

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 5 February 2020

Present:

Councillor Stone – in the Chair

Councillors Alijah, Hewitson, Kilpatrick, Lovecy, McHale, Madeleine Monaghan, Reid, Sadler and Wilson

Co-opted Voting Members:

Ms Z Derraz, Parent Governor Representative

Ms S Barnwell, Parent Governor Representative

Dr W Omara, Parent Governor Representative

Co-opted Non Voting Members:

Mr L Duffy, Secondary Sector Teacher Representative

Ms J Fleet, Primary Sector Teacher Representative

Also present:

Councillor Leese, Leader of the Council

Councillor Bridges, Executive Member for Children and Schools

Councillor Ollerhead, Executive Member for Finance and Human Resources

Councillor Flanagan, Ward Councillor for Miles Platting and Newton Heath

Detective Superintendent Jamie Daniels, Greater Manchester Police (GMP)

Apologies:

Councillors Cooley, T Judge and Reeves

Mrs J Miles, Diocese of Salford Representative

CYP/20/08 Minutes

Decision

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 8 January 2020.

CYP/20/09 Publication of Greater Manchester Mayor, Independent Assurance review of the effectiveness of multi-agency responses to child exploitation in Greater Manchester

The Committee received a report of the Strategic Director of Children and Education Services which informed Members of the work that had been undertaken within the Council following the issues being raised that led to the Mayor's Independent Assurance Review and provided reassurance that the response to the exploitation and abuse of children had strengthened significantly in Manchester.

The Chair began by stating that this was an issue of great concern to the Committee and that their thoughts were with the people affected. He advised that the Committee had scrutinised the work on complex safeguarding over the past few years, through report and visits, but still had questions and concerns that they wanted to raise through this meeting.

The Deputy Director of Children's Services introduced the report, highlighting that the Council had been pro-actively working with GMP to make improvements in response to the emerging findings from the review, without waiting for the report to be published. He also advised that, where appropriate, employees from the time period that the report covered had been referred to the relevant regulatory body.

The Executive Member for Children and Schools drew Members' attention to the statements that the Council had issued following the publication of the report. He advised the Committee that there had been significant changes made since the time period which the report covered but that the Council could not be complacent on this issue.

The Leader outlined his role in safeguarding, following the introduction of the Children Act 2004, which had been implemented in 2006. He informed Members that he was responsible for ensuring the adequacy of the Council's safeguarding responsibilities and outlined how he did this. This included monthly meetings with the Executive Member for Children and Schools and quarterly meetings with the Chief Executive and Executive Members and members of the Senior Leadership Team with responsibility for safeguarding adults and children, where performance indicators were reviewed and issues discussed.

The Chair highlighted that at the meeting of the Council on 29 January 2020 Members had agreed a pledge on safeguarding children.

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

- The issue of Manchester children being placed in homes outside of the city and non-Manchester children being placed in homes within the city and how to ensure safeguarding in these cases;
- How patriarchal attitudes at the time contributed to an environment where the sexual abuse of girls was not effectively challenged;
- Problems with GMP's new computer system iOPS;
- What was being done to engage with shopkeepers and others in busy retail districts who might spot issues of concern in their area;
- Working effectively with other Council services, such as taxi licensing, to address child sexual exploitation;
- Concerns that the team undertaking the review had not been able to obtain all the relevant information and, that, in addition to the ongoing criminal investigation, further investigation should take place of the failings of the Council;
- Changes in the methods being used to groom children, including via social media; and
- That all Councillors would receive training on issues such as their corporate parenting responsibilities and the exploitation of children and that, as the perpetrators in these cases had come from particular communities, Ward Councillors from these communities could play an important role.

The Deputy Director of Children's Services informed Members of the safeguards in place for children living in residential children's homes, regardless of where the home was. These included visits from Social Workers, reviews of the care plans for individual children by an Independent Reviewing Officer, oversight of homes from commissioning services, inspection and monitoring visits from independent professionals under Regulation 44 of the Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 and regulation by Ofsted. A Member expressed concern about the regulations relating to children from outside Manchester being placed in commissioned homes in Manchester, advising that Members should campaign for the legislation to be changed to require the child's Social Worker to report to the authorities in Manchester. The Leader supported this comment, adding that at present small children's homes did not require planning permission and often the Council and GMP did not know they were there until there was a problem.

In response to a Member's comments, the Deputy Director of Children's Services informed Members that it was clear that children in the city remained vulnerable to exploitation and were experiencing exploitation and, while recognising that improvements had been made, he assured Members that neither the Council nor GMP were complacent on this issue.

