

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 7 October 2020

This Scrutiny meeting was conducted via Zoom, in accordance with the provisions of the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020.

Present:

Councillor Stone – in the Chair
Councillors Sameem Ali, Alijah, Cooley, Hewitson, Kilpatrick, Lovecy, Madeleine Monaghan, Reeves, Reid and Wilson

Co-opted Voting Members:

Ms S Barnwell, Parent Governor Representative

Co-opted Non Voting Members:

Mr L Duffy, Secondary Sector Teacher Representative
Ms J Fleet, Primary Sector Teacher Representative

Also present:

Councillor Bridges, Executive Member for Children and Schools
Jordan Navarro, Manchester Parent Carer Forum

Apologies:

Councillors T Judge and McHale

CYP/20/36 Minutes

Decision

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 9 September 2020.

CYP/20/37 Update on Opening of Schools and Colleges For All Children and Young People

The Committee received a report of the Director of Education which provided an update on the full reopening of schools for all pupils in September and the current challenges faced by schools. It provided an overview of the work that had taken place in Manchester to support school leaders at this time. The report also noted that, through the learning and education system, children were informed about and understood environmental issues and the negative impact of carbon; promoting safe and healthy lives.

Officers referred to the main points and themes within the report, which included:

- Attendance;
- Infection control;

- Workforce and wellbeing;
- Newly Qualified teachers (NQTs);
- Remote learning;
- Post-16; and
- Our Children (Looked After Children) and the Virtual School.

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

- To thank schools staff for all their work in re-opening schools to all pupils;
- To recognise the support that the Council's Education Service was providing to schools;
- The additional challenges and pressures on school staff, including head teachers and senior leadership teams, and how their mental wellbeing could be supported;
- That schools were taking different approaches to the 'bubbles' of pupils who were in contact with each other and what was being learnt about what was and was not working in terms of infection control;
- Remote learning, including how this was being monitored and evaluated, and noting that some children did not have their own laptop and did not have access to a reliable internet connection;
- The increase in families deciding to home educate their children and how much of this was due to fears over sending their children to school during a pandemic;
- The availability of tests for COVID-19; and
- The impact on pupils in Year 11 and Year 13 who were due to take examinations in the summer of 2021.

The Director of Education reported that more was being learnt about how to reduce infection risk and what worked well and that best practice was being shared regularly with all Manchester schools. She advised the Committee that the Council's Health and Safety Team was working with her service and schools to reduce the risk. She reported that the more information schools held, for example, on children's playtimes and where they had sat for lunch, the more schools could narrow down who had been in close contact with an infected pupil, therefore, reducing the number of pupils who needed to self-isolate.

The Director of Education informed Members about the new statutory duty for local authorities to monitor and evaluate remote learning and outlined how her service was doing this through visits to schools by independent Quality Assurance professionals. She advised Members that a number of options were being looked at to help pupils who did not have access to wifi, such as dongles and providing paper copies of materials.

The Director of Education advised Members that, during lockdown, some families had found that having their children learning at home worked well for them but that some of the requests to home educate did stem from anxiety about sending children back to school. She outlined the approaches being taken, stating that many parents were ringing the Council's attendance helpline to talk through the situation and their

options. She advised Members that conversations were also taking place between the school and the family, ensuring that they understood the full implications of home education, such as losing their child's school place, and looking for solutions, which in some cases, particularly in special schools, could include some remote learning. The Executive Member for Children and Schools praised the work of the Council's Attendance Team in advising parents who were anxious about sending their children back to school.

The Director of Education informed Members that all schools which were members of the Manchester Schools Alliance (MSA) could access an Employee Assistance Scheme, including counselling and other mental health support, for free and that the MSA and her service were looking at how to promote this more; however, she reported that a few schools were not members of the MSA and discussions were taking place about how to ensure these schools were providing appropriate support to staff.

The Director of Education informed the Committee that every school had been sent ten COVID-19 testing kits which they could use where there was difficulty in accessing tests through the normal channels and that these could be re-ordered through the Department for Education (DfE) as necessary. She advised Members that she shared their concerns about the impact of the pandemic on Year 11 and Year 13 pupils, noting that in areas such as Manchester where infection rates were higher, pupils were more likely to have to spend part of the academic year isolating at home but would be compared and competing with other pupils nationally who had been less affected. She commented that even good quality remote learning was not the same as being at school and that some children faced additional challenges, such as not having a quiet space at home where they could study. She informed Members that she would be raising this with Ofqual and through other forums.

Decision

To agree that future updates will focus on school attendance data and any new developments or significant changes to the current situation.

[Councillor Alijah declared a personal interest as a deliverer of initial teacher training.]

CYP/20/38 Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Update and the Response to COVID-19

The Committee received a report of the Director of Education which detailed the actions taken by the Council, health services and education settings to support children and young people with SEND and their families during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Officers referred to the main points and themes within the report, which included:

- Changes in Government legislation in relation to children with SEND;
- Participation and co-production with parents/carers;
- Young people's experiences, views and engagement;
- The Local Offer and the Information Advisory Service;

- Multi-agency working and joint commissioning;
- Quality and impact of Education, Health and Care assessments and plans;
- Elective Home Education;
- Inclusion;
- The continuum of provision in Manchester;
- Transition Planning Team;
- Short breaks and personal budgets;
- Workforce development; and
- Regional networking.

