

**Manchester City Council
Report for Information**

Report to: Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee – 8 January 2019

Subject: Delivering the Our Manchester Strategy

Report of: Executive Member for Children’s Services

Summary

This report provides an overview of work undertaken and progress towards the delivery of the Council’s priorities as set out in the Our Manchester Strategy for those areas within the portfolio of the Executive Member for Children’s Services.

Recommendations

The Committee is asked to note and comment on the report.

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Scrutiny update December

I have enjoyed the first 6 months as Executive Member and particularly the chance to speak with staff, both in workplaces and at staff engagement events. I meet weekly with the Director of Children's Services and key strategic leads to raise issues and to discuss performance and strategic direction and decisions. I have outlined below some of the key areas for delivering on our manifesto commitments and realised the Our Manchester strategy.

Improvement journey

A big focus for me has been to make sure that Children's Services is supported and challenged to continue to improve. Over the last 6 months we have had a peer challenge review from Leeds followed almost immediately by an Ofsted focused visit. The letter from the Ofsted visit was shared with this committee and I was pleased that Ofsted saw further improvements since 2017.

I was particularly pleased that the inspectors commented on the positivity and commitment of our staff and their feeling that they had manageable workloads and felt that there was visible leadership. Over the last 6 months I have visited teams across the city and across the service and I have been impressed by how positive staff are, and by the fact that staff feel positive about Manchester's children's services despite the huge challenges we face. Stable staffing and effective management is vital to our future success. I meet with Senior leaders to track performance monthly and I am pleased that average caseloads and management are now both within the ambitious targets we set.

I am committed to listening to young people. Young people continue to chair our Corporate Parenting Panel and these sessions are always fantastic. I have been promoting Corporate Parenting to more members and am pleased that there has been an increase in attendance. I have introduced a themed approach to Corporate Parenting Panels which has allowed us to focus on issues in more depth. We have focused on Education and Skills and on Social Value contributions and will be focusing on Housing in January which is an area our young people tell us they face big challenges in.

Leaving Care

I'm proud that our Labour manifesto committed us to exempting care leavers from Council Tax until they reach the age of 25 and that we have already implemented this change. As Corporate Parents we have a moral duty to give our young people the best start in life and this change is a recognition that we are committed to supporting our young people.

We have ambitious plans for our young people and to realise these ambitions we have brought our leaving care service "in house" with a longer term view to establishing a more independently run service. This is in line with our manifesto commitment to relaunch our offer for young people leaving our care.

We have committed to working alongside young people, with young people taking decisions on the board and working within the service. To give our young people the best start in their adult life we need to utilise all of the opportunities and networks that

we have- just as any parent would for their own child. We have begun to utilise the Council's Social Value policies to get support for our young people through mentoring, financial advice and creation of employment opportunities.

During the next 6 months the leaving care service will continue to be a specific focus for me and I will be working with the new service manager to make sure that the new service has all of the expertise and support it needs to support our young people including looking at whether the Council estate can be used to design an enhanced bespoke centre for our young people. I am also working with Suzanne Richards and housing colleagues to make sure that our young people can access the housing they need.

Placements for Our Children

I have been focused on helping and challenging Children's Services to increase the number of foster carers to support Our Children and am pleased that we continue to recruit carers and we are seeing net gains in the number of carers. We have arranged a Takeover Day in January to promote fostering and to try to encourage more people to consider whether it could be right for them.

We are still using too many high cost placements despite best efforts and we are struggling against national pressures in a market which does not meet the needs of our young people. A lot of work has been taking place between Children's Services and Health colleagues to see how we can provide better support for these young people who often have the highest needs.

Complex Safeguarding

Manchester's young people can face serious risks as a result of issues such as sexual exploitation and criminal exploitation and protecting children from these risks is of the utmost priority. We have established a Complex Safeguarding Hub in Manchester which is a multi agency hub with strong input from GMP. I attend Greater Manchester Children's Board which has been making sure that GM works together on these challenges. Exploiters don't recognise boundaries between local authorities and it is important that we work together to tackle these challenges. Manchester is rolling out a Trusted Relationships programme as part of the work to tackle these threats. I have visited the Complex Safeguarding Hub and seen the way that they are integrating their approach, with social work, GMP, Early Help and Missing from Home or Education teams based together to help build up vital information to protect children more effectively.

