

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 9 September 2020

This Scrutiny meeting was conducted via Zoom, in accordance with the provisions of the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020.

Present:

Councillor Stone – in the Chair
Councillors Sameem Ali, Hewitson, T Judge, Kilpatrick, Lovecy, Madeleine Monaghan, Reeves, Reid and Wilson

Co-opted Voting Members:

Ms S Barnwell, Parent Governor Representative
Ms Z Derraz, Parent Governor Representative

Co-opted Non Voting Members:

Mr L Duffy, Secondary Sector Teacher Representative

Also present:

Councillor Bridges, Executive Member for Children and Schools

Apologies:

Councillors Alijah, Cooley and McHale
Ms J Fleet, Primary Sector Teacher Representative
Dr W Omara, Parent Governor Representative

CYP/20/30 Dr Omara

The Chair informed the Committee that this was Dr Omara's last meeting as a Co-opted Member of the Committee, although unfortunately he had been unable to attend due to another commitment. He reported that Dr Omara had been a valuable Member of the Committee and advised that he would write to him to thank him for his contribution.

Decision

That the Chair will write to Dr Omara to thank him for his contribution to the work of the Committee.

CYP/20/31 Minutes

Decision

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 22 July 2020.

CYP/20/32 September opening of schools and colleges for all children and young people

The Committee received a report of the Director of Education which provided an overview of the work that had taken place in Manchester to support the reopening of schools and colleges for all children and young people in response to the most recent Government guidance which was also summarised in the report. The report also noted that, through the learning and education system, children were informed about and understood environmental issues and the negative impact of carbon; promoting safe and healthy lives.

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

- Government guidance;
- Implementation in Manchester;
- Supporting pupils to attend school;
- School operations;
- Curriculum offer;
- Continuity planning;
- Mental health and wellbeing;
- Safeguarding; and
- School/college workforce.

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

- To thank everyone involved for their work in re-opening schools to all pupils;
- How the position of schools would be reviewed if infection levels increased significantly and increased lockdown restrictions were required;
- The mental health impact of the pandemic on both pupils and staff;
- The additional funding that had been made available to schools;
- The use of bubbles in schools, noting that many households would have more than one child in different bubbles;
- Request that the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) documents being shared with schools also be circulated to Members of the Committee;
- Discussion about the wearing of face coverings by secondary school pupils when moving around school and whether these should also be worn in the classroom;
- Concerns about the potential for the transmission of the virus outside of school, for example, from parents congregating at the school gate and from secondary school pupils mixing on the way home; and
- The impact on children transitioning to the next stage of their education who had not had the normal support through the transition period.

The Executive Member for Children and Schools recognised the hard work involved in re-opening schools to all pupils and thanked all those involved. He expressed concern that new Government guidance had been issued shortly before the start of term, which had presented challenges for schools as they had already made plans.

The Director of Education drew Members' attention to the Government guidance on schools, which included four tiers of restrictions for education settings. She reported that, despite local restrictions in Manchester, schools were currently operating at Tier 1, where schools were open to all pupils; however, if necessary, a decision could be taken to move to Tier 2, where secondary school pupils would attend school on a rota basis, Tier 3, where secondary schools would be closed to most pupils and, in the most serious circumstances, Tier 4, where primary schools would also be closed. She advised Members that, under all these circumstances, schools would still be open for the children of key workers and vulnerable children, as they had been during the full lockdown earlier in the year. She informed Members that the Government guidance was to not require pupils to wear face coverings in the classroom on the basis that this impeded teaching and meant that pupils would be wearing them for long periods but that the rules on this were at the discretion of individual schools. The Consultant in Public Health advised the Committee that schools had reviewed their classroom layouts, for example, making sure that pupils were not facing each other at close proximity so this reduced the risk of transmission in classrooms in a way that was not always possible when groups of pupils were moving around school corridors. In response to a Member's question, the Director of Education clarified that pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) were not required to wear a face covering.

The Director of Education advised the Committee that a lot of work was taking place to support the mental health of pupils but agreed that support for teachers should also be considered and she suggested that this could be raised with schools through the Headteacher briefings and Chair of Governor briefings. She clarified that schools had been provided with additional funding from the Government, which they could use however they thought best to support pupils to catch up on missed learning, and that there was separate provision for subsidised tuition through the Education Endowment Fund, although schools had to pay the rest of the cost of this tuition.

The Consultant in Public Health advised the Committee that the purpose of bubbles was to enable the quick identification and isolation of close contacts of an infected person. She acknowledged that this was complicated because each pupil within a bubble would also have other close contacts, such as other family members, and she advised that, if that child subsequently tested positive, the rest of their household would also have to isolate.

The Director of Education advised that a few schools had experienced problems in the first week with parents gathering around school gates when dropping off and collecting their children and that the Council had offered support to the schools on managing this situation. She informed the Committee that no schools had contacted her service to report problems with this in the second week of term so it would appear that these issues had been resolved. She advised Members that a letter had been sent out to parents at the end of the last term about the importance of them working with schools to ensure that procedures were followed and that it would be worth sending another letter to remind them of this. She also stated that she would circulate the FAQs to schools to Members of the Committee.

