

**Manchester City Council
Report for Information**

Report to: Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee – 17 July 2019

Subject: Delivering the Our Manchester Strategy

Report of: Executive Member for Children and Schools

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 and Schools.

Recommendations

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

Contact:

Name: Councillor Garry Bridges
Position: Executive Member for Children and Schools
Tel: 0161 234 3250
Email: cllr.g.bridges@manchester.gov.uk

Over the last twelve months there has been significant progress in delivering the Our Manchester Strategy, the Labour Manchester Manifesto and continuing the Children's Services improvement journey.

Our staff

Since in post, we have received a focus visit from Ofsted which recognised further improvements from the last full inspection. The inspector's comments on the commitment, passion and morale of staff- front line, managers and senior leaders.

I have focused on our staff throughout the year- regularly visiting teams across the service and speaking to them about their work and the challenges they face. This has been hugely important to me in keeping close to the practice of our frontline workforce when making decisions which impact them. I am pleased that we have much less reliance on agency staff and a relatively stable workforce now. This continues to be a priority as we can only make the changes we want to see with a stable team.

Leaving Care Service

The young people leaving our care has been a big priority and there have been some key changes in the last year, including the decision to take the leaving care service back "in house." This honoured a Manifesto commitment to relaunch our leaving care service and has seen recruitment to key posts including the service manager and team managers. I have worked closely with the Leaving Care Service and it's board governance which has 2 care experienced young people as vice chairs. There has been lots of innovations involving other Council departments and the private sector to offer learning and employment opportunities for our young people. I have also worked closely with Executive colleagues Cllr Sue Murphy and Cllr Richards on a young people's accommodation pathway to see homelessness designed out of the system for Our Young People. This was enshrined in a Council motion which committed our Council to end intentional homelessness for care experienced young people. Alongside this we have made our care leavers exempt from Council Tax until the age of 25 and are working on additional entitlements including offering supported travel costs.

Transition for our young people leaving care is a huge challenge and one of the drivers behind taking the leaving care service "in house" was to get better coordination with social workers and other partners and help us to plan better for their futures.

We recently hosted a peer review from Havering which looked at the Leaving Care service and gave a presentation about their findings. They were impressed with staff commitment and passion and said that the decision to take the service "in house" appeared to have generated much more collective ownership and responsibility for our young people.

I was pleased to take a paper to Executive asking for up to £1.2 million for an investment in a former residential accommodation in order to provide a new home for the leaving care service and a combination of trainer and tester flats. Finding the right

home and getting the right support to maintain it is really difficult and I am pleased that we have made this investment in supporting more of our young people.

Children's Services Improvements

Over the past year we have been developing a "locality based model" with new front door arrangements which prioritise local relationships and conversations over one based on paper referrals. I have spoken to staff across departments who are very positive about the change as it potentially means that families get more appropriate support at an earlier opportunity. Initial pilots have shown that there is a reduction in the demand on our services, with partners taking more ownership of issues which families present to them, allowing social workers to focus on challenging and complex cases rather than spending time on referrals which are not progressed. This is due to be rolled out alongside a change in the IT system which our social workers use and a paper will be coming back to scrutiny. Whilst this has a lot of potential, it is important that the arrangements are monitored robustly.

I have regular sessions with senior leaders focused on quality of practice and have been discussing with the newly appointed Head of Safeguarding the need to refresh the audit framework and the reporting of learning from audits to support improvements in practice. Despite regular positive feedback, the need to embed consistency and demonstrate impact is something which inspectors and reviewers pick up on and it is important that our auditing supports this.

Children in Manchester are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse from criminals and it is a priority for Children's Services to keep these children safe. There have been lots of initiatives rolled out over the past 12 months to achieve this aim including the establishment of the Complex Safeguarding Hub, Achieving Change Together, Adverse Childhood Experiences and No Wrong Door. We invited the Local Government Association to Peer Review the Child Sexual Exploitation response through the Complex Safeguarding Hub and they offered useful feedback whilst generally complimenting the partnership approach to protecting children and the joint work with Police to disrupt and prosecute offenders. The challenges children face are complex and we need to be constantly developing our response to keep them safe. Over the next 12 months my Assistant Executive will be working on a project looking at how to support adolescents and their families through Children's Services and Targeted Youth work.

