

# Minutes



## Performance Scrutiny Committee - People

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Date: 25 June 2019

Time: 10.00 am

Present: Councillors D Williams (Chair), J Cleverly, H Thomas, J Watkins, T Watkins, J Richards and S Marshall

Cabinet Members: Councillors P Cockeram (Cabinet Member for Social Services) and Gail Giles (Cabinet Member for Education)

In Attendance: D Cooke (Scrutiny Adviser) and L Davies (Governance Officer)

Apologies: Councillors K Critchley and C Townsend

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### 1 **Declarations of Interest**

None

### 2 **2018 / 2019 End of Year Service Plan Review**

#### **Children and Young Peoples Services**

Attendees:

- Councillor Paul Cockeram, Cabinet Member for Social Services
- James Harris, Strategic Director People
- Sally Anne Jenkins, Head of Children and Young People Services

The Head of Children and Young People Services presented a brief overview to the Committee and highlighted the key areas for consideration.

Children Services continued to deliver the full range of statutory services required. This year had been another immensely busy year. Towards the end of the year a completely staffed management team improved the capacity to undertake important shifts to improve practice and to restructure in line with external changes. These changes would have largely been implemented by the end of 2019. The successes of 2018/19 included positive morale and very few vacancies despite a backdrop of very high demand and large numbers of complex cases, the establishing of the Family and Friends team, the launch of the Family Group Conferencing service, the opening of Rose Cottage and the increased services in Preventions.

Members asked the following:

- A Member expressed concerns over the financial position of Children and Young Peoples Services, asking about the service area's budget and if there would be a point that funding could not be found to fund services. The Head of Children and Young Peoples Services explained that the budget was challenging and sometimes a budget

overspend could not be avoided, at present the service area could not apply for any extra financial support. The department manage the budget responsibly and where possible work in conjunction with others throughout the Authority. The Strategic Director confirmed that monthly meetings were held with Finance and Senior Management team Officers to discuss financial commitments and any unforeseen events that had to be addressed, however, at present time the authority had been able to cover any overspend.

- A Member of the Committee asked the Officers if out of county placements came under the resources heading of the Service Area Team table. The Officers explained that out of county placements were only made as a last resort, with the aim for Newport children to be cared for in Newport. All of the Authorities Children's homes were full and foster carers were limited. All measures had been taken to stop out of area placements, but if the situation was unavoidable care was taken to ensure they were only for limited period. In the case of disabled children with needs the Authority cannot meet, it would have been unavoidable to go out of county in search of suitable accommodation. The Authority was looking at putting measures in place, such as, purchasing a new property, increasing foster carers in Newport and additional sourcing additional support as ways of increasing the provision for Newport children, especially those with specific needs. Rose cottage was a good example with a monetary saving made by bringing children back in to Newport from out of county placements. The additional benefit of bringing children back into Newport was contact and relationships were easier to manage and facilitate between young people and their families. One young person in Rose Cottage was ready to return home to their family, this would have been more difficult if that young person had been placed out of county.
- Members enquired about the off target performance measures for 2018/2019, especially the target relating to the number of looked after young people, were the risk adverse local judiciary were one of the reasons provided for a poor performance. Officers replied explaining that risk adverse local judiciary comment referred to the Family Court with Judges taking decisions that could influence the practice of Social Workers, posing challenges for the service as the Courts were above the Authority. The Cabinet Member for Social Services would be attending a Conference where the situation would be discussed.
- A Member asked Officers to confirm what saving the Authority had made relating to the creation of in house residential services. Officers confirmed a capital spend of 6.4 million was made, received from the Intermediate Care Fund. This funding was used for Rose Cottage, Windmill Farm and Oaklands. The Council had seen a saving of 400 thousand pounds since the opening of Rose Cottage, with further savings from children returning home after being placed in Rose Cottage, and children who were placed out of area moving back into Newport.
- Members asked when Windmill Farm opened and what type of Looked After Children would it would accommodate, and what savings would be made by opening the home. Officers replied explaining that Windmill Farm would open in 18/24 months' time. It was explained that the emphasis was on getting a balance of children in the residential facility, as this would be the young people's home, it was important to place young people who were likely to contribute to a positive environment. The Committee were reminded that Oaklands was due to reopen in mid-July, but the facility was only for short breaks and respite care for families.
- Officers confirmed that new marketing materials for fostering had been developed, including a leaflet and a promotional drive had begun using NCC Twitter and Facebook to increase the publicity, the fostering team were also making a short promotional film to work alongside the social media information. Feedback back from current Foster Carers had been very positive of the Authority.

