

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 9 February 2022

Present:

Councillor Reid – in the Chair
Councillors Abdullatif, Alijah, Bano, Benham, Collins, Foley, Hewitson, Lovecy, McHale, Nunney and Sadler

Co-opted Voting Members:

Mr G Cleworth, Parent Governor Representative

Co-opted Non-Voting Members:

Miss S Iltaf, Secondary Sector Teacher Representative

Also present:

Councillor Rahman, Deputy Leader
Councillor Bridges, Executive Member for Children's Services
Councillor Hitchen, Ward Councillor for Miles Platting and Newton Heath
Lorraine Ganley, Director of Nursing and Professional Lead, Manchester Local Care Organisation (MLCO)
Ben Aspinall, COVID-19 Vaccination Programme Lead, MLCO

Apologies:

Councillor Cooley
Mrs J Miles, Representative of the Diocese of Salford
Ms L Smith, Primary Sector Teacher Representative

CYP/22/08 Minutes

Decisions

1. To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 12 January 2022.
2. To receive the minutes of the meetings of the Ofsted Subgroup held on 24 November 2021 and 19 January 2022.

CYP/22/09 An update on families residing in both bed and breakfast accommodation and homeless accommodation outside of the city boundaries, and the impact on schools and transport

The Committee received a report of the Strategic Director of Children and Education Services and the Strategic Director (Neighbourhoods) which set out the collaborative work undertaken by the Homeless Service and Children's Services to support families who were impacted by homelessness.

The main points and themes within the report included:

- Background information;

- School and travel;
- Support for families;
- Reducing the use of bed and breakfast and out of city placements;
- Prevention;
- Apex House as a model;
- Placing families directly into dispersed accommodation;
- Nightly rate accommodation;
- Private Rented Sector;
- Domestic Violence and Abuse;
- Refugee Transitions Outcomes Fund (RTOF); and
- Transformation Programme.

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

- Who funded school transport when a homeless family was moved to a different area;
- The impact on families of living in temporary homeless accommodation and the impact on children of having to leave their area and move elsewhere;
- The importance of intervening early, when families first started struggling to pay their rent, and the roles housing providers and schools could play in this;
- Concern about the impact of rising costs of living and private landlords increasing rents;
- Concern about insufficient housing stock in the city;
- Concern about families in overcrowded housing who were not classed as homeless;
- People, predominantly women and children, becoming homeless due to domestic abuse, while the perpetrator was able to remain in the family home;
- Consideration about the safety of refugee families when allocating housing, for example, if racist, anti-refugee groups were active in the area; and
- To request more information on nightly rate accommodation.

The Ward Councillor for Miles Platting and Newton Heath highlighted how unaffordable rents were for people on the minimum wage. She expressed concern at the length of time that people were in dispersed temporary accommodation. She also expressed concern that people who were found housing in the private sector still did not have secure long-term accommodation, if they only had a six-month secured tenure. She reported that homeless people from other areas were being placed in temporary accommodation in her ward, whereas people from her ward who had become homeless were being placed elsewhere. She advised that consideration should be given to the needs of displaced families and the needs of and impact on the host community. The Chair suggested that figures on homeless families being placed in their ward could be provided to Members through Ward Co-ordination, noting that this disproportionately impacted on certain wards. She also expressed concern about the children who were being moved out of their communities and the impact of that.

In response to a Member's question, the Director of Housing Operations informed the Committee that the Private Rented Sector Team was working to source permanent

accommodation for homeless families in the private sector and to prevent families from becoming homeless through engagement with landlords and families, including providing incentives. He confirmed that links were being made with schools and other services, especially in relation to early intervention to prevent homelessness. He acknowledged Members' comments about the challenges facing families placed in bed and breakfast accommodation, advising that the average length of stay was 20 days but that this was still too long and that the transformation programme aimed to reduce the use of bed and breakfast accommodation. In response to the comments from the Ward Councillor for Miles Platting and Newton Heath, he advised that a mixed model, using both social rented and private sector accommodation, was needed but that housing had to be of good quality with a reputable provider and appropriate for the family. In response to a Member's comments about a specific case in her ward, he offered to provide a response outside of the meeting, if she provided him with further details.

The Director of Education reported that, if a child had an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP), the Council had a statutory duty to fund home to school transport, which could be a taxi or a school bus. If a child did not have an EHCP, she advised that the Council would pay for a travel pass, if required due to distance, although she advised that she was aware of some cases where schools were arranging to collect the child from home, particularly where a family was temporarily being accommodated further away.

The Strategic Lead (Homelessness) informed Members that the Council funded an advice contract which could assist people who were struggling to pay their rent and that there would be a campaign to encourage people to get advice at an earlier stage before they have built up rent arrears. She encouraged Members to promote this to residents at their advice surgeries. She confirmed that there was a clear process for the placement of refugee families which took into account the safety of the area.

The Strategic Director of Children and Education Services drew Members' attention to previous items that had been brought to the Committee about domestic abuse and advised that he would discuss with the Director of Housing Operations the issue raised about perpetrators remaining in the family home, while the partner and children had to leave.