Making sure that children in Manchester get the best start in life is one of the most important things we can do for our city. A key manifesto pledge is to look at our Early Years offer and to work toward a renewed model to support this and to improve outcomes for our children. We have some impressive strengths to build on but there are gaps we must address, including connectivity with health services and midwifery and take up of health assessments at 9months and 2 years. A key priority for the next 12 months will be to look at how we can make sure we are providing all families with the support they need and identifying issues families need more help with as early as possible. To support that I will be looking at our relationship with partners in the city including health and education. Last year we launched the "Reducing Infant Mortality" strategy which is a key aim for the city and needs to be fully integrated with the Early Years model.

Our relationship with health and social care systems is one which presents opportunities to improve outcomes for our young people but only if done properly. I have recently joined the Manchester Health and Care Commissioning Board and will be exploring how we can make our health systems work better for young people in the city.

Promoting Inclusion and Preventing Exclusions

My portfolio has recently been expanded to include schools, which I am pleased with as it gives me the opportunity to focus on issues which cut across those briefs. One key area which is a priority for me over the coming year is the launch of the "Promoting Inclusion and Preventing Exclusions Strategy." Exclusions have gone up across the country and in Manchester. We know that children's outcomes and life chances permanently worsen as a result of exclusion and that they immediately become more at risk through safeguarding concerns. The strategy has been widely consulted on and will be formally launched in Autumn term alongside an implementation plan focusing on how all partners can support our children to stay in school. Alongside this I want to see a review of our Alternative Provision to make sure that the right support is in place so that as many of our young people as possible are supported back into mainstream education and that they are engaged in activity that is right for them and leads them to positive outcomes.

SEND

Manchester is due a SEND inspection and I will be working with the Director of Education to make sure that young people with additional needs can get the support they need. The High Needs Block in Manchester is under severe pressure because of rising demand and Council previously agreed to invest additional resources to increase specialist provision in the city. I want to make sure that there is enough capacity so that our children with additional learning needs get the support they need to achieve their full potential in a setting that is right for them. I have worked with campaigners to highlight the lack of proper national funding for SEND and will continue to do so.

Poverty and homelessness

A big challenge remains the amount of families living in poverty and the associated crisis of rising homelessness. The Government has made families in Manchester increasingly precarious through benefit cuts and restrictions leading to more homelessness. The impact this has on a child is huge and I have been working with Cllr Sue Murphy, Cllr Suzanne Richards and senior officers to push for better understanding of the impact on children in a family. This is a huge problem in our city.

Serious youth violence

Another area of portfolio overlap is the issue of serious youth violence. I have chaired sessions at the Corporate Parenting Panel looking at youth justice for the children in our care and have visited our Youth Justice offices in the city. I have worked with Cllr Nigel Murphy and Cllr Rahman along with senior officers to push for a coordinated

approach to serious youth violence and the risks that criminal activity pose to children and will continue to do so.

Budget

All of the challenges above need to be tackled in the context of austerity which has seen our budget cut every year since 2010. Last year, the Children's Services budget received support from the Council through one off pots of money to mitigate overspends, largely in placement costs.

Setting a realistic and achievable budget will be a big challenge and puts a lot of the ambitious aspirations for our young people at risk.

Conclusion

Over the past twelve months there have been real improvements as a result of the decisions we have taken. The decision to take our Leaving Care Service "in house" and to focus on opportunities for our young people has laid the foundations for real improvements and the decision to invest in a new base and supported accommodation will mean real help to our young people. Over the next 12 months I want to focus on imbedding initiatives and making sure that we are seeing better support for our young people. I will use my new roles with responsibility for schools and membership of MHCC, to focus on how the city can prioritise children and their families and how our partnerships with health, schools, early years providers and other partners can be used to give children the best start in life.