The Strategic Head of Early Help outlined the work taking place through the Community Safety Partnership to reduce and prevent harm, through engaging with a wide network of organisations such as hotels and licensing and trading services. She also assured Members that the Council and GMP were committed to acting on the lessons learnt from past failings. She advised Members that it was recognised that young adults were also vulnerable to exploitation and a co-ordinated approach was being adopted to prevent and address the exploitation of both children and vulnerable adults.

Detective Superintendent Jamie Daniels offered GMP's apologies for the failings and mistakes of the past in responding to child sexual exploitation. He addressed the Member's comments regarding the iOPS system, acknowledging the challenges it had presented; however, he reported that the key problem with how the force had dealt with child sexual exploitation in the past had not been record-keeping but that it had not been a high enough priority. He assured Members of the high priority that this was now being given, outlining how GMP's safeguarding teams worked in partnership with the Council and shared information, and he updated them on the recent successes which had resulted in offenders being charged. He informed the Committee that he hoped that this would enable them to rebuild the trust of victims who had been failed in the past. The Chair welcomed that officers from GMP had attended recent scrutiny committee meetings, where relevant, and stated that he hoped this would continue.

The Executive Member for Children and Schools advised the Committee that many Ward Councillors had a good knowledge of what was happening in their area and that they and other people in their local areas and retail centres needed to know where to report safeguarding concerns. He informed Members that meetings would be set up in localities so that people knew who to contact and that he would circulate details of these meetings to Ward Councillors.

The Leader outlined the weaknesses in information-sharing between GMP and the Council in the time period covered by the report and the challenges in obtaining and sharing information from that time period now. He reported that, although no minutes were available of the gold group meeting which had taken place at the Town Hall in April 2005, the decision to end Operation Augusta had already been taken earlier in the day by GMP and he highlighted that, while this was the wrong decision, GMP had been prioritising based on the measures of police effectiveness set down by the Home Office and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary. He advised the Committee that the Coroner's report into the death of Victoria Agoglia was a sealed file which the Council did not have access to and that the Coroner was accountable to the Chief Coroner, not to either Manchester City Council or Rochdale Borough Council, of which he was an employee. In response to a Member's request, the Leader agreed to write to the Coroner to ask that the file on the death of Victoria Agoglia be released.

The Leader highlighted that Victoria Agoglia's mother had been in the care system herself, under the care of Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council, and had later died of a drug overdose and that there had been a systemic failure which had allowed this to be repeated. He reported that, through the use of early intervention and early help, Manchester City Council aimed to break these cycles, although he acknowledged that there was still more work to do to improve the outcomes for Our Children (Looked After Children).

The Leader expressed concern that, where offenders were prosecuted through Operation Augusta, the offences they were prosecuted for and the sentences received did not reflect the severity of the abuse. He advised Members that, unfortunately, there was a propensity, both then and now, for juries to disbelieve the principal witness because they were a child who the prosecution could describe as a drug-taker and a child prostitute. He informed Members about ongoing work to identify and pursue perpetrators and advised that this prevented complete transparency, as sharing information could risk alerting perpetrators that they were being investigated.

The Chair commented that sentencing from more recent cases indicated that this issue was being treated more seriously now.

The Deputy Director of Children's Services advised the Committee that discussions had taken place with social services staff from this time period who were still employed by the Council, that it had not been judged that their conduct met the threshold for referral to the regulator and that they had been made aware of the Council's whistleblowing policy, in case there were any issues they wished to raise.

A Member requested an update on the phase of the review referred to in section 1.4 of the assurance review of Operation Augusta. Detective Superintendent Jamie Daniels advised that he would provide a written response to this query.

Detective Superintendent Jamie Daniels reported that, while for crimes such as burglaries and robberies the police were dealing predominately with adults who they were easily able to engage with and obtain evidence and statements from, the

victims of some types of crimes, including child sexual exploitation, had complex needs and additional vulnerability. He advised that in the past, the response had often been to disregard these victims because of these challenges, rather than recognising that they should be provided with additional support. He confirmed that there were still offenders who had not been brought to justice and advised that part of the approach to addressing this was for GMP to try to re-build trust with victims so that they felt confident to go through the criminal justice system. He provided information about the GMP teams currently working to bring these offenders to justice. The Leader reported that many of the victims had chosen to get on with their lives and did not welcome being contacted by the police and that it was important to be sensitive to their privacy and needs and the risk of re-traumatising them.

Detective Superintendent Jamie Daniels acknowledged that the methods being used to groom children were evolving. He reported that detailed examination of the cases referred to the Complex Safeguarding Hub, along with information from national sources, were being used to identify and address new methods being used.