In response to a Member's question, the Director of Housing Operations reported that Apex House had been more successful than other accommodation in finding settled homes for the families placed there.

The Strategic Lead (Homelessness) informed Members that nightly rate accommodation was where a family was accommodated in a property on an emergency basis, which was paid for on a nightly rate, and that this was being used to reduce the use of bed and breakfast. She advised that her service had just started trialling moving people who presented as homeless directly to temporary accommodation rather than placing them in a bed and breakfast first. In response to a Member's question, she outlined how the Homeless Floating Support Service worked with a range of partners including Early Help, schools and GPs to support families in dispersed temporary accommodation.

The Deputy Leader reported that the transformation process was at the early stages and that he wanted to come back to the Committee in a couple of years' time to show the improvements that had been made in keeping families closer to their communities. The Chair advised that the Committee would continue to monitor this.

Decision

To receive a further report in 6 months' time.

CYP/22/10 Children and Education Services Directorate Budget 2022/23

The Committee received a report of the Strategic Director (Children and Education Services) which stated that, following the Spending Review announcements and provisional local government finance settlement 2022/23, the Council was forecasting a balanced budget for 2022/23, a gap of £37m in 2023/24 and £58m by 2024/25. The report set out the high-level position. Included in the report were the priorities for the services in the remit of this Committee. Appended were details of the initial revenue budget changes proposed by officers and the planned capital programme as well as information on the 2022/23 Dedicated Schools Grant. The Committee was invited to comment on the proposals prior to their submission to the Executive on 16 February 2022.

The main points and themes within the report included:

- Summary of Council budget;
- Current budget position;
- Scrutiny of draft budget proposals and budget report;
- Next steps;
- Children and Education Services context;
- Budget overview;
- Dedicated Schools Grant; and
- Capital budget.

The Executive Member for Children's Services drew Members' attention to the budget reports which had been submitted to the Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee and the Resources and Governance Scrutiny Committee which included proposals for additional funding for youth services and for Free School Meals over the Easter holidays respectively.

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

- To what extent the budget had taken into account the need for more special school places;
- Funding for improving the condition of school buildings, including school-based Early Years provision;
- To welcome the focus on carbon reduction around schools and to recognise the additional benefits of investing in reducing carbon, such as lower energy bills and improving children's well-being;

- Whether the Council had considered asset transfers for buildings which had previously been Council-run daycare provision but were now commissioned to other providers;
- Concern about home to school transport putting additional pressure on the Children's Services budget, as outlined in the report; and
- Concern about the national insurance increase referred to in the report.

The Director of Education reported that school places for children with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) were funded by the Department for Education (DfE) through the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant, which would be increased by £10 million next year. She informed Members about additional special school places which had recently been created and about plans for more to become available from next year. She advised that the Council had a capital maintenance grant each year to assist schools with significantly expensive maintenance issues, such as a new roof or boiler, and so had an understanding of the condition of school buildings; however, she drew Members' attention to proposals to undertake condition surveys of school buildings which, she advised, would formalise this knowledge and enable the Council to plan work for the future. She reported that the DfE was going to be making some funding available for new school buildings and that these conditions surveys would help the Council to provide evidence to the DfE about why some of this funding should be awarded to Manchester. In response to a question from the Chair, she confirmed that the Council only had statutory responsibilities in relation to the maintenance of the buildings of local authority-maintained schools, not academies.

The Executive Member for Children's Services confirmed that a range of different options were considered for buildings used for Early Years daycare provision. He suggested that the Committee might want to receive a report on the condition surveys that were due to be carried out on schools and Early Years buildings, once the work had reached an appropriate stage.

The Strategic Director of Children and Education Services highlighted the approach that had been taken to budget savings, which had focused on preventative work and cost avoidance rather than cutting services. The Chair welcomed the way that this approach had worked in recent years in reducing costs through early intervention to prevent children and young people from entering the care system.

Decision

To endorse the proposals outlined in the report.

CYP/22/11 Annual Virtual School Head's Report

The Committee received a report of the Director of Education which provided an overview of the work that had been undertaken, through the Corporate Parenting Partnership, during 2020-21 to promote the education, employment and training of the Children and Young People in the care of Manchester (referred to as Our Children and Young People), Manchester Care Leavers, Previously Looked After Children who attended education settings within Manchester and Young People supported by the Youth Justice Service.

The main points and themes within the report included:

- Key educational headlines for children and young people;
- Attendance at education settings; and
- Key high-level priorities for the Virtual School.

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

- Praise for the work of the Virtual School;
- Access to educational psychologists and training for teachers;
- How Manchester compared with other core cities, for example, in relation to the number of Our Children who were in education, employment or training post-16;
- Whether data was available broken down by ethnicity;
- Our Children and Young People who had Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND);
- The Virtual School's new duties in relation to children and young people with a social worker; and
- What was being done to inform teachers about the work of the Virtual School.

