

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday, 11 January 2023

Present:

Councillor Reid – in the Chair

Councillors Abdullatif, Bano, Gartside, Hewitson, Johnson, Judge, Lovecy, Sadler and Sharif Mahamed

Co-opted Voting Members:

Canon S Mapledoram, Representative of the Diocese of Manchester

Mr G Cleworth, Parent Governor Representative

Also present:

Councillor Bridges, Executive Member for Children Services

Councillor Bell, Ward Councillor for Moss Side

Apologies:

Councillor Alijah

Miss S Iltaf, Secondary Sector Teacher Representative

Ms L Smith, Primary Sector Teacher Representative

CYP/23/1 Minutes

Decisions

1. To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2022.
2. To receive the minutes of the meeting of the Ofsted Subgroup held on 23 November 2022.

CYP/23/2 Ofsted Improvement Plan

The Committee considered the presentation of the Deputy Strategic Director of Children's Services which provided an update on progress in response to the Ofsted Inspection of Local Authorities Children's Services (ILACS) of Manchester's Children's Services.

Key points and themes in the presentation included:

- The findings from Ofsted's inspection which took place in March and April 2022;
- The Council's Ofsted Improvement Plan and how improvements were being made; and
- What had been achieved so far.

The Executive Member for Children's Services reported that, while welcoming that Manchester's Children's Services had been judged as "good" by Ofsted, the Council was not complacent and was committed to continuing to improve.

The Chair explained the history and context of this item for the benefit of new Members of the Committee and offered to meet with new Members if they wished to discuss this further. She recommended that the Committee carry out further visits to frontline Social Work teams to ensure that Members knew what was going on in practice, rather than relying too much on what they were told in Committee meetings. This suggestion was supported by other Members.

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

- To welcome the work taking place;
- Social Workers' caseloads;
- Workforce issues, including recruitment and retention of Social Workers, sickness levels, the use of agency workers and the diversity of the workforce;
- Training for Social Workers, in particular on domestic abuse, and how the success of training was assessed; and
- How to build trust with families.

The Deputy Strategic Director of Children's Services reported that there was a national debate about how pre-qualifying training prepared Social Workers for their role, including in relation to dealing with cases involving domestic abuse. He reported that the Council used the Safe and Together model, which was a well-evidence-based approach to working with people who had experienced domestic abuse, and brought in high-quality trainers from the Safe and Together Institute to deliver training to its Social Workers. He reported that the Council's policies and procedures, peer support and the quality of supervision they received also assisted Newly Qualified Social Workers in addressing their learning needs. He advised that the quality of training was assessed through the outcomes for children and families. He reported that the Council had a target of an average caseload of 18 for Social Workers and 16 for Newly Qualified Social Workers and that over the last 18 months caseloads had been lower than that and that these figures compared well nationally, and particularly to other Greater Manchester authorities.

The Deputy Strategic Director of Children's Services advised that lower caseloads, training and improving competence levels, including cultural competence, helped Social Workers to build trust with families. In response to a question about training on cultural competence, he informed Members about the development of a cultural competency toolkit, the Let's Talk About Race course, which he reported had received positive feedback, the role of reflective supervision and how the diversity of the workforce could help to improve Social Workers' insight into this area. He reported that recruitment and retention had improved, although recruitment was an area which they were constantly working to address. The Strategic Director (Children and Education Services) provided the Committee with workforce data, including stating that the vacancy rate for Social Workers was 12% and there was a turnover of around 18%, which represented an improvement.

In response to a Member's question, the Deputy Strategic Director of Children's Services outlined the early intervention service which had been commissioned to support families with disabled children and prevent an escalation of needs. In response to questions from the Chair, he described the audit process for examining the quality of practice in relation to individual disabled children and their families and outlined how the process for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) had improved. The Chair expressed concern at the financial pressures affecting the families of disabled children and the funding challenges facing the Council services and schools which supported them.

The Executive Member for Children's Services suggested that the Committee receive a specific report on the Children's Social Work workforce at a future meeting to provide the information which Members had requested, to which the Chair agreed.

In response to comments from the Chair, the Deputy Strategic Director of Children's Services outlined the improvements that the introduction of the Liquid Logic IT system had brought and how the service had invested in wifi and improving office accommodation. In response to a question from the Chair, he reported that Social Workers had weekly protected learning time, usually for two hours, and that staff could have additional protected learning time, depending on business needs.

Decisions

1. To recommend that the Committee visit frontline Social Work services.
2. To receive a report on the Children's Social Work workforce at a future meeting.

CYP/23/3 Our Year 2022

The Committee considered the report and presentation of the Strategic Director (Children and Education Services) which provided an overview of Our Year and looked at the next steps to take this work forward.

Key points and themes in the presentation included:

- Our Year themes;
- Highlights of the year;
- Feedback from children and young people;
- Achievements from Our Year; and
- Work towards becoming a UNICEF UK Child Friendly City.

The Executive Member for Children's Services informed Members about the celebration event on 31 January and extended the invitation to this to the Co-opted Members.

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

- To welcome the work which had taken place as part of Our Year and thank all those involved;
- The priority that children and young people placed on protecting the environment;
- Noting that, as part of the work towards becoming a UNICEF UK Child Friendly City, Manchester had to focus on three mandatory “badges” (priority areas) and could choose three others that it would focus on, how would these other three be chosen;
- To request that Ward Councillors be informed of how they could support this work;
- Were there any areas of the city where fewer activities had happened in 2022 and which would be given more focus going forward; and
- How best to communicate with young people about activities they could participate in.

