

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 8 December 2021

Present:

Councillor Reid – in the Chair

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

Co-opted Non-Voting Members:

Miss S Iltaf, Secondary Sector Teacher Representative

Ms L Smith, Primary Sector Teacher Representative

Also present:

Councillor Bridges, Executive Member for Children's Services

Andrew Burton, Executive Headteacher, City of Manchester Learning Partnership

Phil Hoyland, Partnership Development Lead, City of Manchester Learning Partnership

Apologies:

Councillors Collins and McHale

Ms K McDaid, Parent Governor Representative

CYP/21/56

Arthur Labinjo-Hughes

The Committee held a minute's silence for Arthur Labinjo-Hughes, the six-year-old boy killed by his father and his partner in Solihull.

The Strategic Director of Children and Education Services expressed his sorrow at the death of a child at the hands of the people who were supposed to care for him. He outlined the reviews that would be taking place to identify lessons that needed to be learnt from this case to improve child protection systems, while stating that responsibility for Arthur's death lay with his killers. He highlighted the progress that had been made in Manchester to improve Children's Services and how the service had opened itself up to scrutiny and Peer Reviews to support its continued improvement. He highlighted the role of the pandemic and lockdown in Arthur's death. He reported that in Manchester social workers had continued to see children face to face during the pandemic and that, when schools had only been open for children of key workers and vulnerable children, Manchester had used a wider definition of vulnerable children; however, he recognised the challenges that the pandemic had presented, particularly due to the high infection rates in the city. He suggested that the Committee might want to look at the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, led by Josh MacAlister, at a future meeting.

CYP/21/57

Minutes

The Chair welcomed the Committee's new Members.

Decision

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 10 November 2021.

CYP/21/58 Safe and Together: Responding to and Managing Domestic Abuse in Manchester

The Committee received a report and presentation of the Strategic Director of Children and Education Services which provided an overview of the Safe and Together Model and its implementation in Manchester.

The main points and themes within the presentation included:

- Introduction and summary of the journey so far;
- Domestic Abuse Strategy;
- The impact of practice and the survivor story;
- Taking a partnership approach: the right support at the right time; and
- Next steps.

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

- Praise for the Safe and Together model, including the shift in language and the strengths-based approach;
- Work to address the behaviour of perpetrators;
- Service provision for children and young people to manage their trauma;
- The importance of public education programmes to break the cycle of abuse, including educating young people and using billboards and libraries to raise awareness;
- The impact on families of having to flee to escape domestic abuse while, in many cases, the perpetrator remained in the family home;
- Recognising that domestic abuse was not only about violence but other forms of abuse, such as emotional and financial abuse;
- Whether data was available broken down by ethnicity of families that were being supported;
- That some family relationships could be more complicated than one party being the perpetrator and that it was not helpful to children in the family where one parent was being labelled as the abuser but this did not reflect their lived experience; and
- Peer-on-peer abuse involving children who had experienced domestic abuse in the family and how this could be addressed in partnership with schools.

The Domestic Abuse Reduction Manager advised that work with perpetrators had been expanded from working with only male perpetrators to working with any perpetrator including those from the LGBT community and those who had English as an Additional Language and work relating to child to parent violence. She advised that the offer of therapeutic counselling for children affected by domestic abuse had been expanded to support over 150 children a year, compared to 50 previously. She

informed Members that the new Domestic Abuse Act had introduced a responsibility for local authorities to provide support to all child and adult victims of domestic abuse and that Manchester Women's Aid had been commissioned to provide support to families in dispersed accommodation, which aimed to reach over 300 children. She also informed the Committee about Domestic Abuse Protection Orders, which removed the perpetrator from the family home and gave victims of domestic abuse time and space to think about what they wanted to do, and advised that she was in contact with Greater Manchester Police (GMP) about how the number of Domestic Abuse Protection Orders could be increased. She also highlighted work to manage risks where families decided to stay together, for example, work with Early Help on promoting positive relationships and the Healing Together programme.

