

# **Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee**

## **Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday, 8 September 2021**

### **Present:**

Councillor Reid – in the Chair

Councillors Alijah, Bano, Cooley, Foley, Hewitson, McHale, Nunney and Sadler

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

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's Services

Councillor Midgley, Executive Member for Health and Care

Kimberley Evans, Healthy Schools Team, Manchester Foundation Trust (MFT)

Claire McNicholls, Named Nurse (Safeguarding), MFT

Superintendent Rebecca Boyce, Greater Manchester Police (GMP)

### **Apologies:**

Councillor Collins

Ms Z Derraz, Parent Governor Representative

### **CYP/21/37 Minutes**

Councillor Cooley and Dr Omara asked to be added to the list of attendees in the minutes of the meeting held on 21 July 2021, to which the Chair agreed.

### **Decision**

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 21 July 2021, subject to the above amendment.

### **CYP/21/38 COVID-19 Update**

The Committee received a verbal update from the Director of Education which outlined new developments and significant changes to the current situation, particularly in relation to schools.

The main points within the verbal update included:

- That secondary schools and colleges were staggering the start of term to enable pupils to take Lateral Flow Tests on site;
- The key changes in schools for the autumn term, which were that schools were no longer required to keep pupils in groups referred to as "bubbles" to reduce mixing, that close contacts of positive cases would be identified by NHS Test and Trace rather than the school and that face coverings were no

- longer mandatory in secondary schools;
- That all schools, colleges and daycare settings had completed a risk assessment and put in place infection control measures and outbreak management plans;
- That the Council would continue to provide support to schools and monitor the number of positive cases;
- The changes in self-isolation rules for close contacts, emphasising the importance of children displaying even mild symptoms not being sent to school;
- Asymptomatic testing arrangements for pupils in Year 7 and above; and
- The current position on the vaccination of children and young people.

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

- To thank officers for their work during the pandemic;
- Children who were still abroad due to travel restrictions;
- Being prepared to respond to a further spike in cases, taking learning from previous experience;
- The importance of parents and governors supporting the new arrangements;
- Take-up of the vaccine among 16- and 17-year-olds; and
- Examination arrangements for the new academic year.

The Director of Education advised that, as schools were only just re-opening for the autumn term, information on the number of children who were still in countries on the 'red' list or were in quarantine on return from those countries was not yet available and she would provide more information on this at the October meeting. She advised that, due to their previous experience of providing remote learning and working in school under tighter restrictions, schools were much better prepared now than they had been at the start of the pandemic, knew what worked and could quickly set up any arrangements needed if the situation changed. She informed Members that she and the Director of Population Health and Wellbeing had sent a letter to parents and carers via schools which provided them with an update, thanked them for their support so far and asked for their continued support during this new phase. She advised that communications were also being sent to School Governors.

In response to a Member's question about reactions to the Pfizer vaccine, the Executive Member for Health and Care advised that GPs could provide advice on this but that she would liaise with the Public Health Team and respond to the Member. She assured Members that supporting schools and colleges was a key aim of the 12-point action plan for dealing with COVID-19 during the next few months. She advised that work would continue to increase the take-up of vaccines by 16- and 17-year-olds and that this would include communications with young people through a range of platforms and regular pop-up vaccination centres at sixth form colleges.

In response to a question from the Chair about whether some schools were continuing to group pupils in bubbles, the Director of Education advised that some schools had found that some of the measures that they had had to put in place due to COVID-19 had had a positive impact, for example, staggered lunch breaks making the lunch period calmer, and that some schools might choose to retain these;

however, she advised that, even if schools retained some of these arrangements, it was no longer the case that close contacts of a positive case had to self-isolate so there would not be whole groups of children being required to self-isolate as had happened previously. She reported that at the moment the intention was that examinations would go ahead in 2022 and that examination boards might release details to schools of which topics would come up in the examinations so that they knew which areas to focus on.