The Executive Member for Children’s Services confirmed that the environment had been a strong theme emerging from every engagement with children and young people. He stated that a young people-led Bee Green conference had been held which had informed the Education Climate Action Plan, which the Committee had received a report on and had asked for an update on at a future meeting. He reported that children and young people wanted action to be taken, not just to talk about climate change, and the Council had provided funding for posts to help to achieve this. He advised that the environment had also been considered in all the events that had taken place as part of Our Year, making events as carbon neutral as possible. He advised that there had been a lot of learning from 2022 on how best to communicate and publicise activities using a range of methods.

The Our Year Project Lead advised that the decision on which three additional badges to focus on would be made through analysis of the school engagement exercises, looking at baseline data, feedback from surveys and a discovery day in the spring where young people would sit down with key decision makers to determine which badges were most important.

The Strategic Director (Children and Education Services) reported that consideration was being given to children’s rights training, which might involve Committee Members or the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Group, and that the Executive Member for Children’s Services was leading on a piece of work looking at how young people’s voices could be incorporated into Council decision-making. The Executive Member for Children’s Services provided further information on what was being considered in relation to this and advised that the Committee would be provided with an update on this at a future meeting.

In response to a question about schools becoming Rights Respecting Schools, the Strategic Director (Children and Education Services) suggested that Members who were governors raise this at their governors’ meetings and reported that this was a priority for the Children’s Board who would be looking at how they could support schools which wanted to become Rights Respecting Schools.

The Chair shared her experiences of carrying out engagement with children and young people as part of Our Year. She emphasised the importance of targeting

activities in deprived areas, promoting the Holiday Activity Fund (HAF) and providing activities in young people's own area, rather than expecting them to cross borders. She also emphasised the importance of play activities and early years. She praised the Baby Week which had taken place but advised that more of this type of activity was needed. She advised that safety was a key issue for children and young people and that the Committee should look at road safety around schools. She emphasised the importance of using social value for the benefit of young people.

The Executive Member for Children's Services reported that the Council had put extra funding in to the HAF schemes to cover half-terms. He reported that applications for youth and play activities tended to be lower in the north of the city so the Council was working to address this, encouraging more applications and building capacity to deliver activities in north Manchester. In response to the Chair's comments on younger children, he informed the Committee about the Kickstart programme as part of the work as a Marmot city region and advised that further information on this would be provided in a future report.

Decision

To consider a report on road safety around schools at a future meeting.

CYP/23/4 School Governance Update

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Education which outlined the support and future planned developments that the Council would provide to assist with fostering effective school governance across the city.

Key points and themes in the report included:

- Governor recruitment;
- Governor support and resources; and
- School quality assurance.

The School Governance Lead expressed her thanks to all school governors across the city for their work.

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

- That the Council should periodically write to school governors to thank them for their work;
- Increasing the diversity of school governors, noting that most recruitment of school governors was via recommendations from people known to the current governors, which was likely to limit diversity, that some people would need more support to become a governor and that it was important to think more widely about who could become a governor;
- Improving recruitment methods, noting that it was important to communicate what a governor's role was, the benefits for the individual and that governors could choose the degree to which they were involved; and
- Mentoring and training for school governors.

The School Governance Lead reported that the Council did try to thank school governors in the city; however, she advised that it did not hold the contact details for all governors, which made this more challenging, and the message might not be passed on to all governors and she would take on board the Member's comments. She informed the Committee that a session had recently taken place on diversity in governance which had included consideration of different methods of recruitment. She informed Members about the methods the Council used to encourage people to consider becoming a governor or to find out more about what the role involved. She welcomed the comments that Members had made in relation to recruiting governors and said that these reflected issues that were currently being discussed. In response to a Member's question, she confirmed that people who were retiring were approached about becoming governors.

The School Governance Lead reported that the Council recommended that schools provide mentors to new governors and that she was currently asking Chairs of Governors across the city if they would be willing to mentor new Chairs. In relation to training, she stated that she encouraged governors to join the National Governors Association, which had a suite of e-learning modules, and that schools could also commission their own training. She advised that she visited schools which required additional support on governance, where this need had been identified through the Schools Quality Assurance process. In response to a Member's question, she advised that she could provide the Member with details of the process for becoming a school governor but that this varied depending on the type of governor and the type of school. The Director of Education informed Members that another route to recruiting governors was through large employers, including the Council and the University of Manchester.

Councillor Bell, Ward Councillor for Moss Side, suggested that officers recruit governors through the Civic Leadership programme and offered to speak with the School Governance Lead about this outside of the meeting. The Chair suggested that the School Governance Lead also speak to Canon Susie Mapledoram, the new Co-opted Member representing the Diocese of Manchester, who stated that they had recently invested a lot of time in training and supporting the governors of Church of England schools.

The Chair emphasised the important role of Parent Governors to hold school leaders to account. She commented that Teachers TV had provided a good source of information for governors but was no longer produced. She requested that Members be provided with data on governor vacancies by ward.

Decision

To request that Members be provided with data on governor vacancies by ward.

CYP/23/5 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 appoint Councillor Hewitson to the Ofsted Subgroup.