

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday, 24 June 2020

Present:

Councillor Stone – in the Chair

Councillors Sameem Ali, Alijah, Cooley, Hewitson, T Judge, Kilpatrick, Lovecy, Madeleine Monaghan, Reeves, Reid and Wilson

Co-opted Voting Members:

Ms Z Derraz, Parent Governor Representative

Dr W Omara, Parent Governor Representative

Co-opted Non Voting Members:

Mr L Duffy, Secondary Sector Teacher Representative

Also present:

Councillor Bridges, Executive Member for Children and Schools

Apologies:

Councillor Sadler

Ms S Barnwell, Parent Governor Representative

Ms J Fleet, Primary Sector Teacher Representative

CYP/20/19 Councillor Sue Murphy

The Chair paid tribute to Councillor Sue Murphy, who had recently passed away, and the Committee paused to reflect on her life.

CYP/20/20 Minutes

The Chair noted that an update had been requested about the work to address the issues arising from the decision to close Newall Green High School, including progress in finding new school places for the affected pupils, and asked that this be provided to Committee Members.

Decisions

1. To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 4 March 2020.
2. To receive the minutes of the meeting of the Ofsted Subgroup held on 22 January 2020.
3. To request that an update on the work to address the issues arising from the decision to close Newall Green High School, including progress in finding new school places for the affected pupils, be circulated to Committee Members.

CYP/20/21 Children and Education Services response to COVID-19

The Committee received a report of the Strategic Director of Children and Education Services which provided an update on the impact, progress and response of schools, children and education services to the presenting challenges of COVID-19, with a specific focus on the support being provided to Manchester's schools and those children considered to be more vulnerable than their counterparts. The report noted that, through the learning and education system, children were informed about and understood environmental issues and the negative impact of carbon, promoting safe and healthy lives.

The Strategic Director of Children and Education Services referred to the main points and themes within the report which included:

- An update on schools, early years settings, childminders and post-16 providers;
- Initiatives to support children and young people, including the provision of laptops and support to children at transition stages in their education;
- Support for Children with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND);
- Free School Meals;
- Support for children who were not currently on a school roll;
- An update on Children's Services, including the impact of lockdown on demand, interface with the Family Court and work to support Our Children and Young People (Looked After Children and Care Leavers);
- The potential impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of children and young people and how this was being addressed; and
- The financial implications of COVID-19.

The Executive Member for Children and Schools recognised the achievements of Council staff and partners, including schools and early years providers, during this challenging time and welcomed the high quality of the data which had been provided to the Executive. He also highlighted the work of the Director of Customer Services and Transaction and her team in putting in place the Manchester Free School Meals Scheme. He reported that, while there had been some positive outcomes from the current situation, such as increased engagement from young people who preferred to communicate via digital means, there were many challenges for the Council and its partners to address. He advised that these included most children not attending school, lower social work referrals and existing issues such as poverty and domestic abuse being exacerbated by the crisis.

Some of the key points and themes that arose from the Committee's discussions were:

- Concern about children not being in school, including that there was variation in what support children were getting from their schools and how much learning they were doing at home;
- Concern that mental health issues would increase as a result of the pandemic;
- Preparations for children returning to school;
- Concern that some children and school staff were in a high risk category or lived with someone who was, noting that data indicated that Black and Minority

- Ethnic (BAME) groups were at higher risk of mortality from COVID-19;
- What progress had been made in providing laptops to pupils who needed them;
- Free School Meals (FSM), including recognising the success of Marcus Rashford's campaign for FSM to be provided to eligible families over the summer holidays and to thank him for using his platform to achieve positive change;
- Concern about the financial impact of the pandemic on Council services if the national government did not provide sufficient financial support to local government; and
- The potential for increased referrals to social services once children returned to school and issues which had arisen or worsened during lockdown were identified and how the Council would manage that increased demand.

A Member highlighted the work that some Councillors were doing to support residents during the pandemic, including producing a leaflet about support that was available. She advised that this being distributed to try to reach residents who might not be accessing information online and encouraged other Councillors to do the same. The Chair suggested that the Member circulate the leaflet to other Councillors.

The Deputy Director of Children's Services advised Members that the pandemic and lockdown had not impacted equally on everyone, with some children and families being worse affected by not being able to attend school, by financial problems and other issues such as mental health. He reported that Children's Services expected to see an increase in referrals once children returned to school and needed to plan for this. He drew Members' attention to the information in the report on the mental health services available to children and young people. He advised Members that there had been an increase in eating disorders during the lockdown which was putting a pressure on the support services.