The Chair requested that the Committee receive a written report next time, including statistical information, and suggested that the Committee receive a written report approximately every three months with verbal updates at the other meetings.

In response to a Member's question about school attendance, the Director of Education advised that she did not yet have last year's national attendance data. The Chair asked that this be provided to the next meeting. A Member emphasised the importance of ensuring that Ofsted inspectors carrying out inspections of Manchester schools were made aware of the disproportionate impact that the pandemic had had on the city.

## **Decision**

To request that the Committee receive a written report at its next meeting, with statistical information, including national school attendance data from 2020/21 and data on children who were still in countries on the 'red' list or in quarantine on return from those countries at the start of the school year.

## **CYP/21/39 Mental Health Services in Schools**

The Committee received a report of the Director of Education which provided an update on wellbeing and mental health and support for schools and settings and education for children unable to attend school due to ill health.

The main points and themes within the report included:

- Mental Health Support Team (M Thrive in Education);
- Elective Home Education (EHE); and
- Section 19 Duty on Local Authorities to provide suitable education for children who, by reason of illness, exclusion from school or otherwise, might not receive education.

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

- Waiting times for Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS);
- Children and young people who had been referred to CAMHS but were not assessed as having met the threshold and the importance of them being signposted to other support;
- That a representative from CAMHS should have attended for this item;
- Concern about rising numbers of children being home educated following lockdown;

- The recent report from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman following their investigation into a complaint against the Council; and
- The important role of school nurses, Early Help and Sure Start.

The Senior Schools Quality Assurance Officer advised that she did not have the CAMHS waiting time figures put could arrange from them to be provided to the Member. She advised that M-Thrive in Education's purpose was to provide the right support at the right time, supporting children and young people in school and outlined the role of the CAMHS practitioners in schools in this work.

In response to a question about suicide prevention, the Senior Schools Quality Assurance Officer outlined work taking place at a Greater Manchester level on self-harm and suicide prevention and offered to provide an update on this work in a future report. The Executive Member for Health and Care advised that the Suicide Prevention Partnership had obtained some funding to provide training on suicide prevention in young people. A Member advised that many young people who had committed suicide had never accessed mental health services and asked that information on universal suicide prevention training in schools be included in a future report. The Senior Schools Quality Assurance Officer highlighted the work of the Healthy Schools Team, which preceded the M Thrive in Education local offer, and which supported schools in identifying and supporting children and young people at risk of suicide. Members discussed some of the factors which could impact on young people's mental health, including social media and peer pressure.

In response to the question about young people who were not assessed as meeting the threshold for CAMHS, the Executive Member for Children's Services advised that the Thrive model aimed to address some of these issues, ensuring that children and young people received appropriate support, whether through CAMHS or through other services, for example, school-based support or support through a voluntary sector organisation. He suggested that the next report on this could focus more on the relationship between the specialist CAMHS service and the wider well-being support for young people. The Senior Schools Quality Assurance Officer highlighted the video made available through the Manchester Safeguarding Partnership which set out the different levels of support available, from universal to targeted to bespoke, although she advised that the Thrive Hubs were not referenced very strongly in this as the offer was still developing at the time the video was produced.

In response to a Member's question about the figures in the report relating to young people using Kooth's online mental health services, Kimberley Evans from the Healthy Schools Team advised that young people could engage with Kooth in different ways, for example, reading the website or accessing online counselling, but that she would contact Kooth to obtain clarity on the figures included in the report.

The Director of Education outlined the details of the case investigated by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman following a complaint about the Council regarding its duty to provide alternative education for a child whose GP had deemed them medically unfit to attend school. She advised that, in response to one of the recommendations, the Council had reviewed what triggered its duty under Section 19 of the Education Act 1996 to make arrangements to provide "suitable education at school, or otherwise than at school, for those children of compulsory school age who,

by reason of illness, exclusion from school or otherwise, may not for any period receive suitable education unless such arrangements are made for them". In response to comments from the Chair about children refusing to go to school, she informed Members about the anxiety and avoidance pathway, advising that in these cases it was usually preferable that this did not trigger Section 19 and that the child maintained links with their school with the aim of them returning to school and she reported that early intervention was important in these situations.

