

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 21 July 2021

Present:

Councillor Reid – in the Chair

Councillors Abdullatif, Alijah, Foley, Hewitson, Lovecy, McHale, Nunney and Sadler

Co-opted Non Voting Members:

Mr L Duffy, Secondary Sector Teacher Representative

Also present:

Councillor Bridges, Executive Member for Children's Services

Councillor Hitchen, Ward Councillor for Miles Platting and Newton Heath

Alex Kennedy, Member of the Youth Parliament and Manchester Youth Council and Chair of Gorton Youth Forum

Apologies:

Councillor Bano

CYP/21/30 Minutes

Decision

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 23 June 2021.

CYP/21/31 Responding to Children in Need of Help, Support and Protection

The Committee received a presentation of the Deputy Director of Children's Services which outlined how Children's Services and partners were responding to children in need of help, support and protection.

The main points and themes within the presentation included:

- The inspection framework and approach;
- Social work practice;
- The front door;
- Early Help;
- Action to protect children;
- Child protection and assessments;
- Children Missing from Education; and
- Edge of Care services.

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

- Referrals relating to domestic abuse;
- The 11% of assessments which had not yet been completed; and
- The number of Children Missing from Education.

The Deputy Director of Children's Services advised that domestic abuse was a significant issue and that it often presented alongside other complicating factors. He drew Members' attention to the Council's new Domestic Violence Strategy and he outlined some of the work taking place to address the issue including protection plans and other work to support victims and more challenge for perpetrators, including work with the Probation Service. He advised that the figure on the completion of assessments related to those completed within 45 days, that Manchester compared well against Greater Manchester and nationally on this and that processes were in place to ensure the completion of assessments which had gone beyond that timescale. In response to Member's question about the Greater Manchester Contextual Safeguarding Pilot, he stated that this work was at a very early stage and suggested that officers could provide further information on this in a future report to the Committee. In response to another question, he confirmed that any parent could use the parenting helpline.

The Director of Education explained that Children Missing from Education (CME) included different categories of children. She advised that this included children who had recently arrived in the city and were in the process of being allocated a school place. She reported that another category within CME was children who had been taken off the school roll. She advised that, where a child had been removed from the school roll because they had stopped attending but the school had not been able to identify where that child had gone, the Council's CME Team had processes in place for trying to locate them. She stated that she could provide figures for CME cases whose whereabouts was unknown but that the numbers fluctuated from week to week. She advised that approximately 85% of these cases were quickly resolved, for example where it was established that the family had relocated to a different area but not told the school. She informed Members that CME figures were currently higher because a significant number of children were in countries on the government's red travel list which created challenges in returning to the UK. She reported that schools had been advised to keep these children on roll if they knew where they were and the family was keeping in contact but that, where there was no contact, children were being removed from the school roll and referred to the CME team. In response to a Member's question about Alternative Provision, she advised that the Council was reducing the number of Alternative Provision places as there was a high level of capacity in the city and mainstream schools were increasingly putting in place facilities to keep these children in their own school and reduce the use of Alternative Provision. She reported that quality assurance of independent Alternative Provision was carried out by the Secondary Pupil Referral Unit, as well as using independent quality assurance professionals; however, she reported that current arrangements were being reviewed and that further information on this would be included in a report at a future meeting.

The Strategic Director for Children and Education Services reported that continual improvement had been made since 2014, when Ofsted had judged the service as inadequate. He advised that the service had moved beyond compliance to being focussed on relationships, the quality of intervention and the difference being made to children's lives. He highlighted the increased demand on the service, with more children requiring help and support due to the pandemic, but advised that the service was now in a better position to make the decisions which would help it to respond to this level of demand.

The Chair welcomed the significant progress that had been made since 2014, including the valuable role of Early Help and Alonzi House, and she highlighted the important contribution of the late Councillor Sheila Newman to this work.

Decision

To note the presentation.

CYP/21/32 Manchester's Year of the Child

The Committee received a report of the Strategic Director for Children and Education Services which provided information on the dedication of 2022 to celebrating the successes of Manchester's children and young people and supporting their recovery from the impact of COVID-19.

The main points and themes within the report included:

- Engagement with children and young people;
- Education and learning;
- Early Years;
- Children's Services;
- Looking to the future; and
- Social and emotional development opportunities.

The Chair shared her experience of taking part in the engagement with children and young people for the Year of the Child and recommended that other Members visit local schools to engage with children and young people.