- Officers confirmed that they had had some success with the Invest to Save fund, including; research opportunities and events, taking every opportunity when they arose. All staff were involved in ongoing training and encouraged to develop.
- A Member asked Officers about Foster Care providers, asking if the Authority had bench marked the rate paid to independent Foster Care providers. Officers replied confirming that a significant piece of work had been undertaken with providers, unfortunately the Council were still reliant on independent fostering agencies to provide placements. In Scotland it was illegal for an independent foster care provider to make a profit. The quality of care provided to the young person was the most important factor to the Officers. The Cabinet Member explained that it was vital that the Council recruited more foster carers to bring down the costs and provide a more suitable home experience for the young people of Newport.
- A Member enquired about the Financial Analysis section asking how the Authority would reduce the deficit it faced year on year. Officers replied explaining that the biggest costs had been staff and out of county placements. The Authority were looking at how to prevent children coming into care, monitoring budgets to limit overspends and any trends that indicated an potential increase in spend or number of young people being referred. The Cabinet Member stated that this was an issue for all other authorities in England and Wales.
- Officers explained to the Committee that the Preventions Team had continued to grow throughout the year which would support the decline in referrals to the health board and other partners. Over the course of the year not only had the Primary Mental Health work been embedded with the Preventions Team, but the SPACE coordinator had taken up their role for Child & Adolescence Mental Health Service (CAMHS). The referrals to the service go through the weekly allocations meeting with partners who aimed to discuss each case to ensure the appropriate action was taken with each. The Early Action posts and the Step Down services, while showing very early signs of high take up, would need monitoring for the early part of this year to ensure they worked effectively and efficiently. The rate of referrals continued to grow and that did pose challenges to the services to meet need without a waiting list being implemented.
- Members asked about the development for work experience and apprenticeship opportunities for looked after children. Officers confirmed that all looked after children would be offered work experience within the Authority. Improved choices for work experience, apprenticeships and wider employment and training options will now be the focus for 2019/20.
- Members expressed concerns over the spike in overall net position from £25 million to nearly £26 million in March 2019. Officers confirmed that the spike was due to more money being set aside for insurance. This was due to an ongoing court case where the outcome would dictate an increase in cost in insurance.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and Officers for attending.

## **Education**

### Attendees:

- Councillor Gail Giles, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills
- James Harris, Strategic Director People
- Sarah Morgan, Chief Education Officer
- Andrew Powles, Deputy Chief Education Officer
- Katie Rees, Assistant Head of Education - Inclusion
- Martin Dacey, Assistant Head of Education - Engagement & Learning

The Cabinet Member for Education and Skills presented a brief overview to the Committee and highlighted, and elaborated on the key areas for consideration contained in the Service Plan's Executive Summary. Education Services have reported improved performance in a number of measures during the 2018/19 financial year and received a positive Estyn inspection outcome in November 2018.

The Cabinet Member continued to outline the Estyn recommendations, which were included; Improving the overall performance of secondary schools, establishing a coherent strategy across all relevant services to improve the outcomes of pupils eligible for free school meals, ensuring that self-evaluation activities focus on the impact that services have on outcomes and their value for money, strengthening opportunities at a local authority level for children and young people to influence decisions that affected them, and delivering the strategic plans to develop Welsh-medium education further.

Members asked the following:

- Members expressed concerns over the schools that were still in Red or Special Measures after 2 years, and enquired as to how their performance would be addressed. Officers replied explaining that those schools in Red or Special Measures had improved performance in a number of measures during the 2018/19 financial year and received a positive Estyn visits. The Officer continued to state that schools in Red or Special Measures did not mean that the whole school needed improving, just elements of the school. Focus had shifted to address the leadership and support in the schools, on what it received from the Council and what it would need in the future.
- A Member of the Committee mentioned that parents of young people in Newport High had commented that good progress had been made under the acting Head Teacher, and requested confirmation of when the interviews for the position of a permanent Head Teacher would take place. Officers replied confirming that the position would be a January 2020 start. The Cabinet Member stated that it was great to hear that parents of school children had taken the time to provide good feedback about the acting Head Teacher to the Members.
- Members enquired about the development of a Newport specialist provision for SEBD pupils. Officers replied explaining that the development of a Social, Emotional Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD) School had been postponed due to the identified location not being a cost effective option to reduce the costs of Out of County provision. The numbers of Out of County placements had dropped, which placed less financial pressure to create a provision where all children could remain in county for their education. The Committee Members stated that it was good to see the Officers being mindful and reactive to how the needs of the young people and the Education department have changed and the SEBD schools creation had been postponed as a result.
- A Member asked about the Newport schools exclusion rates and how would they be improved on going forward, and whether Religious Holidays contributed to poor attendance figures. Officers replied confirming that exclusion rates had reduced. Secondary school Head Teachers were working with small focus groups and setting targets to reduce exclusions and increase attendance levels, primary schools were looking at replicating the approach. Head Teachers decided on the whether attendance was compulsory for religious holidays, festivals and worship, remaining mindful to coincide inset days where possible. The Cabinet Member reminded the Committee that it was important to remember that any absence was treated as a potential safeguarding issue by the staff of a school.