Jordan Navarro, Chair of Manchester Parent Carer Forum explained the role of the Forum. He informed the Committee that Forum members were all parents or carers of children with SEND so other parents felt able to approach them and they were able to represent the views of this group in meetings with the Council. He reported that the Forum had always had a good relationship with the Council's SEND Team and that, during the pandemic, this had strengthened further and they had also developed relationships with other Council teams which had had a positive impact.

Jordan Navarro highlighted that some children with SEND found it difficult to attend a COVID-19 testing centre (for example, autistic children who found the number of people and the queuing difficult) but families had sometimes struggled to access home testing kits. He reported that the Forum had carried out a survey on COVID-19 testing centres and children with SEND, the results of which he would share with the SEND Team.

The Head of School Quality Assurance and Strategic SEND informed the Committee that nurses had visited the homes of children with complex SEND to carry out COVID-19 tests and that this had worked well. She reported that her service had communicated to the DfE the success of this approach and the challenges being experienced by some families in getting their children with SEND tested. Schools, including special schools, were also now able to provide home testing kits to families where necessary. She acknowledged that this has been a challenging area, although there had been some improvements and she welcomed the opportunity to see the results of the survey Mr Navarro referred to and hearing any suggestions from parents of children with SEND on how this could be improved.

In response to a Member's question on how children with autism were affected by the changes in how schools were operating, the Head of School Quality Assurance and Strategic SEND reported that so far it seemed that the increased structure and calmer atmosphere, for example, around lunchtime and in school corridors was beneficial for children with autism. She highlighted that the number of exclusions since pupils had returned to school was lower than in previous years.

In response to a Member's question about Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), the Head of School Quality Assurance and Strategic SEND advised Members that, although the timescales for completing these had been relaxed during the pandemic, the Council had still aimed to complete them within 20 weeks. She reported that, although many families were still waiting longer than this at present, changes had been implemented to improve the timeliness and quality of the plans, new staff had been recruited and progress was already being made. A Member

welcomed the changes being made, including engaging with parents at an earlier stage in the process.

The Chair thanked everyone who had been involved in supporting children and young people with SEND during the pandemic.

Decision

To note the report and that the Committee would continue to monitor support for children and young people with SEND.

CYP/20/39 Responding to the Needs of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

The Committee received a presentation from Children's Services which provided information on responding to the needs of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC).

Officers delivered the presentation which referred to:

- Presenting issues;
- Increasing demand in related areas;
- Manchester's multi-agency offer;
- Education and attainment outcomes;
- The Council's pledge to Our Children and Young People (Looked After Children and Care Leavers) affected by Brexit immigration changes;
- Partnership working; and
- Case studies.

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

- Concern that local Ward Councillors had not been informed about asylum seekers housed in a hotel in their area, noting that Ward Councillors could provide help to these people;
- Concern that an application for settled status had been refused because the child had a criminal conviction;
- Educational attainment of UASC;
- Trafficking of children; and
- Age assessments of asylum seekers.

The Chair requested that Members be provided with a briefing note about the hotel which was accommodating asylum seekers.

The Executive Member for Children and Schools praised the Council's work in this area and the commitment of staff. He reported that the Immigration Aid Unit had praised the Council's work in relation to the pledge and young people affected by Brexit immigration issues. He advised Members that, although the pandemic had affected people's ability to provide documents and secure their status, the government had not allowed for this by changing their deadline for settlement

schemes. He suggested that the Committee might want to look at this issue as the deadline approached next year.

The Service Lead informed Members that trying to keep children within Manchester, living with Manchester-based foster carers, led to the best results, partly because of the role of Manchester's Virtual School in supporting Our Children. She reported that the children were assessed before they started school so that they were placed in the right ability group and support was provided for any special needs. She informed the Committee that, of the UASC leaving care, around 86% were in Education, Employment or Training. She reported that her service was mindful that some children might be trafficked into the country or vulnerable to modern day slavery, that she was a member of the multi-agency Modern Day Slavery Partnership Group working to address these issues and that staff in her service received training on modern day slavery. She advised Members that her service had a robust, legally sound process in place for age assessments, noting that adults could try to present as children but also that children could attempt to present as adults.

The Chair thanked officers for the presentation and their work.

Decision

To request that Members be provided with a briefing note about the hotel which is accommodating asylum seekers.

CYP/20/40 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.

A Member requested an update on the issues raised at the Committee's February 2020 meeting regarding non-Manchester children being placed in children's homes in Manchester and about training for Members on child sexual exploitation. The Chair asked that the Strategic Director of Children and Education Services update Members on this.

Decisions

1. To note the report and agree the work programme.
2. To ask that the Strategic Director of Children and Education Services update Members on the issues raised at the Committee's meeting in February 2020.