The Director of Education reported that every school would receive a visit from a member of the Quality Assurance Team during the Autumn term to look at how

schools were managing, including where they were up to in teaching the full curriculum, what their remote learning plan was and which children had the greatest gaps in their learning which they needed support to catch up on. She advised Members that this would include how children entering Year 7 were doing, considering that they would not have had gone through the normal transition process to prepare them for secondary school.

Decisions

1. To have a standing item on future agendas on the response to COVID-19, including updates on schools, for as long as is necessary.
2. To note that the Director of Education will circulate the FAQs that have been sent to schools to Members of the Committee.

CYP/20/33 Working With Children and Young People and Their Families During COVID-19

The Committee received a presentation from Children's Services which provided an overview of how Children's Services was working with children and young people and their families during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Head of Locality (North) delivered the presentation which referred to:

- The service's principles, approach, behaviours and impact;
- Response to the pandemic and initial crisis management;
- Creative responses in practice;
- Quality assurance and performance; and
- Next steps.

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

- Preparations for a potential increase in referrals following the re-opening of schools to all pupils;
- Availability of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE);
- Concern that supervised contact visits between children and their families had not been able to take place;
- Concern about young people being at risk of criminal exploitation and involvement in knife crime over the summer; and
- Concerns about the level of funding from the Government and the impact on Children's Services.

The Deputy Director of Children's Services reported that some modelling had taken place in relation to future demand for social work services following the lockdown but that this was difficult to do without past similar events to compare it to. He informed the Committee about the planning taking place for a potential increase in demand, including engagement with a range of partners such as school clusters, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and Greater Manchester Police (GMP), consideration of staffing levels and ensuring that the front door service and the

provision of advice and guidance were as robust as they could be. He also confirmed that, beyond the first week or two of the lockdown, Children's Services had not had any issues with the availability of PPE.

The Deputy Director of Children's Services reported that planning had been taking place for the re-opening of centres for supervised contact and that two contact centres were re-opening that week. He outlined the work of the Complex Safeguarding Hub, the Community Safety Partnership and GMP in addressing child criminal exploitation and knife crime, including joint working using intelligence to target specific areas or individuals where there were concerns. The Director of Children and Education Services highlighted the role of the Inclusion Strategy in preventing young people from being excluded and becoming exposed to negative influences and the Youth Offer which had been available over the summer.

Decision

To thank officers for an informative presentation and to pass on the Committee's thanks to frontline social work staff and other key workers.

CYP/20/34 Early Years sector update and the response to COVID-19

The Committee received a report of the Director of Education which provided an update on how the Early Years sector had responded to the COVID-19 pandemic and gave an update on the key activities that had taken place to support the Early Years sector and plans to support providers moving forward in the Autumn term. The report also stated that education about the environment started in Early Years and a high quality Early Years sector supported this agenda. In addition, the buildings review of the Tendered Day Care Sites would enable the sites to have greater energy rating efficiency.

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

- Response and financial support to the Early Years sector during COVID-19;
- Quality assurance support for the Early Years sector during the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Changes to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Framework;
- Review of day care provision in Sure Start Children's centres; and
- Next steps.

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

- That the support the Council had provided to Early Years providers had been excellent;
- Concerns about the financial position of Early Years providers, particularly loss of income from private fee-paying families, as the funding commitment from the Government did not include this;
- That parents were concerned about sending their children back to Early Years settings due to COVID-19; and

- Reforms to the EYFS Framework.

The Senior School Quality Assurance Officer advised that his team was regularly engaging with and offering support to the Early Years sector regarding the financial challenges they were facing during the pandemic. He reported that a significant majority of Early Years settings across the city had re-opened but acknowledged that there were concerns about a loss of income from private fee-paying families and reported that his service would continue to offer support and advice to providers. He advised Members that work was taking place with the Quality Assurance Team, Outreach Workers, the Communications Team and Early Years providers to communicate to parents that measures had been taken to make settings safe for their children to return to. He informed the Committee that it was hoped that attendance would continue to increase and that attendance figures would be monitored over the next month.

The Executive Member for Children and Schools thanked staff in the Early Years sector across the city, noting that some settings had been open through the lockdown period. The Chair echoed these thanks.

The Head of School Quality Assurance and Strategic SEND advised that, due to the Early Years reforms, the baseline of children's levels at the end of the EYFS would no longer be available as a basis for measuring progress through primary school. She also highlighted the focus on reading comprehension in the new Framework, informing the Committee that increasing numbers of children in Manchester's Early Years settings had English as an Additional Language (EAL) and that these children usually made more progress in this area further on in primary school; however, the progress made later on would be difficult to show without the baseline data. She advised Members that previous work to improve reading levels, such as the Every Child A Reader initiative, had been very successful, with work which had taken place 10 or 11 years ago being reflected in improved attainment at high school for that cohort of children. She reported that, prior to the pandemic, it had been noticed that this approach had become diluted, that work had been started to re-focus on improving reading and comprehension at an early age and that this work would continue. She reported that there was no clear picture yet of how school readiness would be assessed under the Early Years reforms. The Chair and the Executive Member for Children and Schools both expressed their concern about the Early Years reforms.

Decision

To note the report and to continue to monitor the Early Years reforms.

CYP/20/35 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.