

# **Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee**

## **Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday, 26 May 2021**

### **Present:**

Councillor Reid – in the Chair

Councillors Abdullatif, Sameem Ali, Alijah, Bano, Collins, Hewitson, Lovecy, McHale and Nunney

### **Co-opted Voting Members:**

Ms Z Derraz, 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

Councillor Foley, Ward Councillor for Didsbury East

Dr Henri Giller, Independent Chair, Manchester Safeguarding Partnership (MSP)

Maria Slater, Director of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

### **Apologies:**

Dr W Omara, Parent Governor Representative

## **CYP/21/17 Minutes**

### **Decision**

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 10 March 2021.

## **CYP/21/18 Manchester Safeguarding Partnership (MSP) Annual Report 2019/2020**

The Committee received a report of Dr Henri Giller, Independent Chair of the MSP, which detailed the strategic priorities and what MSP had achieved, reported on its annual assurance activity and what had been learnt from practice reviews undertaken where there was a serious incident.

Dr Henri Giller referred to the main points and themes within the report, which included:

- The Partnership Strategic Priorities and the action taken in relation to these;
- The Assurance Function;
- Learning from Practice Review and Improvement exercises; and
- Scrutinising the new MSP arrangements.

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

- Mental health and suicide prevention;
- Training for Members, including on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and on understanding exploitation;
- The importance of a joined-up approach between adult and children's services, where vulnerable adults were parents; and
- How the experiences of minoritised communities was embedded into the work of MSP.

Dr Giller advised that mental health was a priority area for MSP and that significant improvements had been put in place over the past 12 months to better meet the mental health needs of children and young people, citing the M Thrive and i-Thrive initiatives. He reported that one of the potential strengths of the new safeguarding arrangements was that they brought children's and adults' safeguarding under the same partnership and he advised that representatives of the Children's Executive Group and the Adult Executive Group were meeting together and discussing joint strategies and areas of common interest, such as the transition from children's to adult services and complex safeguarding. He outlined some of the challenges, such as the different legislative basis for children's and adults' safeguarding, the capacity of services to meet needs into adulthood and the level of continuity of support over time but he advised that there was an awareness of these issues and a commitment to working to improve them.

Dr Giller reported that there was an operational infrastructure behind the strategic groups referred to in the report and that this engaged with communities to understand the likely impact of proposals and changes. In response to a Member's question, he assured the Committee that work had taken place to look at the impact of the pandemic on working practices and that this learning would be taken forward.

In response to a question from the Chair, Dr Giller reported that the initial self-evaluation exercise had been intended to raise awareness of changes needed and for work with the organisations on how they could make and embed those changes. He advised that the next self-assessment would be followed by an audit of the changes that organisations had committed themselves to. In response to a further question, he reported that different organisations were subject to different regulatory mechanisms, further assurance structures would be available through the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) and that MSP was keen to explore additional options such as peer reviews.

The Executive Member for Children and Schools advised that he and the Strategic Director of Children and Education Services arranged training for all Councillors each municipal year, covering topics such as corporate parenting responsibilities and safeguarding. He reported that dates would be sent round shortly for this and that, if Members then wanted further training on specific areas, this could be arranged.

## **Decision**

That the Committee will receive regular reports on the work of the Manchester Safeguarding Partnership.

## **CYP/21/19 Impact of COVID-19 on children's services in Manchester, including schools, settings and the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service**

The Committee received a report of the Deputy Director of Children's Services which detailed the impact and consequence management of COVID-19 across the Children's and Education Directorate. The report had a particular focus on the delivery arrangements and performance of children's services. Acknowledging the requirement to view the support to children as a partnership endeavour, the report also provided an update on schools and CAMHS's ongoing response to the pandemic.

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

- Schools update, including school attendance and Ofsted monitoring visits;
- Early Years update;
- Children's Services, including working practices during the pandemic, contacts with Children's Services, performance management and quality assurance;
- Early Help; and
- Managing the impact of COVID-19 on well-being and mental health.

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

- That individual schools were adopting different practices in response to the current situation;
- Reasons for the variations in school attendance levels;
- Concern that lockdown and learning at home had widened the gap between children from more and less advantaged backgrounds;
- The impact of the pandemic on babies' development; and
- How the Council would support schools if the Indian Variant spread within the city.

The Director of Education informed the Committee that all schools had initially completed risk assessments for COVID-19 which had been reviewed by the Council's Health and Safety Team. She advised that, despite recent changes in national guidelines, the Council was still strongly advising schools to keep the measures from their risk assessments in place, although they did not have any powers to enforce this. In response to a Member's question, she outlined some of the support being offered to Early Years settings and through additional activities to assist children with reaching developmental milestones, noting the impact that the pandemic would have had on the development of many young children, not only those who would have otherwise been identified as having Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND). In response to another question, she advised that the strategy for supporting pupils with SEND had remained the same, although there had been a particular focus on school attendance during the pandemic.

