

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday, 12 January 2022

Present:

Councillor Reid – in the Chair

Councillors Abdullatif, Bano, Benham, Foley, Hewitson, Lovecy, McHale, Nunney and Sadler

Co-opted Voting Members:

Dr W Omara, Parent Governor Representative

Co-opted Non-Voting Members:

Miss S Iltaf, Secondary Sector Teacher Representative

Ms L Smith, Primary Sector Teacher Representative

Also present:

Councillor Bridges, Executive Member for Children's Services

Councillor Rawlins, Executive Member for the Environment

Ruth Todhunter, Manchester resident

Lee Ormsby, Our Lady's RC High School

Kristian Cope, Our Lady's RC High School

Elaine Morrison, Education Consultant

Apologies:

Councillors Alijah and Collins

Mrs J Miles, Representative of the Diocese of Salford

CYP/22/1 Minutes

Decision

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 8 December 2021.

CYP/22/2 Climate Emergency and the Education Sector

The Committee received a report of the Director of Education which outlined the work being undertaken by the Council to support the Education Sector in responding to the Climate Emergency declared by the Council in July 2019, with a focus on decarbonisation. It also outlined the plans to develop this as a theme of Our Year 2022 in response to feedback from children and young people. This would enable children and young people to have their say and contribute to achieving the zero carbon target for the city.

The main points and themes within the report included:

- Planned conference;
- Carbon Literacy Training;
- De-carbonisation;

- Partnership working with the Department for Education (DfE) and Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA);
- Young People's Offer;
- Our Year;
- Green skills;
- Early Years settings; and
- Promoting active travel.

Manchester resident, Ruth Todhunter, addressed the Committee, telling them about her involvement in campaigning for clean air with other local mothers and the British Lung Foundation. She informed Members about the School Streets Initiative, where a road outside a school had a temporary restriction on motorised traffic at school drop-off and pick-up times and the benefits of this for children and young people. She encouraged the Council to work with schools and communities to identify where air quality could be improved to inform interventions and behaviour change. She advised that funding to support School Streets should prioritise those schools most affected by poor air quality. She reported that the British Lung Foundation was offering to meet with the Council to discuss how they could work together to monitor air pollution in the city.

Lee Ormsby and Kristian Cope from Our Lady's RC High School delivered a presentation on their Climate Action Roadmap.

The main points and themes within the presentation included:

- Background information;
- Climate action activities by area;
- Student voice; and
- The steps of the roadmap from emerging to established to being a leading school on combating climate change, which could be a model for others and share its resources and learning.

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

- To welcome the presentation from Our Lady's RC High School and the work they were doing and to ask whether they would be looking to move to using organic food;
- To what extent were other schools undertaking this kind of work, how would the actions taken by other schools be monitored and could Members be kept updated on this work;
- The need for safe walking and cycling routes to schools;
- Request from a Member for an Ardwick school to be included in the Street Schools initiative;
- How was the retrofitting of schools being addressed;
- To welcome the work that the Director of Education and Executive Member for Children's Services had done in this area and to ask that sufficient officer capacity be made available to bring together best practice and progress this work in time for the planned conference;

- The importance of the new Climate Change Officers in each district engaging with schools and of ward-level and community engagement;
- The importance of a joined-up approach and sharing good practice between primary schools, secondary schools and colleges;
- The importance of involving children and young people in this work so that they felt they had agency, noting that this could help to reduce anxiety about climate change;
- What support was there from the Government and Council to support schools with carbon reduction; and
- The poverty faced by many families and that, when they were struggling to provide the basics of food and a warm home for their children, it was difficult to engage with issues such as where food was sourced from.

The Executive Member for Children's Services advised Members that this was a very high priority for the Council and that they were looking to increase capacity to support this work. He welcomed how much schools had been doing on this, despite the additional challenges they had faced due to the pandemic. He reported that every ward had a climate action plan and that schools were central to that and he recommended that Ward Councillors ensure that the link with schools was explicit in their own ward action plans. He advised that he would discuss with the Director of Education how schools' work on climate change would be monitored and then discussions would take place with the Chair about the most appropriate way for the Committee to continue to scrutinise this.

In response to the question about organic food, Kristian Cope advised that organic food was procured for use in food technology lessons but that for school meals it was difficult to buy sufficient volumes of organically produced food to feed nearly 1000 pupils, even before the cost was taken into account.