In response to a Member's questions, the Service Lead advised that, although this model took a new approach, the focus was still on keeping children safe and she outlined how risk was managed, commenting that the work with schools had helped with this as they knew the children well and could detect changes in behaviour. She highlighted that Youth Justice was using the Safe and Together model to work with child survivors of domestic abuse and help them to understand their childhood experiences. In response to a question about adapting the model to work with diverse communities in Manchester, she advised that interpreters had played a valuable role in working with some families and that other services were utilised to improve practitioners' understanding of diverse cultures but she acknowledged that this was still an area for further development. In response to Members' questions, she outlined how a range of services and the Voluntary and Community Sector would be trained in and involved in the work to address domestic abuse. A Member advised that housing providers should be included in this work, to which the Domestic Abuse Reduction Manager responded that housing providers were involved in this work and that a programme of training was being provided to these organisations. The Strategic Director of Children and Education Services advised that the Safe and Together training had first targeted key areas, such as social workers who would be undertaking direct interventions, but was then being expanded out to other service areas and organisations. In response to a Member's question, he advised that training on this could be incorporated into the training delivered to Members. In response to a Member's question about how children could report their concerns about domestic abuse at home, he advised that all schools had a Designated Safeguarding Teacher and that a high number of referrals came through schools, which indicated that children felt safe and able to speak to teachers about their concerns.

The Domestic Abuse Reduction Manager reported that it was recognised that more work needed to be done with children and young people on promoting healthy relationships and that a public health approach was needed to tackle domestic abuse. She outlined the work taking place including a group being set up to look at how to raise awareness about domestic abuse and work with schools and the Council's Schools Quality Assurance Team. In response to a Member's question about whether there were any plans to involve football clubs in this work, she advised that work was taking place with CityCo, local businesses and sporting organisations, looking at what they could do to support the work to tackle perpetrators' behaviour.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Domestic Abuse Reduction Manager advised that her team was working closely with GMP regarding their response to domestic abuse and that GMP was currently reviewing its Domestic Abuse Policy. In response to the question about demographic data, she advised that this could be provided as a lot of data had been gathered as part of a needs assessment carried out during the development of the new Strategy. She advised that the organisation Talk Listen Change had recently been commissioned to provide interventions on peer on peer abuse and healthy relationships, working closely with schools.

Decision

To note the report and the importance of raising awareness about domestic abuse and relevant support services across different groups of staff, such as housing staff and different service areas within the Council.

[Councillor Abdullatif declared a personal and non-prejudicial interest as she had previously worked for Women's Aid Federation England and continued to do some ad hoc work within the sector as well as being a trustee of Ending Violence Against Women.]

[Ms Smith declared a personal and non-prejudicial interest as a volunteer with the Pankhurst Trust Manchester Women's Aid.]

CYP/21/59 Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) and Alternative Provision

The Committee received a presentation of Andrew Burton (Executive Headteacher) and Phil Hoyland (Partnership Development Lead) from the City of Manchester Learning Partnership which highlighted measures being taken to re-shape the Alternative Provision offer in Manchester in line with Manchester's Inclusion Strategy.

The main points and themes within the report included:

- New developments at Manchester Secondary Pupil Referral Unit (MSPRU);
- Participation in the new DfE Alternative Provision Task Force; and
- The creation of a revised Alternative Provision Framework for Manchester High Schools.

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

- To welcome the work taking place;
- What work was being done with mainstream schools, particularly secondary schools, to help them support young people at an earlier stage so that they were not excluded;
- To request more information on how youth workers were involved in this work;
- Concern about the variability of the in-house support provided by different mainstream schools and how schools would be persuaded to improve the support provided; and
- Was the number of commissioned alternative provision places based on the data from 2019/2020 and what were the anticipated trends for the number of exclusions.

The Director of Education highlighted work to support pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs within mainstream schools. She informed Members about the Every Child Project, which was part of the Inclusion Strategy, and was gathering an evidence base for what worked for young people in secondary school, particularly focusing on the transition from Year 6 to Year 7. She advised that most Manchester secondary schools were looking at what support they could provide in-house instead of sending pupils to Alternative Provision and that part of the Inclusion Strategy was to look at what was working and to share good practice.

Phil Hoyland advised that the Inclusion Strategy had changed the attitudes of the leadership teams in a lot of schools, although they still faced the challenge of being held highly accountable for examination outcomes and destinations after leaving school. He reported that the hope was that the use of Alternative Provision would no longer be viewed as a punishment but as the school investing in something positive for that young person which could not be provided on site. He informed Members that the Bridgelea Primary PRU had a long history of providing outreach support to primary schools in Manchester and that work was now taking place to extend that outreach offer to secondary schools, including providing advice on in-house Alternative Provision.