The Senior Schools Quality Assurance Officer advised that the Council's policy on Elective Home Education had recently been reviewed and, although statutory powers were quite limited, the Council asked schools to engage with families who wanted to remove their child from the roll and home educate them and that the policy included engagement with and taking into account the views of the child.

In response to a question from the Chair about support for LGBT young people, Kimberley Evans offered to circulate details of her team's offer to support schools in teaching the relationship, sex and health curriculum, including ensuring that it was inclusive.

## **Decision**

That the Committee will consider this again at a future meeting and that a representative of CAMHS should be present for this.

## **CYP/21/40 Helping and supporting Our Children to lead a safe, healthy, happy life and have a successful future**

The Committee received a presentation of the Deputy Director of Children's Services which outlined work on helping and supporting Our Children to lead a safe, healthy, happy life and have a successful future.

The main points and themes within the presentation included:

- Decision making in practice, focusing on early permanence, family time and the legal gateway process;
- The role and function of the Independent Reviewing service;
- Engagement and participation of children and young people;
- Quality of care planning, including pathway planning;
- Providing stability and permanence for children;
- Risk management with specific focus on the role of the complex safeguarding hub;
- Health data and impacts on children;
- Permanence and placement stability; and
- The virtual school contributing to preventing young people from being Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET).

The Executive Member for Children's Services reported that Ofsted had seen improvements at every visit and suggested that the Ofsted Subgroup could focus on some of the areas identified as needing more work.

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

- The frequency of Our Children seeing their own Social Worker and the impact of the number of agency workers; and
- Access to dentists for Our Children;
- Access to support for families caring for children on Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs); and
- Children placed outside the city boundaries.

The Deputy Director of Children's Services advised that issues with access to dentists had been escalated through the Corporate Parenting Panel and NHS England. The Executive Member for Children's Services advised that the last two meetings of the Corporate Parenting Panel had received data on this and that the more recent set of figures had shown signs of rapid improvement and that this and other health-related issues affecting Our Children would be a priority at the next Corporate Parenting Panel meeting.

The Deputy Director of Children's Services recognised that inconsistency of contact with Social Workers would have a detrimental effect on Our Children but advised that the risk of this was low because the Council's turnover rate for Social Workers was around 11% and the vacancy rate 7% and that the figure for Social Workers seeing the child on their own was 85%. He advised that the risk was mitigated through the permanence planning meetings and looked after children reviews. He reported that the service's reliance on agency workers was less than it had been in 2017 and that he could provide figures on this.

The Deputy Director of Children's Services advised that a support plan was put in place when an SGO was discharged but that he would undertake a deep dive investigation of re-engagement with families when the arrangements were not working out. He informed Members about the Advice, Guidance and Support service that could signpost families experiencing difficulties to support, advising that this was very well used. In response to a request for the Committee to look at this issue further, the Chair advised that this could be something that the Ofsted Subgroup looked at it. In response to a Member's request for information on progress in areas that had previously been judged as 'requires improvement', the Chair advised that the Ofsted Subgroup would be looking at this in detail.

The Deputy Director of Children's Services advised that most children who had been placed outside of the city's boundaries were still placed close to Manchester and, due to the geography of the city, a placement outside of the Council area could sometimes be closer to the area the child was from than a placement in a different part of the city. In response to a further question about reciprocal arrangements where children were placed across local authority boundaries, he advised that he chaired the Greater Manchester Local Authorities Care Leavers Forum which was looking at and escalating this issue. The Executive Member for Children's Services advised that he sat on the Greater Manchester Children's Board and that there was a lot of commitment to making the offer to Our Children and Care Leavers more equal across Greater Manchester and that the disparity sometimes arose because one local authority was leading the way in what it was offering.