- A Member of the committee asked about the review of alternative education provisions within Newport. Officers replied to Members explaining that a financial review and restructure of the Bridge Achievement Centre had been completed to ensure a reduction of agency staff and an increase of capacity. An ALN data analysis had taken place to identify ALN trends for the next 3-5yrs, this was further modified to incorporate the information gathered through a secondary behaviour audit to gain an accurate picture of provision need within the city. Alternative qualifications were offered along with a bespoke timetable to the young people, ensuring all had the opportunity to achieve during their time in statutory education.
- Members of the Committee enquired about the Education Welfare Officer (EWO) covering a cluster, asking if the Service had ensured that all schools, including new builds across the City had a named EWO. Officers replied confirming that a huge focus on cluster working was underway, with all schools in the cluster taking a communal approach. This method of working had proved beneficial to the schools and to the Authority. All schools had a nominated EWO, one post had been deleted on the March 2019, due to a restructure and allocation of schools were altered accordingly. New EWO allocations to be determined in 2019-20 as further consequences of the restructure are felt. The new Glan Llyn Primary would be allocated a EWO in September 2019.
- A Member enquired about the terms *Wellbeing Objective 1 – To improve skills, education and employment opportunities* and *Aspirational People*. Officers confirmed that the Wellbeing Objective was a Corporate Plan Objective that the Education Measures fed into. Aspirational People was a think tank made up of Senior Officers, structured within the People Portfolio.
- A Member of the Committee commented on the amount of children attending the Bridge Achievement Centre, asking for clarification on the 28 permanent places when the centre catered for 125 pupils. Officers confirmed that some pupils attend Coleg Gwent, Blaen y Pant, Newport Live and Catch 22, and possibly only attended the Bridge Achievement Centre for GSCE lessons. The Cabinet Member stated that their preference would have been to deliver all services to the young people in house, but this was not always the best option for the young person. The service delivered to the young people was closely monitored to ensure it met the Councils high standards.
- The Officers informed the Committee that a SEN data analysis has taken place to identify potential ALN trends for the next 3-5 yrs, this would be further modified to incorporate the information gathered through a secondary behaviour audit to gain an accurate picture of provision needed within the city. The Bridge Achievement Centre had been reviewed and further developed by the inclusion of the Learning Pathways and diverse qualifications available to their pupils. Newport Live and Catch 22 have been commissioned to extend KS2 and KS3/4 provision, and would be reviewed and possibly extended to ensure consistent provision in the city.
- A Member expressed concerns for the use of the term 'Free School Meal (FSM) Learners' and requested that better wording is used in the future. Officers informed the Committee that they would take that request on board, The Officers continued to reassure the Committee Member that this terminology was only used in Council documents and not used in documents young people could see.
- Members spoke to the Officers regarding the performance of young people receiving free school meals, asking how this could be improved upon. Officers confirmed that the performance of pupils receiving free school meals in 2018 had declined by 2.6 per pupil to 26.2%. In comparison, the national FSM average increased by 0.9 per pupil from 28.6% to 29.5%. Improving the outcomes for pupils in receipt of free school meals

was an Estyn recommendation from their last visit and reflected as a priority in the Education Service Plan for 2019/20.

- Members asked Officers for confirmation of how the overspend in budget for SEN, would be reduced. Officers replied explaining that a complete review of the SEN budget would take place. This review would have had allowed Officers to highlight areas where savings could be made. The review would provide a better understanding of support for pupils needs and allowed for a better service to be provided. To work with head teachers to realign the amount of money spent. Monitor budget on a monthly basis. To look at transport costs and the new transport policy to operate in the same way as Adult Services. The Cabinet Member reminded the Committee that ultimately the method of travel was ultimately a parental choice, some very young people are much more comfortable with their parents taken them to school, but as the child aged they were able to look at a variety of different options.
- The Committee raised concerns about the practice of Head Teachers from Newport schools being seconded to other Gwent Authority schools. The Cabinet Member explained that this was done under a Regional Contingency Plan. The Cabinet Member further explained that the Chair of Governors of the school would only allow the Heads secondment if there was a suitable and capable deputy to act up. The Regional Contingency Plan provided mutual benefit for all authorities involved. Newport High received support from a Caerphilly Head Teacher. The Council would never risk the performance of a Newport School for another Authorities school.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Members and Officers for attending.

### **3 Conclusions of Committee Reports**

The Committee noted the Children and Young Peoples End of Year Service Plan Review and agreed to forward the minutes to the Cabinet as a summary of the issues raised. The Committee requested that the comments made regarding the overall service plan reports from the meeting on the 11 June 2019 were reiterated.

The Committee wished to make the following comments to the Cabinet:

- The Committee wished to congratulate and thank the Officers and Staff for the devotion and hard work to supporting the children and young people of Newport often through the most difficult of times.
- The Members were happy to hear the wait time for CAMHS has improved drastically and there was no longer a numerous monthly wait time to be seen.
- The Head of Children and Young People Services to provide the Committee with up to date information on the number of Looked After Children who have had three or more placements.

The Committee noted the End of Year Education Service Plan review and agreed to forward the minutes to the Cabinet as a summary of the issues raised.

The Committee wished to make the following comments to the Cabinet:

- The Committee stated that it was positive to see the Officers constantly reviewing the educational needs of the young people in Newport and forecasting the needs of the future young people as well, especially those who required additional support.
- The Committee requested a report on the Bridge Achievement Centre and the satellite provisions across the city and how these provisions support the needs of the young people.

- The Members requested that an information report be provided to the Committee on the primary school aged young people who are with the Catch 22 provider.