

**Manchester City Council
Report for Information**

Report to: Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee – 8 January 2020

Subject: Delivering the Our Manchester Strategy

Report of: The Executive Member for Children and Schools

Summary

This report provides an overview of work undertaken and progress towards the delivery of the Council's priorities as set out in the Our Manchester Strategy for those areas within the portfolio of the Executive Member for Children and Schools.

Recommendations

The Committee is asked to note and comment on the report.

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Introduction

The overarching ambition for all of our young people is that they are safe, happy, healthy and successful and that the Council and our partners are working together to support families and young people to have the best start possible. In the Manchester Labour Manifesto, we made commitments to invest in our young people, including building a new home for our leaving care service, supporting more young people to be included in education, enhance our early years offer and to support our social workers in the work they do.

The last 6 months have seen considerable progress against the political priorities that I set out in May. I have outlined some of the key priorities and the progress made and the focus for the next 6 months.

Leaving Care Service

Doing the best we can for the young people leaving our care is a priority for me and for our Council. Over the last few years we have made our support for our young people clear- we have ended intentional homelessness for our young people, introduced council tax exemption until the age of 25 and worked as part of Greater Manchester to extend free travel.

As referred to in my report to July CYP Scrutiny, there has been significant progress in the Leaving Care Service since the decision to bring it back “in house.” Since then the Leaving Care Service has received findings from Havering following a Peer Review which has been brought to the Committee. The service was also the focus of a thematic Corporate Parenting Panel which reported on progress, with the ability to scrutinise performance and strategic direction.

As part of our commitment to the new leaving care service, we have approved investment of up to £1.2million in a new base for the service. Young people were asked to come up with a name and the new home for Leaving Care will be known as the Bee Hive which will open early in 2020. Scrutiny members will be invited to a formal launch. This will be a fit for purpose centre with on site accommodation options and trainer flats. There have been a range of projects to support our young people with employment, mentoring, finance and banking, accommodation and clothing events run in partnership with Prince’s Trust.

In my previous update I referred to joint work with Cllr Sue Murphy and Cllr Suzanne Richards on accommodation and preventing homelessness in our youth population. As part of this I attend a Homelessness subgroup of Executive Members and Officers and we agreed that 16-18 year old preventing and supporting homelessness will now be brought back “in house,” and joined up with the management of the leaving care service to get better outcomes for our young people.

The choices we have made over the last few years have transformed our offer for young people leaving our care and the service is constantly improving under its new management.

Inclusion Strategy

The Inclusion Strategy and promoting inclusive education is one of my top political priorities and a key part of the Manchester Labour Manifesto. We want to make sure that all children are encouraged to thrive and that we are engaging and supporting young people and their families at the earliest opportunity.

The strategy was formally launched in November with over 350 partners, front line workers and parents attending. The launch was very successful with stalls promoting good practice and speakers talking about the principles behind the strategy. Since the launch we have had 2 Inclusion Strategy steering group meetings and have planned our activity for this academic year to make sure that there is progress on all strands of the strategy. There has been broad buy in to the strategy from all partners and it complements other work such as Adverse Childhood Experiences and the changes to Thrive model of children's mental health.

Further information will be presented to this committee about progress against the implementation plan.

SEND

In July's update I referred to plans to expand SEND provision in the city and I have continued to work on this - meeting with project teams and local members to make sure that provision is right and that we create the best learning environments for our young people. I have prioritised visiting our specialist schools and seeing the work they are doing and hearing about their priorities and challenges. I have been extremely impressed by changes that have been made in our specialist schools and way that they support our young people and are aspirational about their education.

I have met with the teams responsible for statutory assessments and reviews who face big challenges because of the increase in numbers of young people needing assessments. I continue to speak to the Director of Education about the need to improve the timeliness of our assessments and for extra capacity in that team to make sure that young people get the support they need as quickly as possible.

Work on transition to adulthood for young people has been another key priority and I have worked with Cllr Craig and the Adults team to improve our processes and expectations for transitions. I recently attended Audit Committee which was able to see significant progress on an issue which has been a long standing concern and I would envisage a more detailed update coming back to this committee.

Early Years

Getting our Early Years support right is the best way to make sure that young people get the best start in life. This was a key part of Manchester Labour's manifesto at the last local election. Work has begun on updating our Early Years offer with support right from conception, linking up with the NHS and with schools to get our children healthier and arrive at school ready to learn - with increased take up of health checks, especially in the areas of the city with the highest levels of child poverty.

I have visited Early Years settings and seen the brilliant work they do supporting young people and the way that they support whole families and identify additional support needs. Because of pressure in the sector many settings and providers are finding it difficult and we have seen instability in our settings. I have worked closely with officers to support individual settings where they encounter problems and on proposals for a more sustainable model of tendered daycare in Council buildings.

We recently had a peer review of our Early Years services which was very positive and highlighted lots of strengths across the city as well as areas for improvement. Many of these fit with the plans for closer partnership working which are being worked on.

Budget and staffing

We have faced huge challenges as a Council due to the level of cuts we have faced. This has left us with a very pressured Children's Services budget at a time when our school age population continues to grow. These choices made by central Government make our task much more difficult and potentially limit our ambitions.