The Chair recognised the progress that the Council had made since it was judged as 'inadequate' in 2014. She encouraged more Members to become independent visitors to children's homes under Regulation 44 of the Children's Home (England) Regulations 2015.

## **Decision**

To note the presentation.

### **CYP/21/41 Manchester Complex Safeguarding Hub**

The Committee received a presentation of the Head of Locality and Claire McNicholls, Named Nurse (Safeguarding), which provided Members with an annual report on the Complex Safeguarding Hub for 2020/2021.

The main points and themes within the presentation included:

- Overview of the Complex Safeguarding Hub;
- Partnership arrangements;
- Governance, accountability and assurance arrangements;
- Response to COVID-19;
- Achieving Change Together model (ACT);
- Performance and outcomes;
- Impact; and
- Priorities 2021/2022.

The Chair welcomed the improvement in agencies working together and that a representative from GMP was in attendance.

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

- How well informed were neighbourhood police teams on the criminal exploitation of children and young people and was there sufficient capacity to address this when it was happening in neighbourhoods;
- The early signs of exploitation and how agencies could work together to identify and address issues at an early stage; and
- How Ward Councillors could support this work.

Superintendent Rebecca Boyce from GMP reported that neighbourhood police teams were informed about the Complex Safeguarding Hub and criminal exploitation through briefings and district tasking and co-ordination groups. She advised that it was important to increase the ability of neighbourhood teams to respond to exploitation as the Complex Safeguarding Hub did not have the capacity to be open to every young person where there was a suggestion of exploitation, reporting that there had been some good examples of neighbourhood police teams responding to adult exploitation, such as cuckooing. She advised that there had also been some good joint work between district police teams and the Complex Safeguarding Hub, where the district police team had identified exploitation as part of a police operation.

She outlined some of the ways in which early indications of exploitation were identified through intelligence teams, police district safeguarding teams and engagement officers in schools. The Chair noted that the Committee would be receiving a report on the role of police in schools at a future meeting.

The Head of Locality informed Members that training was provided to schools on child criminal and sexual exploitation. She also advised that Missing From Home Panels provided opportunities to identify signs that a child or young person was being exploited. Claire McNicholls, Named Nurse (Safeguarding), advised that MFT had a robust training programme which included child sexual exploitation (CSE) and that the Trust's Complex Safeguarding Subgroup communicated across the Trust on indicators and themes relating to exploitation. She highlighted that the Trust had recently developed a Complex Safeguarding Policy and the resources it provided. She advised that a short briefing on CSE and Child Criminal Exploitation had also been sent out to staff and that risk indicator checklists had been introduced for CSE and knife crime.

In response to a Member's question, Superintendent Boyce advised that the term child criminal exploitation included county lines but encompassed a broader range of issues.

In response to a Member's question about the data in the presentation on the young people involved in ACT, the Head of Locality advised that this was quite a small cohort so not representative of all young people that the service was working with. Noting that many of the young people involved in ACT were from Hulme, Moss Side, and Rusholme, the Chair advised that she would discuss this with one of the Hulme Ward Councillors.

The Executive Member for Children's Services advised that Ward Councillors and the public had a role in recognising criminal exploitation and that in recent years a number of Councillors had approached him with information on issues within their ward which had been referred to the service and led to concrete outcomes.

In response to a question from the Chair about the impact of lockdown on referrals, the Head of Locality advised that there had been a reduction in referrals at the start of the pandemic as some services were not seeing young people but that this had gradually increased, with more referrals coming from different sources such as British Transport Police and that the service had continued to review young people who were regularly going missing from home. In response to a further question from the Chair about 16 and 17-year-olds who were looked after going missing from home, she informed the Committee that work was taking place with the Children's Society on this and that she could provide further information at a later date.

## **Decision**

To note the presentation.

## **CYP/21/42 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 and agree the work programme.