The Director of Education reported that individual schools were addressing climate change in different ways and that many did not have a single plan like Our Lady's had so this did create challenges in monitoring it. She advised that the Council would work with schools to share good practice and knowledge from schools which had done a lot of positive work on this to schools which had not started addressing this issue. In response to a Member's question, she advised that her service did already work with Neighbourhoods on some work relating to air quality but agreed that there was more to be done on this. She reported that a lot of schools had wanted to take part in the School Streets initiative but that it had to be done in line with Highways legislation and that it was important to evaluate the impact from piloting the scheme in a few locations first. She advised that, in terms of encouraging active travel, her service would focus on behaviour change, while also linking with Neighbourhoods on the local infrastructure. She informed Members that a condition survey would be carried out on all school buildings that the local authority maintained and that this would enable the Council to better prioritise spending on buildings maintenance where it was most needed.

The Executive Member for the Environment advised that some of the reports which were going to the Environment and Climate Change Scrutiny Committee the following day were relevant to this discussion so she would ensure that these were shared with Members of this Committee. She advised that the Council was looking at developing

an improved criteria for how schools involved in the School Streets initiative were selected. In response to a Member's question, she confirmed that the location of planting of trees and hedges was co-ordinated and that this had massively increased. She informed Members how Biffa was engaging with schools, including an offer of an educational programme on waste and recycling, and about the learning centre at the Longley Lane Household Waste and Recycling Centre and she advised that she would ensure this information was re-circulated to schools.

Elaine Morrison, Education Consultant, advised that the Council was sending regular communications to schools about any funding they became aware of to assist with this work and that addressing funding issues would be a focus of the conference. She advised that working with the DfE on pilot projects was also bringing additional funding into the city. She reported that officers were working with local businesses to see if they would be interested in supporting schools on this work. She informed Members how links were being made with the Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise Sector (VCSE) to support this work. She advised that officers were monitoring the geographical spread of schools involved in climate action work so that they could focus on any particular wards where there was a lower uptake.

Decision

To note the report.

CYP/22/3 COVID-19 Update

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

The main points and themes within the verbal update included:

- Temporary changes to the guidance on face coverings in schools;
- Other measures schools were implementing to reduce the spread of COVID-19;
- Lateral flow testing and requirements for those testing positive;
- Support for schools, including the use of Outbreak Meetings;
- School attendance;
- The impact of staff absence; and
- Vaccination of young people.

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

- Support for young people's mental health;
- The impact of staff being able to self-certify as sick for 28 days, data on schools and areas which were worst affected by staff absence and whether any schools had had to close;
- To ask for more data on vaccination levels at next month's meeting; and
- That the Committee should look at the number of children being electively home educated.

The Assistant Director of Education outlined the work that had taken place to improve mental health support to children and young people, through Healthy Schools and Manchester Thrive and training for schools on other ways to access mental health support, advising that this support to schools had been increased during the pandemic. She advised that, as term had only just re-started, data was not yet available on staff absences but that four primary schools had been affected by a partial closure, for example, a particular class doing remote learning but with vulnerable pupils still coming on site.

The Executive Member for Children's Services praised the work of schools and the Council's Education Service during the pandemic, including the prioritisation of vulnerable children and young people.

Decisions

1. To ask for data on vaccination levels for young people in Manchester to be included in the next update.
2. That the Committee should look at the number of children being electively home educated.
3. That a letter should be sent to all schools congratulating them for their work during the pandemic.

CYP/22/4 Year of the Child (Our Year 2022)

The Committee received a report and presentation of the Strategic Director of Children and Education Services which provided an update on Our Year 2022.

The main points and themes within the presentation included:

- The feedback from engagement with children and young people on what was important to them and what Manchester could do better;
- Key themes identified from this;
- Events, activities and campaigns;
- UNICEF Child Friendly City submission; and
- How Members could support this work.

The Executive Member for Children's Services encouraged the Co-opted Members to watch the webcast of the Council meeting on 1 December 2021, at which young people from across Manchester had spoken about the issues that were important to them. He highlighted the last slide of the presentation on how Members could support Our Year and encouraged the Committee Members to get involved. He advised that support was available in doing this and that the Our Year Project Lead could circulate an information pack.

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

- To welcome this work;
- The number of children and young people across different settings who had been engaged through this work and whether they were representative of all children and young people across the city;
- The importance of the voice of children of all ages being heard;
- How Our Year would be promoted, including engagement with parents;
- That many teachers would welcome the opportunity to support this work and that it was important to ensure that this was communicated to them; and
- The lack of work experience placements during the pandemic and what could be done to encourage more organisations to take part, noting that Members might be able to offer work experience or shadowing opportunities.

