

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday, 7 September 2022

Present:

Councillor Reid – in the Chair

Councillors Amin, Bano, Gartside, Hewitson, Lovecy and Sadler

Co-opted Voting Members:

Mr G Cleworth, 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 Early Years, Children and Young People

Apologies:

Councillors Abdullatif, Alijah, Cooley, Johnson and Judge

CYP/22/39 Minutes

Decisions

1. To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 20 July 2022.
2. To receive the minutes of the meeting of the Ofsted Subgroup held on 27 July 2022.

CYP/22/40 Manchester Our Children Sufficiency Strategy

The Committee received a report of the Strategic Director of Children and Education Services which provided the progress of the implementation of the 2020 – 22 Our Children Sufficiency Strategy and shared the new 2022 – 27 Our Children Sufficiency Strategy. It stated that the aim of the 2022 – 27 Strategy would be to continue to embed the developed practice, sustaining and progressing the partnership approach to deliver innovate models of accommodation.

The main points and themes within the report included:

- Background information;
- Main issues; and
- Looking to the future.

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

- To welcome the innovative work taking place;

- The not-for-profit sector;
- The Mockingbird model; and
- That the Council had closed a number of its in-house children's homes and would it need to establish any more.

The Strategic Commissioning Lead reported that in-house foster carers delivered a significant proportion of the provision but that the Council also worked with other providers, including profit and not-for-profit organisations and charitable organisations. She informed Members about work taking place to develop different models, in particular for the post-16 offer, including Staying Close and the House Project, which were enabling young people to move into housing before they were 18, which was taking pressure of the commissioned resource. She advised that decisions on placements were based on the assessed needs of the young person but making the right decisions first time also led to efficiencies. The Strategic Director of Children and Education Services described how the service developed relationships with providers to ensure that they had confidence in each other which meant that they were more likely to provide the range and choice to meet the different needs of individual children and young people and prevent them from moving from placement to placement.

The Strategic Commissioning Lead explained that the Mockingbird model involved a cluster group of foster carers supporting each other with an experienced foster carer, who might not have a child placed with them at the time, as a hub home carer, at the centre. In response to a question from the Chair about the Take a Breath model, she advised that this was for young people who should not be in secure accommodation but who could not currently be found suitable placements in the community because of the level of their needs so models needed to be developed with health partners. The Strategic Director of Children and Education Services advised that this related to young people who did not need to be in hospital but needed a bespoke specialist provision for a presenting need and that, if the correct provision was not put in place, it could lead to a cycle of re-admissions. He advised that a Key Decision would need to be taken in relation to this at a future date and the Committee might receive a further report at that stage.

In relation to the previous decision to close a number of the city's in-house children's homes, the Strategic Director of Children and Education Services advised that this represented a shift towards focusing on children's needs rather than seeing children's homes as the default option. He advised that family-based care was usually best for children. He reported that the number of Looked After Children in Manchester was not increasing but the complexity of need was and that it was more bespoke and specialist provision that was needed, rather than more children's homes.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Strategic Commissioning Lead reported that Ghyll Head was used for short breaks and that the Council was also looking for other locations which could be used.

Decision

To note the report.

CYP/22/41 School Attendance in Manchester

The Committee received a report and presentation of the Director of Education which reviewed school attendance in Manchester in 2021/2022 and summarised Manchester's strategic approach to improve school attendance in 2022/23.

The main points and themes within the presentation included:

- The importance of school attendance;
- The current climate in Manchester in 2021/2022;
- National policy context and new guidance;
- Local context;
- Strategic approach; and
- Next steps.

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

- To welcome the positive attendance data;
- Variation in absence levels across different wards and whether the data was also broken down by age and different communities;
- Children with anxiety about attending school;
- Families where absence was part of a wider picture of family problems which needed to be addressed;
- Whether additional funding was available to tackle persistent absence;
- The cost-of-living crisis and the cost of school uniforms; and
- That childhood illnesses would be increasing now that people were mixing more again.

In response to a Member's question on the extent to which persistent absence was condoned by the parents, the Statutory Lead (Attendance and Exclusions) informed Members that data was not available on this. He highlighted that children could still be off school with COVID-19 and that this was still affecting attendance levels. He advised that attendance data was broken down by sector and by Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) and that work would be taking place over the next year to analyse the data by gender, ethnicity and whether the child had a social worker. He advised that the data was available broken down by school. He outlined some of the help available for children who were missing school due to anxiety, including Early Help, THRIVE Hubs and the anxiety-based school avoidance pathway.

