

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee – Ofsted Subgroup

Minutes of the meeting held on 24 November 2021

Present:

Councillor Lovecy – in the Chair
Councillors Hewitson, Nunney and Reid

Apologies:

Councillor Foley

CYP/OSG/21/01 Minutes

Decision

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2020.

CYP/OSG/21/02 Responding to Children in Need of Help, Support and Protection

In response to a Member's question about the areas that Ofsted would focus on in their inspection, the Strategic Director for Children and Education Services drew Members' attention to the information in the two presentations, included in the papers, which had previously been delivered to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee and outlined the approach Ofsted was likely to take. He highlighted some of the key areas they were likely to look at, including the number of referrals to social services, partnership working and how well partners such as schools, police and health colleagues understood the threshold for referrals. He also highlighted the recent Local Government Association Peer Review and offered to bring this to a future scrutiny meeting. In response to a Member's question, he reported that he had not yet received the letter outlining the feedback from the Peer Review but that the verbal feedback had been positive, while also providing a lot to consider.

A Member advised that IT had been identified as an issue of concern on recent visits to social work teams. The Deputy Director of Children's Services explained that the service had invested in technology in 2017 and 2018 so a lot of laptops were coming to the end of their shelf-life in 2020, coinciding with the pandemic and supply issues, so there had been delays in the distribution of new laptops. He acknowledged that Wi-Fi was poor across the service's estate but advised that a temporary fix had been put in place. He also outlined the work taking place to resolve outstanding IT issues. The Chair advised that it was important that staff were being kept informed about what was being done to try to resolve issues rather than surmising that managers were not bothered about the issues they were having.

The Chair commented positively on a recent visit she and other Members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee had undertaken, highlighting the team spirit within the social work teams. The Strategic Director for Children and Education Services advised that these visits were important because they made staff feel listened to and Members were able to amplify issues.

The Chair commented that the changes to the Longsight Office, including the increase in informal spaces, was working well. A Member emphasised the importance of issues such as IT and the buildings that social workers were working in, advising that these could have an impact on staff retention. The Strategic Director for Children and Education Services advised that support from colleagues was important for social workers and that there needed to be an office environment that enabled this. He informed Members about work taking place across the Council to look at the condition of its entire estate. The Subgroup discussed the possibility of having more co-located services.

A Member welcomed that fewer children were becoming Looked After, praising the role of Alonzi House and Edge of Care Services. The Deputy Director of Children's Services advised that Mental Health support was important, in particular early intervention, including universal services, Healthy Schools, THRIVE and working collaboratively with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

A Member commented positively on the work of schools during the pandemic. The Chair welcomed the partnership working which had been taking place, including with the Voluntary and Community Sector.

The Chair reported that, based on recent visits to social work teams, staff felt that they could concentrate on significant cases while advising on others; however, she commented, that sometimes schools staff who were experienced in safeguarding felt that a particular case met the threshold for social work intervention but that this was not accepted by Children's Services. The Strategic Director for Children and Education Services acknowledged that sometimes different professionals held different views on a particular case and he outlined how he and his service were engaging with schools and how clusters of schools were working together. The Chair emphasised the important role of schools and the importance of ongoing conversation and relationship building.

The Strategic Director for Children and Education Services suggested that the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee could look again at proxy indicators, such as repeat referrals. In response to a Member's comments, he also suggested that Members could look at serious youth violence at a future scrutiny committee meeting. The Chair suggested that Members could look at the outcomes from Serious Case Reviews.

The Deputy Director of Children's Services advised that improved services with strong partnerships resulted in better outcomes for children and families and also more opportunities to apply for and obtain grant funding.

Decision

To note the discussion and the issues raised.

CYP/OSG/21/03 Ofsted Inspections of Manchester Schools

The Senior School Quality Assurance Officer provided Members with details of the Ofsted visits which had taken place during the 2020-2021 academic year. She

explained that routine inspections had been put on hold during the pandemic but that Ofsted inspectors had still been visiting schools – either remotely or in person – during this time. She drew Members' attention to the Section 8 visits which had taken place, advising that these did not result in a judgement but that the reports from these visits had been overwhelmingly positive. She reported that, for schools which had been previously judged as Requires Improvement or below, Section 8 monitoring inspections had continued and that these had been very positive.

A Member commented that, due to the use of virtual visits and reduced staffing, Ofsted were relying more on data to assess schools. She also reported that in some areas of the city, and particularly in the secondary sector, there were some very good schools and some not so good schools and that the leadership and management were key to this.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Senior School Quality Assurance Officer confirmed that Newall Green High School had closed. She informed Members that the Council had raised at a national level the pressures that Manchester schools had faced during the pandemic. She highlighted that some schools had received multiple Ofsted visits within a short period of time and offered to provide an update at the next meeting. The Chair commented on the excellent work of Manchester schools during the pandemic and the additional pressures that they had been placed under, particularly schools which had already been struggling.

The Subgroup considered the recent Ofsted report for Manchester Enterprise Academy, which stated that this continued to be a good school. Members welcomed this and discussed the school's Fantastic Futures programme. A Member expressed concern at the new, more simplified report format that Ofsted was now using, which the Senior School Quality Assurance Officer advised was written to be accessible for parents and families. The Chair commented on the low numbers in the school's sixth form, to which another Member responded that the sixth form was closing down. The Chair noted the comment in the report about boisterous behaviour and advised that the important issue was how this was dealt with. In response to a question from the Chair, the Senior School Quality Assurance Officer advised that the school's Alternative Provision would have been included in the inspection and, if there had been any concerns about it, this would have been mentioned in the report.

The Subgroup considered the recent Ofsted report for Wright Robinson College, which stated that this continued to be an outstanding school. The Senior School Quality Assurance Officer explained that schools that had been judged outstanding had previously been exempt from routine inspections but that this had now changed. She informed Members that schools which were last inspected before 2015 were receiving a Section 5 inspection and that schools which had been inspected since 2015 were receiving a less wide-ranging Section 8 inspection and that Wright Robinson fell into the latter category. The Chair commented that it was an impressive report. A Member reported that the school was over-subscribed but did not suit all children and that it had strict behaviour management. She advised that it welcomed new arrivals and was an inclusive school. The Chair expressed concern at the zero tolerance behaviour policies and asked if the school had in-house Alternative Provision. Another Member advised that pupils would remain on roll but attend a nearby Alternative Provision. She also commented that it was very inclusive

of children with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND).

Decisions

1. To write to Manchester Enterprise Academy and Wright Robinson College to congratulate them on their recent Ofsted reports.
2. To arrange visits to both schools.

CYP/OSG/21/04 Terms of Reference and Work Programme

The Subgroup considered the Terms and Reference and Work Programme. A Member suggested that the next meeting again look at both Children's Services and schools. The Chair proposed that the next meeting take place on 19 January 2022.

Decision

To approve the Terms of Reference and Work Programme, subject to the above comments.