I am clear that we need to continue to fund our early help and early intervention services as much as possible. This is a challenge given the increase in costs for children and families with the most complex needs.

Over the last 6 months I have worked closely with Cllr Ollerhead and officers in Children's and the City Treasurer to make sure that our Children's Services budget is sustainable and continues to support young people and their families.

One big challenge we face are the high costs of placements for young people in the private market. In order to make sure that we have better control over the costs and ensure we are getting the best support for our young people we are proposing jointly commissioning residential provision with health colleagues and creating a new commissioning post to allow us to better shape the market we operate in.

It is really important to me that we value our staff. I continue to undertake visits to speak to staff about their work and their challenges. Whilst caseloads continue to be acceptable in the average there is variation and increasingly complex work. In order to make sure that we keep our staff and value their increased experience as they stay with the Council, we are going to bring forward plans to improve our offer to keep staff with us.

Over the past few years we have seen many changes in Children's Social work with lots of programmes and initiatives. Most recently we have seen changes to the point of contact to Children's social work and changes to the IT system used by workers as well as expansion of our Edge of Care offer through No Wrong Door and Complex Safeguarding Hub through Achieving Change Together. It continues to be important that we embed and develop initiatives already introduced and that we continue to track the impact that they are having on our families and young people.

We recently had an Ofsted focus visit which commented on the positive initiatives we had introduced, and that they had been introduced thoughtfully and taken up well by

staff. They were particularly complimentary about the take up of Liquid Logic and how staff have adapted to the system quickly.

Poverty and homelessness

I referred above to the group of Executive Members and officers who are now meeting regularly to look at the challenge homelessness presents to families in our city. The number of families with children who face homelessness is rising and the impact on those families can be serious and long term. I will continue to work with my colleagues to try to make sure that we are doing all we can to coordinate the support families receive in a better way when they face these very difficult circumstances.

Complex safeguarding

Serious youth violence remains a concern for our city and young people themselves told us that this is their number one priority through the results of the “make your mark” ballot. We also know that too many young people continue to be at risk of exploitation through organised criminals. I have worked with Cllr Nigel Murphy and officers from the Community Safety Partnership to get together with national programme leaders to look at whether our complex safeguarding response can be governed in a more coordinated way with the work being undertaken through the Community Safety Partnership.

Protecting children from sexual exploitation and criminal exploitation remain a top priority and the work of the complex safeguarding hub is having an impact. There have been significant successes including prosecutions and disruption activity and the judiciary and Ofsted have commented on the innovative work being undertaken there. Regular updates about the Complex Safeguarding Hub have been to this committee and will continue to do so given how important this work is.

Young carers

Prior to becoming an Executive Member, I was the Council’s Carers Champion and I was keen to make sure that our Young Carers Strategy was refreshed and fully implemented. I worked with Young Carers who told us that they wanted us to focus on the support they receive in schools. Since the appointment of a young carers coordinator there has been a renewed momentum, with lots of work with schools and more and more schools are setting up groups and creating champions for young carers. Our Young Carers Steering Group has met monthly over the last year and looked at ways that different departments and partners can work together more effectively to identify young carers and make sure their needs are met.

The Young Carer Coordinator and I nominated the Young Carers from the steering Group for a Be Proud Award to recognise their contribution to the work and we were pleased that they won at the award ceremony last year.

Climate Change

Since my last update, the Council has declared a climate emergency. In order to make sure we are doing all we can to reduce our impact on the environment and

mitigate the impacts, all Executive Members need to show leadership in their portfolios. Since the climate emergency was passed, I have had several meetings with senior officers who have begun updating me on the action being taken. I relayed some of this work to full Council last year. All schools have been written to to produce key asks of the Council and key pledges for action. This is being followed up with the climate agency and schools to give clear guidance on changes which can have the biggest impact.

Young people themselves are powerful agitators for change and I met with a group of primary schools across the city as part of a campaign to coincide with the anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. I am also working closely with Cllr Stogia and Cllr Rahman on a Youth Summit to bring together young people to focus on action we can all undertake.

Conclusion

Since July's update there has been consistent progress on the issues which I identified as political priorities. The Leaving Care Service continues to go from strength to strength and is becoming a real asset to the city. A new permanent base should accelerate this progress. The inclusion strategy has been formally launched with widespread enthusiasm and has a clear plan for implementation and delivery. This work on inclusion fits with our work supporting young carers and young people with additional needs. As committee has seen previously it has already started showing signs of results and Manchester is gaining a reputation for our commitment to inclusion.

Despite this progress, families in Manchester have continued to face enormous pressures as a result of rising poverty and continued austerity. I will continue to prioritise effective joint working in the face of complex problems like family poverty, homelessness and youth violence over the coming 6 months.

The next 6 months will also see firmer plans brought forward for how we can work more closely with our partners including health, to lead to the best outcomes for our children with the most complex needs and how our Early Years support can be more seamlessly integrated with the support families receive from health services. This closer working has the potential to get families the right support much sooner.

The refresh of our Children's Plan and our Corporate Parenting Strategy over the coming months gives us an opportunity to make sure that we are pushing ourselves to be the best we can for young people and their families and to reflect our increased ambitions.