The Director of Education reported that there was a lower percentage of children with SEND and special school pupils returning to school and higher levels of anxiety within this group. She advised that, although her service was pleased with the attendance levels last year, these had still not returned to pre-pandemic levels and that they wanted to get them back to the level that they were before the pandemic. She advised that it was important to use all the resources available to tackle persistent absence, engaging with all the different organisations which had a relationship with the child and their family and working together to get them attending school regularly. She also informed Members that additional funding of just over £1

million a year was being provided by the Department for Education (DfE) for the SAFE Project, to intervene with secondary age children who were at risk of entering the criminal justice system.

The Executive Member for Early Years, Children and Young People stated that he shared Members' concerns about the cost-of-living crisis and the impact on children and families. He advised that the Deputy Executive Member for Early Years, Children and Young People was working with the Education Business Partner on making schools more poverty-proof. He advised that schools had a responsibility to make uniforms available as cheaply and easily accessible as possible and to help families who could not afford them and that an audit was taking place of how well different Manchester schools were doing on this.

In response to a Member's question, the Statutory Lead (Attendance and Exclusions) reported that schools were good at identifying patterns of absence and understanding and working with local communities, for example, having their inset days on dates of religious festivals. He advised that the additional breakdown of data which would be available next year would also assist with identifying patterns. The Director of Education informed Members that targeted meetings between her service and individual schools provided the opportunity to look at the data, identify patterns of absence and challenge schools on their response. The Senior Schools Quality Assurance Officer outlined how her service worked with schools to improve attendance, reduce persistent absence and provide early intervention for the most vulnerable pupils, including access to wider services.

The Chair expressed concern about absence rates for children with SEND and Looked After Children. She also highlighted that some children had not returned to school after the pandemic, with families opting for Elective Home Education. She expressed concern about homeless families being placed a long distance from their children's school and the impact of this on school attendance. She outlined some of the ways that families could be supported, for example, through Sure Start, and stated that billboards could be used to advise families how to access support. She noted that the Committee periodically received reports on school exclusions.

Decision

To request that a breakdown of attendance data by school be circulated to Members of the Committee.

CYP/22/42 Information and Update on Schools White Paper

The Committee received a report and presentation of the Director of Education which summarised the content of the Government's White Paper on Schools titled 'Opportunity for all: Strong schools with great teachers for your child' which was published in April 2022. It included contextual information on Manchester's current school system and set out the opportunities and challenges presented by these changes, a proposed approach and next steps to implementation.

The main points and themes within the report and presentation included:

- The strategy set out in the White Paper which included:
 - Teachers;
 - Standards;
 - Targeted support; and
 - The school system;
- The Manchester context, the approach to implementation and challenges for the city; and
- Next steps.

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

- Concern that there would be a loss of accountability and whether the Council would be able to ensure that the Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) shared its vision, values and priorities;
- Concern about the timescale for these changes;
- Whether assets used by the community would still be available for use post-academisation; and
- Would teachers be involved in the discussions about how schools moved to MATs.

The Assistant Director of Education reported that Manchester schools could be run by smaller MATs which were already operating and working well within Manchester, rather than national chains, and that the Council would be having discussions with those MATs. She advised that decisions around academisation would be made by the governing body but that staff would be consulted as part of the TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings – Protection of Employment) process and that there was staff representation on governing bodies. She advised that the Council would be working with schools to help them identify which MAT was best for them, based on the school's needs.

The Director of Education advised Members that she believed that Manchester schools and MATs would continue to support the Council's vision, values and priorities and that the Council would continue to work with them on priorities for the city, such as climate change and community use of facilities. She reported that the Council had a good relationship with the schools in the city and that the MATs currently operating in the city had engaged positively with them.

The Strategic Director of Children and Education Services highlighted that 40% of Manchester schools were already academies, that the Council was already working with all of its schools and that the Council would try to shape and influence how these changes were implemented to the best of its ability.

The Chair expressed serious concern about the proposals in the White Paper, including the future role of the Council and its education staff and that she felt the education system was being privatised. She advised that Councillors should lobby government about these changes and that Members would be discussing this further outside of this meeting.

Decision

To note the report.

CYP/22/43 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.

Decisions

1. To note the report and agree the work programme.
2. To add Councillor Bano to the membership of the Ofsted Subgroup