Serious youth violence is something which myself Cllr N Murphy and Cllr Rahman are focused on. Young people have told us- through the "make your mark ballot," that this is their number one concern and there is lots of work being undertaken with children's service, youth justice, schools and with youth services like Manchester Young Lives and Factory Youth Zone. In response to the Make you Mark Ballot, we are looking to make this a priority for the Manchester Children's Board.

Early Years

Manchester's Early Years Delivery Model is a key strength of our offer for families. Our integrated delivery with health visitors sees effective working for a universal offer and the ability to offer targeted support. I have visited Children's Centres and seen the benefits of this integrated working and the support families receive through outreach workers.

Our Manifesto committed us to build on Sure Start's Labour roots and to make sure that we give support to the families who need it most. Work has started on looking at where Early Years family support and Early Help could work to support families more effectively in a joined up way which could help us to do this. Child population pressures in Manchester mean that our Health Visitor service is stretched and I will be working with our public health team to support their business case for further investment in this vital service.

A key challenge for our Early Years system is to increase the take up of the 9 month and the 2 year check ups. I have challenged officers to prioritise this and there are a number of pilots taking place to look at how this can be improved. This has been discussed at the Committee and I hope to be able to look at this in more detail when the Committee next considers Early Years.

National policy changes have made it very challenging for private daycare providers in the city and we have seen a number of providers unable to continue operating. I have liaised with local ward members over daycare settings when issues arise and I have met regularly with the strategic lead for Early Years to ask that this issue is explored and we consider what steps we need to take to make sure that we have sufficient daycare places in our city.

Poverty and Austerity

One of the biggest challenges for our city is that we have a Government which is taking policy decisions which are increasing the levels of child poverty in our city. Families are increasingly struggling to house or feed themselves as a result of benefit changes. This presents a huge pressure to the Council as families need more support whilst our budget is reduced through austerity.

I have been shocked by the numbers of families who are forced to leave their homes and have to be housed temporarily. The disruption this causes to children can be really hard and the effects can be long lasting. I have worked with Cllrs Murphy, Richards and Craig to have regular conversations looking at how departments can work better together to support families facing homelessness. Cllr Sue Murphy leads on Homelessness for the Council but I want to make sure that I do everything I can to support her given the scale of the challenge in our city.

Local working

Central to Our Manchester is working with people in their neighbourhoods. Work has begun on looking at how Children's Services can integrate better with the services at a neighbourhood level and how Children's Social Work can work more effectively through

a locality model to develop stronger local partnerships. Both Ofsted and Leeds in our Peer Review pointed to the high levels of demand for statutory services in Manchester and a stronger local model gives us the opportunity to make sure that we are working with families as early as possible and in the way most likely to have an impact.

Early Help

Our Early Help offer is strong in Manchester and I have had the pleasure of visiting all of the Early Help Hubs in the last 6 months. The impact on families' lives is evident and I am impressed by the range of issues and problems which Early Help are able to support families with. Next year, Government funding through Troubled Families money is due to run out and a key challenge for me will be to consider how we can make sure that our Early Help offer continues to be strong and sustainable.

Youth

I am working with Councillor Rahman to develop a new Youth Strategy with a strong universal offer for all young people in Manchester but also targets additional support and engagement with those who need additional encouragement to access the offer. Council passed a motion to call for us to do all we can to promote youth services in Manchester and we will be working together to achieve this.

Young Carers

Before taking on the role of Executive Member I served as the Council's "Carers Champion" and attended the Carers Network meetings. Our Young Carers group in Manchester have done some fantastic work over the past couple of years but this has largely fallen on the shoulders of a small number of passionate young people. Recently the group produced a report on Young Carers in Manchester with specific requests for how we can help them to thrive. I met with the chair of the group and subsequently Council officers to discuss how we can take this forward. I am confident that we can make real progress to improve the experience for young carers in our city and will be focusing on this over the next 6 months.

Overall Children's Services continues to improve and I am pleased with the progress over the past 6 months. I have enjoyed meeting and engaging with staff across the service and despite the huge challenges we face. I have outlined some specific areas I have been focusing on to deliver on our Manifesto promises and to develop Our Manchester in Children's Services.