The Strategic Director of Children and Education Services advised that the communication strategy was being refined and developed and the intention had been to start with a soft launch through a series of events with the website being fully up and running by mid-February. He also highlighted the briefing packs which were being produced. The Chair advised that empty billboards across the city should be used to promote Our Year as well as using social media. The Strategic Director of Children and Education Services emphasised the importance of Our Year not just being about the Council but involving the wider community, with a cultural shift and a legacy of children and young people being involved in the big decisions for their city. He advised that the Executive Member for Children's Services and the Director of Education were engaging with schools regarding Our Year. He outlined how children and young people had been engaged with across school settings, advising that pupils, for example, those who were part of the School Council, spoke on behalf of their peers so the views gathered reflected a wider range of pupils than just those who were directly engaged with. He informed Members that engagement with the business sector as part of Our Year was not just about getting a financial contribution from businesses but about time, accessibility and support, including work experience opportunities. The Chair advised that these issues should be considered as part of the social value element of contracts awarded by the Council. The Strategic Director of Children and Education Services assured Members that social value was being built into this work.

In response to a Member's question, the Our Year Project Lead outlined the work involved in the UNICEF Child Friendly City submission and suggested the Committee could be provided with an update at a later date, including information on how Members could support this. In response to a Member's suggestion about engaging with young people again in a year to assess the impact this work had had, the Our Year Project Lead advised that this would be part of the measures of success for the project.

Decision

To note the report and presentation and endorse and support Manchester submitting an expression of interest to become part of UNICEF's Child Friendly City and Communities programme.

CYP/22/5 The Quality of Practice in Children's Social Care

The Committee received a report and presentation of the Strategic Director of Children and Education Services which reflected the development and current position of the quality of practice being delivered to children and their families in Manchester, with a particular focus on Children's Social Care..

The main points and themes within the presentation included:

- Manchester's children and young people population;
- What was quality of practice and what sources did the service use to assess its quality of practice;
- What was known about the current position; and
- How the service planned to drive continuous improvement and learning.

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

- Whether the better quality of practice and the poorer quality were concentrated in particular service areas;
- How were young people's views and experiences captured and was any negative feedback received;
- The importance of addressing IT issues to enable social workers to work effectively; and
- To note that some issues would be looked at by the Ofsted Subgroup.

The Executive Member for Children's Services informed Members that the IT issues were being addressed, that a lot of progress had been made on this and that Children's Services were receiving top priority within the Council for new devices.

The Strategic Director of Children and Education Services advised that the service did not just rely on the auditing tool to understand where it was at in terms of quality of practice, noting the role that scrutiny played with Members visiting social work teams, asking questions of staff and then using what they had learnt on these visits to effectively question and challenge the service's senior leadership at its meetings. He outlined how areas were identified which would benefit from targeted auditing and observed practice and the work to drive up quality of practice, taking the learning from this into workforce development training. He advised that he would bring a report on Participation and Engagement to a future meeting which would provide additional information on how the views of young people were gathered. The Strategic Lead for Safeguarding and Practice Development outlined some of the ways that young people's feedback was gathered and advised that key issues young people raised were that they did not like being allocated a new social worker, when they had already built a relationship with the existing one, and that they wanted improved transitions to adult social services.

Decision

To note the report.

CYP/22/6 IRO (Independent Reviewing Officer) Annual Report 2020/2021

The Committee received the 2020/2021 Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing (IRO) Service for Cared for Children, which was required in accordance with the Children and Young Person's Act 2008 and subsequent statutory guidance published by the Department for Children Schools and Families in 2010 as set out in the IRO Handbook

The main points and themes within the report included:

- Service and legal context;
- Our Children and Young People data 2019/2020;
- Our Children statutory reviews;
- Participation and engagement;
- Quality assurance;
- Outcomes and impact of the service 2020/2021; and
- Key priorities 2020/2021.

In response to a Member's question about children placed outside the local authority area, the Strategic Director of Children and Education Services reported that the vast majority were placed within Greater Manchester. The Strategic Lead for Safeguarding and Practice Development advised that for most of those children they had been placed there because that was the best way to meet their needs and that the service still took the same responsibility for them as for children placed within the city, although she acknowledged that there were additional barriers to overcome.

Decision

To note the report.

CYP/22/7 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.