Decisions

1. To emphasise the role that departments across the Council and external organisations, including the voluntary and community sector, have in addressing child sexual exploitation.
2. That the Committee will continue to monitor complex safeguarding at future meetings.
3. That this work will also be monitored through the Corporate Parenting Panel, which all Members are encouraged to attend.
4. To thank Detective Superintendent Jamie Daniels and his colleagues at GMP and to look forward to continuing to build the relationship with GMP.

CYP/20/10 Planning for Ofsted's 'Proportionate' Inspection of Manchester's Children's Services - April 2020 to April 2021

The Committee received a presentation of the Strategic Director of Children and Education Services which provided information on the planning for Ofsted's 'proportionate' inspection of Manchester's Children's Services.

The Deputy Director of Children's Services referred to the main points and themes within the presentation which included:

- Information on Ofsted's new ILACS (Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services) Framework, which was implemented in 2018;
- Areas of focus for the ILACS;
- The process for an ILACS; and
- Planned activity during 2020/21.

The Committee recognised the progress that had been since the 2014 Ofsted inspection.

In response to a Member's question, the Deputy Director of Children's Services reported that the Signs of Safety model worked to build on a family's strengths but with a clear focus on risk, understanding the risks and the contribution of partners in ameliorating risk.

In response to a Member's question on Social Workers' workloads and the stability of the social work workforce, the Executive Member for Children and Schools advised the Committee that Ofsted had recognised that the Council was addressing this. He informed Members that money had been set aside in the budget for this and that further details would be included in a future report.

Decision

That the Committee will continue to monitor this work in the lead up to the next Ofsted inspection.

CYP/20/11 The Council's Updated Financial Strategy and Budget reports 2020/21

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Executive and the Deputy Chief Executive and City Treasurer, which provided an update on the Council's overall financial position and set out the next steps in the budget process, including scrutiny of the budget proposals and budget report by this Committee.

In conjunction to the above, the Committee also considered the Children and Education Services Budget 2020/21 which provided the final budget proposals following the contents of the provisional Local Government Settlement received late December 2019 and feedback from scrutiny committees during January 2020. In addition, the Committee received the School Budgets 2020/21 which provided a summary of the confirmed Dedicated School Grant (DSG) allocation from the 2020/21 settlement announced on 19 December 2019, and the budget allocation across individual school budgets and Council-retained schools budgets.

The proposed 2020/21 budget reflected the fact the Council had declared a climate emergency by making carbon reduction a key consideration in the Council's planning and budget proposals.

The Executive Member for Finance and Human Resources outlined the national context within which the budget was being set, highlighting the significant decrease in funding to the Council since 2010.

The Ward Councillor for Miles Platting and Newton Heath highlighted the issue of homeless families being placed in temporary accommodation in a different area and who would fund transport to school, where it was in the child's interests to continue to attend their existing school. The Executive Member for Children and Schools outlined how Executive Members were working together to look at how services could be better co-ordinated to address homelessness and meet the needs of people who were homeless. He reported that he would also be meeting with the Strategic Director of Children and Education Services, the Director of Homelessness and

Deputy Leader Councillor Sue Murphy to consider how Children's Services and the Homelessness Service could work better together to support homeless families. He advised that he would take forward the issue raised by the Member. The Chair requested that the Committee receive a report at a future meeting on this area of work. A Member questioned whether a joint subgroup should be established with the Neighbourhoods and Environment Scrutiny Committee to look at this issue in more detail. The Chair advised that he would not be recommending this at this time but that he would speak to the Chair of the Neighbourhoods and Environment Scrutiny Committee about how best to scrutinise this subject.

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

- Educational Psychology including the overspend and the future commissioning arrangements;
- That the Troubled Families grant had recently been confirmed for a further year by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government and was the Council prepared if this funding was not continued in future years; and
- That additional money had been allocated to the High Needs Block of the DSG but that this followed several years of the funding being frozen when the number of pupils in Manchester was increasing.

In response to points raised by Members in relation to fostering, adoption and residential placements, the Chair advised Members that these issues were regularly discussed at the Corporate Parenting Panel, which all Members were invited to attend, and that reports on these issues would also be considered at future Committee meetings.

The Director of Education informed Members that there had been an overspend on the Educational Psychology budget because of the increasing numbers of children with an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) and she outlined when Educational Psychology services were used in relation to EHCPs. She reported that the Council would be carrying out an open tender for Educational Psychology services. The Chair requested that the Committee receive a short note in a future Overview Report on the tendering process for the Educational Psychology service.

The Deputy Director of Children's Services reported that plans had been made to spend the Troubled Families funding which had recently been confirmed, stating that this work was well-evaluated, achieving good outcomes and providing value for money. The Head of Finance advised that this was a one-year budget and that, if no further funding was provided by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government for this programme, the Council would need to make a decision in next year's budget process about what its priorities were.