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

- To welcome this work, including engaging with children and young people and responding to the issues and priorities they raised;
- The many ways that the pandemic had impacted on children and young people, including recognising the effect this had had on their education, despite the hard work of teachers and other schools staff;
- When the outcomes of the consultation would be available; and
- Recognising the additional pressure that the teacher assessment of GCSE and A-level grades had placed on teachers and how they and school leaders could be supported with challenges from parents and pupils arising from the results.

The Director of Education informed the Committee that there were robust arrangements in place for the teacher assessments along with clear appeal procedures and that schools would encourage parents to channel any issue they had about the grade awarded through the appeal process.

The Strategic Director for Children and Education Services advised that the aim was to complete the engagement work during the autumn term and present the outcomes

to a meeting of the Council. He emphasised the importance of reaching all young people, not only those who were part of groups like Manchester Youth Council, and putting children and young people at the heart of decision-making. In response to a question about how young people would continue to be involved in decision-making, he advised that young people were being asked how they wanted to engage with this. He suggested that the Committee might want to receive regular reports on this work.

Decisions

1. To note the report and the recommendations made to the Executive at its meeting on 30 June 2021.
2. To receive an update report at a future meeting.

CYP/21/33 Ways of Working

The Committee received a presentation of the Deputy Director of Children's Services which outlined new ways of working within Children's Services.

The main points and themes within the presentation included:

- The principles supporting this work;
- Flexible working;
- Line manager and employee responsibilities;
- The Organisational Development Plan for the service;
- Monitoring impact;
- ICT; and
- Estates.

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

- To welcome that the service was taking the opportunity to identify the positive changes in ways of working which had arisen out of the pandemic and build on them;
- Whether office space would be reduced;
- The importance of a team ethos and social work staff being able to access informal support through colleagues, noting that this had been observed on a recent visit to a Locality Office; and
- Whether staff with ADHD had been involved in the consultation process.

The Deputy Director of Children's Services advised that there were no immediate plans to reduce office space and that this work was about creating a more employee-friendly environment, using the space better rather than reducing it. He reported that the staff consultation had taken place through multiple methods to meet staff's needs and preferences and that the vast majority of staff had felt able to participate.

The Executive Member for Children's Services recognised some of the negative impacts of the pandemic on social work staff, in particular feeling more isolated and

not having the same level and type of interaction with colleagues which would support them in normal circumstances. He assured Members that being able to work in an office environment, with a supportive team ethos, was a key priority.

Decision

To note the presentation.

CYP/21/34 COVID-19 Update

The Committee received a verbal update from the Director of Education which outlined new developments and significant changes to the current situation, particularly in relation to schools. She thanked school and college leaders and their staff for their work through this challenging year, as well as thanking children and young people and their parents and carers for the way they had responded.

The main points and themes within the verbal update included:

- Recognising that Manchester schools had very largely remained open throughout this time, in spite of high infection rates and the number of staff and pupils self-isolating and that this was not the case everywhere;
- Attendance figures, stating that the most recent available figures showed attendance rates at just over 93%, while highlighting that the figures did not include pupils who were self-isolating;
- The numbers of positive cases and children being sent home to self-isolate because they were in the same bubble, noting that while the figures were reducing, they were still high;
- The changes to the national guidance for schools from 19 July 2021, as England moved to Stage 4 of the Roadmap out of Lockdown;
- That the Council, along with other Greater Manchester local authorities, was advising its schools to continue with their existing arrangements for the last few days of term, following which they would have time to plan for the new arrangements in September; and
- That the Council would continue to provide support to schools on COVID-19-related arrangements and issues into the new academic year.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Director of Education informed the Committee that she and the Executive Member for Children's Services had written to schools to thank them for their work during the pandemic.

Decision

To note the verbal update.

CYP/21/35 Youth and Play Fund - Summer Provision

The Committee received a report of the Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) and the Head of Youth Strategy and Engagement which provided an overview of Manchester's Youth and Play offer, which included provision commissioned by the Council and the Youth and Play Fund which was distributed via Young Manchester. It

also highlighted the offer which would be available across the city throughout the summer school holidays, which encompassed the offers from the wider partners and stakeholders, including the targeted Holiday Activities and Food programme (HAF).

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

- Youth and Play Funding (Manchester City Council);
- Youth and Play Fund (Young Manchester);
- Summer provision; and
- Next steps.

