

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 21 June 2023

Present:

Councillor Reid – in the Chair
Councillors Alijah, N Ali, Amin, Bell, Fletcher, Gartside, Hewitson, Judge, Ludford, McHale and Nunney

Co-opted Voting Members:

Mr G Cleworth, Parent Governor Representative
Mr Y Yonis, Parent Governor Representative

Also present:

Councillor Bridges, Executive Member for Early Years, Children and Young People
Councillor Butt, Deputy Executive Member for Early Years, Children and Young People
Councillor Shilton Godwin, Chair of the Environment, Climate Change and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Committee
Councillor Muse, Ward Councillor for Ardwick
Luke Prosser, Loreto College
Helen Green, Loreto College

Apologies:

Councillors Lovecy and Sadler
Canon S Mapledoram, Representative of the Diocese of Manchester
Ms L Smith, Primary Sector Teacher Representative

CYP/23/24 Minutes

Decision

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 24 May 2023.

CYP/23/25 Update: Education Climate Change Action Plan 2022-24

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director of Children and Education Services which provided an update on work done by the Council to support the Education sector with decarbonisation since the publication of the Education Climate Change Action Plan in October 2022. It also outlined the plans for this work moving forwards, with the action plan refreshed bi-annually following on from several review points within the two years.

Key points and themes in the report included:

- Background information;
- Progress to date in relation to:
 - Campus;
 - Culture;

- Community; and
- Curriculum; and
- Future opportunities and intentions.

The Committee also received a presentation from Luke Prosser and Helen Green from Loreto College about the College's sustainability journey.

Key points and themes in the presentation included:

- The College's Sustainability Strategy;
- The reasons for introducing it; and
- How it was being achieved.

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

- To thank the representatives from Loreto College for their presentation and to welcome the work being done by the College;
- The environmental impact of journeys to school and what more could be done to promote behaviour change, particularly in relation to promoting active travel;
- Sharing good practice with other schools; and
- Decarbonisation of the schools' estate and the bid for funding for this work.

In response to a question from the Chair about twinning with schools in other countries, Helen Green from Loreto College reported that the College had international schools in countries such as India which the College engaged with and that they would be looking at what work they could do with them from an environmental perspective. She advised that Loreto also had other English schools, including one in Chorlton, and that the College, and Luke Prosser, in his role as Sustainability Manager, were leading on work with those schools on climate change. Luke Prosser explained that the Principal had given him freedom to work with anybody to tackle climate change and that he was open to any ways that he could help and share best practice. In response to a Member's question, he outlined the College's in-house carbon literacy training.

In response to a question from the Chair on allotments, the Project Manager (Educational Climate Change) informed Members that, from September, the National Education Nature Park would be rolled out across all Manchester schools to teach pupils about biodiversity and that biodiversity could be found in school grounds, and that the Department for Education would be providing some funding to improve biodiversity on school grounds. He explained how best practice was being shared through the green schools networks and a dedicated page on the Schools Hub. In response to questions about journeys to school, he informed Members about the Green Bee Relay, which encouraged active travel, the Governance Review Board which was being established and would be look at strategic issues like active travel on a wider scale, and the impact of the introduction of Our Pass, which provided free travel for 16 to 18-year-olds.

The Director of Education advised that ideally children should go to a local school and that most Manchester children did go to a local school; however, she advised

that, if they could not, they were entitled to a free travel pass. She reported that a lot of secondary school pupils travelled to school by bus but that, at primary, even if the school was local, a lot of pupils were taken by car and that a culture change was needed, using a range of methods such as challenges, competitions and pilot schemes.

The Chair expressed concern that the current allocation of school buses was unfair. She stated that she and the Chair of the Environment, Climate Change and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Committee had been raising this issue but that, with the introduction of bus franchising, Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) did not want to significantly change the bus network at present; however, she advised that they would continue to raise this. She also expressed concern that there would be a shortage of secondary school places in 2024, resulting in some children having to travel further. She highlighted the issue of homeless families being placed in temporary accommodation further away from their children's schools, while recognising the improvements being made in relation to homeless families.

The Project Manager (Educational Climate Change) reported that the five schools chosen for funding bids had been chosen on the basis of having the oldest boilers that were most in need of replacement and he explained how there would be an initial bid for low carbon skills funding which, if successful, would help with the design of the boilers and support the application for the public sector decarbonisation funding. In response to a question from the Chair of the Environment, Climate Change and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Committee about the levels of engagement from schools with climate change initiatives, he stated that schools had a number of competing demands on them and the networks were quite new so he was relatively happy with the initial uptake but was committed to continuing to work to build on this. He stated that the audit taking place in September to gauge the number of schools with a climate action plan would be useful for providing targeted support.

The Director of Education reported that the Council only had a small building maintenance budget for local authority-maintained schools but was linking in with the wider Council to access additional funding in order to do more. She stated that this had included doing condition surveys of schools which meant that, when new funding became available for school buildings, the Council already had information on which schools most needed this.

Decisions

1. To support the approach outlined within the Campus workstream, with the establishment of locality green school networks in North, Central and South Manchester to engage more schools in this work.
2. To recommend that consideration be given to partnering schools with allotments and parks.
3. To note that the Chair, along with the Chair of the Environment, Climate Change and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Committee, will continue to engage with TfGM on the allocation of school buses.

The Committee considered the report and presentation of the Strategic Director of Children and Education Services which highlighted Children's Services' and partners' response to the step change increase of Unaccompanied Asylum-seeking Children and young people (UASC) coming into Manchester.

Key points and themes in the report and presentation included:

- Background information;
- Profile and demographic; and
- Responding and meeting the needs of Manchester's UASC.

The Executive Member for Early Years, Children and Young People highlighted the problem of children who were initially assessed by the Home Office as being adults and placed in dispersal accommodation with adults and reported that the Council was lobbying on this issue.