Following a Member's comments about young people becoming involved in crime and serious youth violence, the Chair reported that the Committee had previously visited Wetherby Young Offender Institution and Barton Moss Secure Children's Home. She suggested that the Committee visit them again, as a joint visit with the Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee. She suggested that the Committee consider bringing a joint report on knife crime, in conjunction with the Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee. The Strategic Director of Children and Education Services highlighted how the use of Personal Education Plans (PEPs) in Youth Justice had improved young people's engagement with education, employment and training.

The Executive Member for Children's Services informed the Committee that a Youth Justice Peer Review had taken place towards the end of 2021 and that they had been very impressed by the work being done in Manchester.

The Virtual School Head reported that the Virtual School commissioned additional educational psychology time for consultation, advice, guidance and training for teachers. She informed Members that the Pupil Premium was paid to schools termly on receipt of a satisfactory PEP outlining how the money would be spent and that additional funding could also be provided to schools, where it was needed, including for staff training to support the needs of the child. In response to a Member's comments about exclusions, she reported that figures for fixed term exclusions for Our Children were currently higher than they wanted it to be but reducing and that permanent exclusions of Our Children were very rare. She drew Members' attention to the Inclusion Strategy which her service had been involved in developing and confirmed the service's aspiration to reduce the number of fixed-term exclusions.

The Virtual School Deputy Head (Post-16) reported that Manchester compared favourably to other core cities, its statistical neighbours and other Greater Manchester authorities in relation to the number of Our Children who were in Employment, Education or Training (EET) post-16. She informed Members that the Virtual School undertook PEPs for those who were not in EET and she outlined how they worked to maximise opportunities for these young people. In response to a question from the Chair, she reported that preventing exclusions post-16 was challenging as the Virtual School was not always informed beforehand but that using the designated teacher model had enabled them to develop stronger relationships, find out about issues earlier on and make alternative suggestions to prevent exclusion.

The Virtual School Deputy Head advised that they collected data on the ethnicity and gender of the children and young people as well as whether they had SEND through the PEP process, that this was monitored and that data could be provided. She also informed Members about training that was being provided to carers, including in relation to SEND, and about the post-16 pilot, which included training colleges and Leaving Care Workers on SEND, as well as attachment and trauma. She reported that the Virtual School provided challenge to schools if they were not recognising that a young person was likely to have SEND and responding appropriately.

The Virtual School Head advised that her team was well known to designated teachers and that it was the designated teacher's responsibility to work with other staff within their school. She highlighted the launch of the Virtual School's website and outlined how they were informing schools about the Virtual School's new duties in relation to children and young people with a social worker.

The Chair reminded Members that all Councillors were Corporate Parents and invited to the meetings of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Decisions

1. To arrange a visit to Wetherby Young Offender Institution and Barton Moss Secure Children's Home, in conjunction with the Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee.
2. To further discuss bringing a joint report on knife crime, in conjunction with the Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee.

CYP/22/12 COVID-19 Update

The Committee received a report of Assistant Director of Education which provided an update on the return of children and young people to education following the Christmas break and the arrangements in place in schools and colleges to report and manage COVID-19. The report had a particular focus on the bespoke offer to increase uptake of the vaccine in children and young people aged 12 to 15 and address inequalities therefore reducing disruption to children's education and learning.

The main points and themes within the report included:

- Main changes to guidance for schools from January 2022;
- Vaccinations;
- Positive cases in Manchester schools; and
- School attendance.

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

- Concern about lower take-up of COVID-19 vaccines in more deprived areas and in some demographic groups;
- The benefits of "Covid chat" and the role older pupils and members of the community could play in having conversations and answering questions about the vaccination; and
- Why more private schools had received the vaccines first.

The Executive Member for Children's Services reported that the Council had been working with health service colleagues to identify and address barriers to the vaccination of children and young people, highlighting capacity for school immunisation and how consent was gathered. He outlined some of the steps being taken to improve take-up, including a bespoke offer for each school, as well as an out of school offer, alongside an adult offer, and improved communications, including in community languages.

Ben Aspinall, COVID-19 Vaccination Programme Lead from MLCO, explained that the initial school immunisation programme had had to be introduced very quickly, that all Manchester schools had been contacted to ask when this could be timetabled in and that those who had responded first had been scheduled first. In relation to schools where a lower percentage of pupils had taken up the offer of a vaccine, he outlined the work taking place to address this, engaging with the schools, community leaders and the wider community and highlighting the offer for pupils to be vaccinated at other vaccination sites in the community, if they had not been vaccinated when the vaccination service was at their school. In response to a Member's comments about the electronic process for parents giving their consent ("e-consent"), he advised that, while it was quick and easy for some, having listened to stakeholders, schools were now being given the option to use e-consent, paper-based consent forms or a combination of the two.

The Chair expressed concern that anti-vaccination campaigners were also affecting the take-up of the MMR vaccine and advised that the Committee would continue to look at child health, in conjunction with the Health Scrutiny Committee.

Decision

To note the report.

CYP/22/13 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.

The Chair welcomed the new Co-opted Member, Mr Cleworth.

Decision

To note the report and agree the work programme.