Decisions

1. To agree the strategy outlined in the reports.
2. To request that the Committee receive a report on the work taking place to better co-ordinate services to support families, children and young people affected by homelessness.

3. To request a short note in a future Overview Report on the tendering process for the Educational Psychology service.

CYP/20/12 School Place Planning and Admissions

The Executive Member for Children and Schools outlined the process that was currently taking place regarding the proposal to close Newall Green High School, advising that this was not the Council's decision. He informed Members that the Council had written to the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Department for Education to oppose the closure. A copy of the letter that the Executive Member had written to the Regional Schools Commissioner was shared with the Committee.

The Executive Member for Children and Schools advised that closing Newall Green High School was not in the interests of the children at the school and their families and that there was not capacity elsewhere within the school system to accommodate all the children if this school did close. He informed Members that the Council had discussed with the Trust which ran the school some options to address the budget concerns which had led to their proposal to close the school. He reported that he was also awaiting a response from the Regional Schools Commissioner.

Members discussed their concerns at the proposed closure of the school, including concerns for the children and staff affected and that high schools in south Manchester were increasingly clustered around one area, with children in Wythenshawe having less local provision. A Member advised that, although a listening period was taking place, she felt as though a decision had already been made.

In response to a Member's question, the Executive Member for Children and Schools reported that the Council did not have any formal powers in relation to this decision but he outlined what the Council was doing to try to influence the decision, including lobbying at the highest level and meeting with the Trust to try to identify a solution.

The Chair recommended that the Committee endorse the letter which the Executive Member for Children and Schools had sent to the Regional Schools Commissioner, opposing the closure of the school.

The Committee received a report of the Director of Education which provided an update on school admissions for the academic year 2019/20 along with plans for creating additional capacity in response to forecast demand across primary and secondary schools. The report stated that investment in modern, energy efficient and high quality education infrastructure would drive reductions in carbon across the estate of schools.

The Committee was invited to comment on the report prior to its submission to the Executive on 12 February 2020.

Officers referred to the main points and themes within the report which included:

- School admission applications 2019/20;
- School population forecast;
- Approach to securing sufficient school places; and
- Actions to secure sufficient school places, including proposals for a new primary school and a new secondary school and the expansion of Dean Trust Ardwick.

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

- The geographical spread of schools, particularly the number of high schools in the West Didsbury and Chorlton area;
- The importance of taking into account future housing development when planning for school places;
- Whether maintained schools could still voluntarily convert to academies;
- Whether it was appropriate for International New Arrivals with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) to initially be placed in a mainstream school while they were assessed; and
- The challenge for small schools expanding from one-form entry to two- or three-form entry.

The Director of Education reported that the Council wanted to have a good geographical spread of schools across the city but that it was challenging to identify suitable, available land across the city to build new schools, particularly high schools. She reported that her service worked with housing colleagues to understand future housing development and that this had been factored into the plans outlined in the report. She confirmed that maintained schools could still opt to become academies but that fewer schools were now choosing to do so. She advised that it was not always clear what level of assessment International New Arrivals with SEND had had and that sometimes once they were placed in a mainstream school, had had their needs assessed and had settled in this was the right setting for them; however, she advised that officers were reviewing arrangements for how best to quickly settle this group of children and get an understanding what their needs were. She acknowledged that it was a challenge for small schools to expand to two- or three-form entry but advised that the Council was able to offer them support through this.

In a response to a Member's question, the Head of Access advised that she would provide him with data on the number of school appeals and how many were successful.

Decisions

1. To record the Committee's opposition to the proposed closure of Newall Green High School and to endorse the letter which the Executive Member for Children and Schools has sent to the Regional Schools Commissioner
2. To endorse the recommendations to the Executive that they:
 1. Note the data relating to September 2019 admissions;

2. Note the pupil forecasts submitted to the Department for Education (DfE) during summer 2019;
3. Support the principle that Basic Need funding is used to fund the new high school and contribute towards the development of the city centre school;
4. Agree that the Council undertakes consultation to gather views on the plans to develop a new primary school in the city centre and a new secondary school in east Manchester as a first step towards identifying a provider for the new school; and
5. Delegate responsibility to the Director of Education in consultation with the Executive Member for Children's Services to:
 - progress the publication of a specification for each new school and invitations to sponsor based on the outcomes of the consultation.
 - Identify a preferred sponsor for each school to be recommended to the DfE.

CYP/20/13 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.

A Member requested a response to the previous recommendation that further information be provided on the number of siblings who had been allocated places at different schools. The Head of Access confirmed that she would provide this.

Decision

To note the report and agree the work programme.