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

- To welcome the work that the Council was doing to support UASC;
- To seek clarification on the process for age assessments;
- The education of UASC; and
- What happened while the young person was waiting for the age assessment to be completed.

In relation to age assessments, the Assistant Director (Children in Care and Care Leavers) explained that the Home Office undertook an initial screening, but that about 20% of these would be incorrect. She reported that, when they arrived in Manchester, either as a spontaneous arrival or via a dispersal hotel, her team undertook a brief enquiry to determine whether, in their professional opinion, they were presenting as under 18, in which case the Council had a duty to accommodate them. She advised that the team's social workers, who were trained in age assessments, then carried out an assessment process, which could take up to 45 days, based on observation, what the young person said and the relationship with the social workers involved in their assessment. The final assessment on the young person's age was then communicated to the Home Office. In response to a Member's question she reported that, if the person presenting could be a child, they were given "benefit of doubt" and accommodated while the assessment was being carried out. In response to a Member's question about how culturally aware and trauma-informed the social workers undertaking these assessments were, she reported that the New Arrivals team were from varied backgrounds and different countries of origin, including two former UASC, whose experiences had been invaluable. She advised that the whole team had been trained on trauma-informed practice and worked closely with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

The Assistant Director (Children in Care and Care Leavers) reported that, at the point of determining a young person's age, if they were of school age, her team would work closely with the Virtual School to get them on a school roll and into school as soon as possible. She advised that, for those over school age, ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) provision was a priority, again working with the Virtual School. In response to a comment from the Chair about the Communicate School, she stated that she would look into this. In response to a Member's question about high numbers of new arrivals being allocated to a specific school, the Strategic Director of Children and Education Services reported that this was more likely to relate to families with children arriving in the city rather than UASC but that, if the Member wanted to raise an issue about a specific school, this could be picked up after the meeting.

In response to a Member's question, the Strategic Lead for Homelessness and Migration confirmed that her service engaged with charities and with local colleges. She reported that the demand for ESOL courses in the city outstripped supply and that work was taking place to lobby on this issue and look for ways to increase funding for and provision of ESOL courses. In response to a question from the Chair, she reported that more males than females were coming into the UK seeking asylum. She stated that dispersal hotels were usually single sex and the ones in Manchester were for males, which was also part of the reason for the disparity in numbers.

In response to a question from the Chair about trafficking, the Deputy Strategic Director of Children's Services reported that this was part of the multi-agency complex safeguarding work and that he would ensure that information on trafficking was included in the next report that the Committee received on complex safeguarding.

Decisions

1. To note the impact of the increase in volume of UASC coming into the city and the wider socio-economic impact.
2. To endorse the decision that Manchester will 'opt out' of the National Transfer Scheme and will refer young people into the scheme as a response to our increase in number of UASC into the city, whilst acknowledging that this decision can be reviewed as young people naturally 'age out' of the system.
3. To recognise the service's response, whilst acknowledging the strength of the partnership work that has wrapped around our young people, in a 'child first' approach.

CYP/23/27 Fostering Recruitment and Retention Strategy 2023-25

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director of Children and Education Services which set out the Council's ambitions for the recruitment and retention of foster carers in Manchester. It identified the Council's recruitment targets and support offer and how it aimed to recruit and retain more foster carers for children who needed foster families.

Key points and themes in the report included:

- Being a Fostering Friendly Employer;
- The Our Manchester Offer to foster carers;
- Recruitment data;
- Looked After Children/needs analysis;
- Ambition for 2023 - 25;
- Ongoing work undertaken by the Recruitment and Assessment Team; and
- The development and implementation of the Mockingbird Family Model (MFM).

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

- To welcome the fantastic work that the Council was doing; and to recognise the vital role of foster carers and to express the Committee's thanks;
- To welcome that the Council now had Fostering Friendly Status;
- Noting a previous campaign to recruit foster carers from the Muslim community, were there any particular communities that were being targeted for foster carer recruitment, such as the Somali community;
- What were the barriers to fostering;
- Noting that the lack of a spare bedroom in their home prevented a lot of people from becoming foster carers; and
- What support was being provided to foster carers due to the cost-of-living crisis.

The Fostering Service Lead reported that there was a need for more Black African and Black Caribbean foster carers and that work was taking place, linking in with AFRUCA, to promote fostering in those communities. She stated that she would be happy to link in with any Councillors about promoting foster carer recruitment in local communities. In response to a Member's question, she stated that the Council had made enquiries with other organisations to get them interested in gaining Fostering Friendly Status and that it was hoped to hold a launch to promote this further.

The Assistant Director (Provider Services) stated that it could take an individual up to 5 years from first considering fostering and making enquiries to becoming a foster carer, because of the consideration given to making the decision, rather than because of delays by the Council. She stated that barriers were often specific to the individual but could include housing, the impact of fostering and increasingly being able to work from home, which could also impact on the availability of a spare bedroom. She highlighted the role of the Mockingbird Family Model in providing support to foster carers. She informed Members that a one-off additional payment had been made to foster carers to support them with the increased cost of living and that there was an annual increase in the level of remuneration for foster carers. In response to a question from the Chair, she stated that every local authority had a different offer and pay structure but Manchester's was competitive and one of the highest in Greater Manchester.

In response to a question from the Chair about supported lodgings becoming subject to regulation, the Strategic Director of Children and Education Services suggested that the Committee receive a report on the work to prepare for this, to which the Chair agreed.

The Chair suggested that different recruitment methods, such as using empty billboards, be used to recruit foster carers and that there should be increased use of kinship carers.

Decision

To receive a report on supported lodgings becoming subject to regulation and the work taking place to prepare for this.

CYP/23/28 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.