The Director of Education reported that the Council and schools were still waiting for government guidance on how schools could safely re-open to all pupils in September; however, she advised Members that her service had already been discussing this with schools and colleges. She informed Members that schools and colleges wanted to have all pupils attending school, not just some year groups, either full-time or on a part-time basis, using a blended learning approach. She reported that schools were currently working with "bubbles" of 15 pupils who did not mix with other pupils in the school but that in future the bubbles might potentially be increased to a full class. She highlighted that secondary schools and colleges faced additional challenges as pupils were studying different combinations of GCSE and A-Level subjects but needed to stay in a bubble with one group of students. She informed Members that a lot of work had taken place to develop home learning, for example online lessons, and that schools needed to continue to work on that offer, particularly as there could be another spike in virus transmissions or a case of COVID-19 within a school requiring a class to self-isolate for two weeks. She advised Members that there would also be some children who could not attend school because they, or someone in their household, was in a high risk group so the remote learning offer would need to be available for them. She informed the Committee that schools had also been provided with risk assessment forms to complete with individual staff

members and that this took into account the risk factors relating to being from a BAME group. She reported that the Council had received 3000 laptops from the national government and 150 from the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA). She informed Members that these had been distributed to schools to give out to pupils and that a number of schools had already used their own resources to provide laptops to pupils who were most in need of them. In response to a Member's question, she reported that the government had announced that £650 million would be allocated to schools to support children to catch up on their education and that £350 million would be provided to the national tuition service to provide subsidised tuition but that further detail was still to be announced on how this would work in practice.

The Deputy Director of Children's Services stated that officers shared the concern that there could be an increase in demand for social work services but highlighted that the average social work caseload was currently 17.8 and the progress in the Council's social worker recruitment campaign, both of which, he advised, provided some assurance of the capacity to cope with increased demand. He also reported that increased use of technology during the pandemic, for example, use of virtual meetings, had highlighted some efficiencies which could be adopted longer term. A Member requested a report at a future meeting on social work recruitment, including the impact of this recruitment on caseloads and information on how cases were allocated and responded to. The Executive Member for Children and Schools suggested that this include information on the recent recruitment campaign, highlighting a video which had been made featuring a current Manchester social worker.

Decisions

1. To express concern about the financial impact of the pandemic on Council services and recognise the importance of the government providing financial support to local councils.
2. To thank Council staff and partners, including schools and early years providers, for their hard work.
3. To write to Marcus Rashford to thank him for using his platform to campaign for eligible families to receive Free School Meal vouchers over the summer holidays.
4. To request a report at a future meeting on social work recruitment, including the impact of this recruitment on caseloads and information on how cases are allocated and responded to.

CYP/20/22 Attainment and Progress 2019

The Committee received a report of the Director of Education which provided an analysis of the 2019 outcomes of statutory assessment at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1, Key Stage 2, Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5. The report also included a summary of performance according to groups by ethnicity.

Officers referred to the main points and themes within the report which included:

- Early years outcomes;
- Primary school outcomes;
- Secondary school outcomes;
- Post-16 outcomes;
- Outcomes by groups, including disadvantaged children, those with English as an Additional Language (EAL), Our Children, children with SEND and children by ethnicity; and
- Next steps.

Some of the key points and themes that arose from the Committee's discussions were:

- That GCSE and A-Level results for 2020 would be based on teacher assessments as no examinations would be taking place, noting that the situation had been made more challenging by the move from modular assessments to a system where results were based on final examinations at the end of the course, and concern that pupils from BAME groups could be negatively affected due to unconscious bias;
- How the Council could support schools to have a more inclusive curriculum that represented all communities in the city, commenting that this should not just be restricted to Black History Month; and
- Request for an update on work to ensure young children were school ready.

The Head of Schools Quality Assurance and Strategic SEND outlined how GCSE and A-Level results would be assessed, which involved schools sending two pieces of each student's work to the examination board, along with the grade they expected they would have received and a list ranking all students entered for that subject. She advised Members that the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) was standardising grades against schools' historic performance and that this was concerning for Manchester schools which had previously been failing but were now on a strong improvement journey. She reported that attainment data was analysed by ethnicity and that this would continue with the 2020 results.

The Director of Education informed Members that there was some very good practice in Manchester of ensuring that the curriculum was relevant to all communities and that the data analysis of outcomes by ethnicity would be used to identify schools which had good practices and share that learning across the city. The Executive Member for Children and Schools informed Members that discussions were currently taking place on how issues relating to Black Lives Matter and racial equality could be better addressed and that further information on the Council's response could be provided to the Committee at a later date.

The Director of Education reported that the Council was involved in the Greater Manchester plan to improve school readiness but that a lot of young children had not been in early years settings over the past few months due to COVID-19, although schools were now able to re-open to nursery children. She advised the Committee that the Council had been working to address this, for example, providing learning materials to the families of two-year-olds who were eligible for the free two-year-old

early years offer; however, she reported that the money that the government was providing to schools to enable pupils to catch up on missed learning did not include support for early years. In response to a Member's question, she reported that COVID-19 had placed an additional financial strain on early years settings, particularly as many parents were not yet sending their children back to these settings, and that work which had started prior to the pandemic on addressing financial challenges in this sector would be resumed.

Decision

To note the report.

CYP/20/23 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 Chair informed Members that a decision had not yet been made about when the next meeting would take place but that Members would be informed.

A Member highlighted some of the Committee's previous recommendations to which Members had not yet had a response and, while recognising the current pressure on officers, asked that a date be agreed by which a response would be provided.

Decisions

1. To note the report.
2. To request that a date be agreed by which officers would provide a response to the three recommendations which had been on the recommendations monitor for over a year.