The Deputy Director of Children's Services acknowledged the challenges facing new parents during the pandemic, highlighting the information in the report about some of the difficulties they were experiencing. He advised of the importance of providing

socialisation opportunities for children and opening Early Years settings, noting that the city's figures were good for this. He informed Members of a new evidence-based approach to supporting vulnerable people who were new parents or soon to become parents, recognising that having been isolated from support services during the pandemic would have added to their vulnerabilities.

The Executive Member for Children and Schools informed the Committee that, despite the challenges presented by the pandemic, the Council remained ambitious for the city's children. He informed Members about plans for a "Year of the Child" in 2022 and proposed that the Committee receive a report about this at a future meeting.

The Director of Education advised the Committee that school attendance was continuing to improve and was at about 94%. A Member commented that schools having different school holiday dates around Easter would have impacted on attendance levels. The Director of Education advised the Committee that the Council set schools holiday dates based on a set of principles agreed across Greater Manchester but that not all Greater Manchester councils were working to these principles and that this would be looked at again. She also reported that academies and Roman Catholic schools within Manchester did not have to follow the dates set down by the Council. She acknowledged the impact that the pandemic would have had on children's education, noting that pupils in Manchester had been particularly affected due to high infection rates in the city.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Director of Education reported that Ofsted were visiting schools to undertake monitoring visits, focusing on schools which were currently judged as Inadequate or Requires Improvement but would not be carrying out full inspections with new judgements until the autumn term.

The Chair praised the excellent work being carried out through Early Help and Sure Start and suggested that the police be invited to a future meeting, noting the references in the report to domestic abuse.

The Director of Education assured Members that there were already structures in place to support schools in the event of an outbreak of the Indian Variant within the city, due to the situation Manchester had been in in autumn 2020, when infection rates were high. She outlined how different services worked together, the processes in place and the support provided to schools.

## **Decision**

To continue to receive regular update reports.

## **CYP/21/20 Children and Education Services - Overview and Key Issues**

The Strategic Director of Children and Education Services highlighted the Directorate's priorities for the forthcoming year, which were set within the context of the previous year and the impact of the pandemic. He highlighted the impact of the pandemic on children and young people, while recognising the resilience they had demonstrated, in particular the educational gap between more and less fortunate

pupils, the anxiety felt by some young people, the risk of school exclusions as pupils returned to school, the long-term job opportunities for young people and support for children with additional needs. He also referred to the learning opportunities from the ways of working that had been adopted and the way the service has responded during the pandemic. He advised Members that other areas of focus for the forthcoming year were inequality, including the role of climate change, the voice of children and young people, the strengths of the school system, recovering from lost learning, reducing the number of young people Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET), Think Family work in collaboration with the Local Care Organisation, support for children with SEND and the transition of young people to adulthood or adult services. He reported that the Directorate was expecting an Ofsted inspection of its statutory children's services within the next year and was looking at its quality assurance framework, including what was being learnt from auditing activity, how that learning was being taken forward and informing practice and looking at the feedback from children and families. He advised that there would also be a focus on the impact of Troubled families and Early Help and that the service would be contributing to work on family poverty, homeless families and youth violence.

In response to a Member's question, the Strategic Director of Children and Education Services advised that the service had made progress since its last full Ofsted inspection and he proposed that he bring the Directorate's self-assessment of its statutory services to a future meeting. He also recognised the hard work of both Children's Services staff and schools staff during the pandemic. The Chair proposed that the Ofsted Subgroup consider the information in relation to the forthcoming Ofsted inspection. She noted that Members would be having a work programming session at the rise of this meeting where they would discuss further the areas which they wanted to scrutinise over the next year.

### **Decision**

To note the oral report.

### **CYP/21/21 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.

### **Decision**

To note the report.

### **CYP/21/22 Exclusion of Press and Public**

### **Decision**

To exclude the public during consideration of the following item which involved consideration of exempt information relating to the financial or business affairs of

particular persons and public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

### **CYP/21/23 Scrutiny Committees' work on cross-cutting themes of the Our Manchester Strategy**

The Committee considered the report of the Deputy Chief Executive and City Treasurer that provided an overview of how cross-cutting themes in the *Our Manchester Strategy – Forward to 2025* reset document were to be covered by the scrutiny committees during the 2021/22 municipal year.

### **Decision**

To note the report.