Andrew Burton reported that the vast majority of children and young people should be in mainstream education, with a PRU or Alternative Provision for those young people who could not attend that mainstream provision, and that the focus should be on preventative work and short-term placements with the aim of re-integrating young people back into their mainstream school. He advised that it was important that work with these young people should be trauma-informed but also have high expectations for them. He informed the Committee that the aim of the current work was to reduce the number of PRU sites, improving the quality of provision, having more professionals co-located and improving the teaching offer, as this was currently variable across the different sites. He advised that there were about 15 youth workers within the PRU and that they played a vital role in nurturing relationships to enable young people to access the curriculum and succeed. He advised that, in future, their youth work expertise would continue to be used, but that this might be in a slightly different way, noting that they had developed additional school-based skills through their time working at the PRU. He reported that the number of places in the PRU was being reduced and that the number of children referred to the PRU had been lower in recent years, although this might have been due to the pandemic. He advised that there had been a slight increase in numbers recently and that it was the responsibility of all education partners to embrace the Inclusion Strategy and manage the system effectively.

The Chair expressed concern about the impact of poor behaviour on classes and on teachers trying to manage children with chaotic behaviour and advised that it was not possible for all children to remain in large, mainstream classes. Phil Hoyland recognised the pressure on teachers and the impact that a child with significant behavioural issues could have on a class and that for a small minority of children Alternative Provision was appropriate. In response to the question about how schools could be held to account regarding their provision, he reported that in 2019 the Ofsted Framework changed to be slightly less data driven and to focus on the school's curriculum and that the new Framework was also clearer about off-rolling

pupils and manipulating the system to remove pupils who it was felt would negatively affect assessment data. He advised that the plans outlined in the presentation would provide a stronger, more personalised Alternative Provision, improve outcomes and re-integration into mainstream schools and reduce the use of permanent exclusions.

The Secondary Teacher Representative outlined how her school's inclusion centre, which offered in-house Alternative Provision, worked, advising that it worked well, although she felt it would be useful to have a specialist managing the centre.

Decision

To receive an update report in 12 months' time.

CYP/21/60 School Budgets 2022/23

The Committee received a report of the Strategic Director of Children and Education Services which recommended changing the basis for the funding allocation across individual primary and secondary school budgets from 2022/23, in order to allow schools a longer adjustment period before introduction of the direct national funding formula.

The main points and themes within the report included:

- Background information, including national changes to school funding; and
- Proposals to start a transition to the National Funding Formula.

In response to a question from the Chair about whether there were any negative responses from schools to the consultation, the Head of Finance advised that schools wanted clear figures on what the impact would be but that this level of detail was not yet available, although they had been provided with the information in appendix 1 of the report.

Decision

To note the report.

CYP/21/61 COVID-19 Update

The Committee received a verbal update of the Director of Education which outlined new developments and significant changes to the current situation, particularly in relation to schools.

The main points and themes within the verbal update included:

- New temporary measures to slow down the spread of the Omicron variant, including face coverings in communal areas, encouraging twice-weekly lateral flow tests and isolation for close contacts of people with the Omicron variant;
- That secondary schools were now required to test pupils on site, just once, on their return from the Christmas break and that they could have a staggered start to the term to facilitate this;

- Staffing issues in schools, including due to non-vaccinated staff having to self-isolate and staff illness and, while some government funding had been made available to fund temporary staff, there was a shortage of available agency staff and the eligibility criteria for the funding made it difficult to access;
- That schools had raised a number of queries and concerns about end-of-term events due to the new variant and that guidance had been circulated stating that these events could still go ahead but advising on additional measures that should be put in place to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission;
- That some schools with high infection levels had taken the decision not to go ahead with these events;
- That infection levels were being closely monitored and that the previous week the number of positive cases had been 376 (292 children and 84 staff); and
- That outbreak control meetings were still taking place when a school reported a high number of new infections but that schools were doing an excellent job in working to reduce transmission.

The Chair asked that the guidance for secondary schools on testing and staggered starts for the next term be circulated to the Committee. The Director of Education agreed to this and highlighted the logistical issues these tests presented for schools, for example, due to halls being set up for mock examinations.

Decisions

1. To request that guidance for secondary schools on testing and staggered starts for the next term be circulated to the Committee.
2. That COVID-19 updates will continue to be a standing item on the agenda.

CYP/21/62 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.