noted that care leavers were over-represented in the criminal justice system and the Chair recommended that the Committee visit a Young Offenders Institution.

The Committee requested a further report at an appropriate time and identified a range of information they wanted included in this. They requested further information on the steering group established to co-ordinate and improve support for care leavers in custody, including case studies, and information on how the embedding of social value into corporate procurement could be used to support LAC and care leavers. They also requested research data on the educational outcomes for LAC and care leavers, in comparison to children who remained with their families and information on the support the Council provided to LAC and care leavers who were parents, in comparison with the support provided by other local authorities.

Decisions:

1. To recommend to the Executive Member for Finance and Human Resources

that Looked After Children and care leavers be prioritised for apprenticeships with the Council.

2. To visit a Young Offenders Institution.
3. To request a further report at an appropriate time to include
 - further information on the steering group established to co-ordinate and improve support for care leavers in custody, including case studies
 - information on how the embedding of social value into corporate procurement could be used to support LAC and care leavers
 - research data on the educational outcomes for LAC and care leavers, in comparison to children who remain with their families
 - information on the support the Council provides to LAC and care leavers who are parents, in comparison with the support provided by other local authorities

CYP/16/30 Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report 2015 – 2016

The Committee received a report of the Head of Quality Assurance for Safeguarding which provided an account of the activity of the Independent Reviewing Service between 1 April 2015 and the 31 March 2016. The Strategic Director of Children's Services and the Head of Quality Assurance for Safeguarding introduced the report across its main themes.

The Committee discussed how the voices of children and young people, particularly younger children could be heard. The Head of Quality Assurance for Safeguarding informed members about work currently taking place to engage under-11s.

In response to a member's question, the Head of Quality Assurance for Safeguarding reported that unaccompanied asylum seeking children received the same services as other children but had dedicated Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) who had specialist training in this area.

A member emphasised the importance of training and development for IROs. The Head of Quality Assurance for Safeguarding informed members that the Council had commissioned a training programme for IROs. She reported that the Council was committed to all IROs completing the course but that those who had been in post for over two years would be prioritised to undertake the training programme first.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Head of Quality Assurance for Safeguarding reported that Coram Voice was now a full developed service and was making good progress.

The Chair reminded members that all councillors were Corporate Parents and that the IRO Report would be considered annually at the Corporate Parenting Panel and the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee.

Decision:

To note the report and receive the 2016-2017 Annual Report in 12 months' time.

CYP/16/31 Raising Standards of Practice in Children's Social Care

The Committee received a report of the Strategic Director of Children's Services which provided an update on progress in Children's Social Care in relation to recruitment, retention and the raising of social work practice. The Strategic Director of Children's Services and the Strategic Lead for Children's Social Care introduced the report across its main themes.

The Committee raised a number of issues including social worker caseloads, performance management and the quality and timeliness of case recording. The Executive Member for Children's Services reported that when the funding for the additional social work posts had been agreed, it was linked to reducing caseloads, improving staff retention and effective performance management, including appropriate recording of cases. She advised that this additional investment would reduce caseloads and give social workers more time to ensure that their case recording was up to date.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Strategic Lead for Children's Social Care reported that sickness absence was reducing and that work was continuing to monitor this and ensure managers were taking appropriate action.

The Chair asked whether the Council was using a 'grow your own' approach to filling Team Manager vacancies, developing existing social work staff to gain the skills needed to move into management roles. The Strategic Director of Children's Services reported that the second phase of the Greater Manchester Social Work Academy would include work on leadership and developing the managers of the future. The Strategic Lead for Children's Social Care reported that a number of internal candidates had been interviewed for the Team Manager roles, some of whom had been appointed.

Decisions:

1. To note the report
2. To receive an update report in six months' time.

CYP/16/32 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, which the Committee was asked to approve.

The report on Academisation of Schools was received late and published in a supplementary agenda due to a delay in starting work on the report.

The Chair welcomed Monika Neall, who would be formally appointed to the Committee as a Parent Governor Representative from 21 September 2016.

Decision

To approve the work programme.