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

- To ask how the engagement data referred to in the report was collected;
- How the Youth and Play Fund was allocated and the geographic spread of organisations applying for and receiving funding;
- Young people not wanting to cross ward boundaries to access youth provision;
- What could be done to improve the engagement of young people with youth provision, particularly in wards where this was low;
- To request a breakdown of data for the four hubs, including the ward of residence of the young people accessing the provision; and
- That issues relating to youth provision should be brought to Ward Co-ordination meetings.

Alex Kennedy, Member of the Youth Parliament and Manchester Youth Council and Chair of Gorton Youth Forum, asked what was being done to ensure equality of accessibility to funding for grassroots youth projects compared to more established projects and to ensure an equal distribution of funding across different wards.

The Head of Youth Strategy and Engagement explained how Young Manchester funding was distributed across wards based on a needs analysis which ranked wards on factors such as deprivation, education levels and eligibility for Free School Meals. She acknowledged that more needed to be done in relation to access to funding for grassroots providers and black-led organisations and advised that there was currently a consultation taking place with the sector on the future of commissioning for the Youth and Play Fund and that a report would be coming to the Committee and the Executive on this. She also informed Members that the Council had established Area Youth Leads who each had an allocation of funding for working with grassroots organisations, helping to get them into a position where they could apply for larger amounts of funding.

The Chair advised that the funding allocation should be more evenly spread across different areas of the city. She highlighted that, when funding had recently been made available for capital projects in parks, it had been distributed evenly with £30k being allocated to each ward and she stated that this was a fairer approach.

The Head of Youth Strategy and Engagement advised that the engagement data referred to in the report was data returned to Young Manchester by the organisations

that received funding from the Youth and Play Fund and she outlined how this was used, for example, identifying demographic groups who were less likely to be accessing youth provision and responding to this. She highlighted that figures were lower than in previous years due to the COVID-19 restrictions that had been in place. In response to the question on crossing ward boundaries, she reported that data was gathered from the hubs on where the young people accessing them came from and it showed that young people were travelling in to the bigger hubs, advising that it was important to ensure the transport links were good and that young people felt safe on that transport; however, she acknowledged that ongoing work was needed about making young people felt safe crossing boundaries and that it was also important to get the right providers in each area so that young people had access to the kind of provision that they wanted to attend. She reported that the national guidelines were that young people should live within a 20-minute safe travel journey of youth provision and that in Manchester all young people lived within that time limit.

The Executive Member for Children's Services reported that more youth activities had been provided this summer than had taken place for a number of years and that Ward Councillors had been provided with details of both universal provision and provision in their ward funded through the Holiday Activities and Food programme.

The Ward Councillor for Miles Platting and Newton Heath expressed concern about the level of provision for young people in her ward and questioned whether youth provision was within a 20-minute safe travel journey for all young people. She highlighted how travel issues were restricting the access of young people in her ward to youth activities in the city. She questioned the accuracy of the data on which provision across different wards was based. She advised that there was no high school within her ward and that many children in her ward attended a high school outside of Manchester City Council's boundaries and, therefore, data on the number of these children who were eligible for Free School Meals had not been included in the analysis. She also asked how Manchester children attending a non-Manchester school could find out about youth provision within the city.

The Chair stated that, while the Government did not provide sufficient funding for youth provision, the Council needed to ensure that the limited funds that were available were targeted in the right places. She highlighted the need to consider the boundaries that some young people would not cross and transport issues and also advised that more detached youth work was needed.

The Head of Youth Strategy and Engagement reported that the needs analysis had been carried out in conjunction with the Council and the relevant Executive Member at the time but that this had been five years ago and she agreed that it needed to be revised. She confirmed that the Free School Meals data was based on the ward in which the school was located, not where the young person lived. The Chair advised that Ward Councillors should be consulted at an early stage in the revised needs analysis.

The Head of Youth Strategy and Engagement clarified that the guideline of being within a 20-minute safe travel time related to a youth provision, not one of the main youth hubs. She advised that information on youth activities had been disseminated through a range of channels, including working collaboratively with Greater

Manchester colleagues, and that many youth providers had also been using social media to promote their provision. She highlighted that information was also available on the Loads To Do website. She informed the Committee that the CEO of the HideOut Youth Zone had offered to share their minibuses to help young people access activities but that this was the responsibility of the providers and not something that was directly in the control of the Council.

Decisions

1. To note that the Committee will receive a further report on the Youth and Play Fund and Young Manchester in the autumn.
2. To request a breakdown of data for the four hubs, including the ward of residence of the young people accessing the provision.

[Councillor Alijah declared a personal interest as the Chair of the Hideaway Youth Project.]

CYP/21/36 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.