

# Minutes



## Performance Scrutiny Committee - People

---

Date:	17 September 2019
Time:	10.00 am
Present:	Councillors D Williams (Chair), J Cleverly, H Thomas, C Townsend, J Watkins, J Richards and S Marshall
In Attendance:	D Cooke (Scrutiny Adviser), L Davies (Governance Officer), S Morgan (Chief Education Officer), J Harris (Strategic Director - People) and K Rees (Assistant Head of Education - Inclusion)
Apologies:	Councillors M Linton Dr A Daly (Diocese Representative)

---

### 1 **Declarations of Interest**

None

### 2 **Minutes of the Meetings held on the;**

The Minutes of the meetings held on the 11<sup>th</sup> June 2019 and 25<sup>th</sup> June 2019 were approved as a true and accurate record.

### 3 **Looked After Children Report**

Attendee:

- James Harris Strategic Director – People
- Sally 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. The Head of Service started by explaining the Welsh Government's expectation of the reduction in Looked After Children in Newport and its feasibility, as well as the plan Officers had in place to achieve the reduction in Looked After Children

Members asked the following:

- The Chair asked Officers to confirm the definition of Looked After Children, enquiring if that had included children living with parents and family, not just by the care system. The Head of Children and Young People Services replied to the Committee explaining that the term Looked After Children could include children with a care order, and children living with grandparents or the wider family network, as well as children living in foster care and residential homes.
- Members of the Committee asked Officers to confirm if the proposal made to the manifesto by the First Minister for Wales, for the reduction in the numbers of children who were looked after across Wales, holds penalties if the target

proposed were not met. Officers explained to the members of the Committee that there would not be budget or staffing implications within the proposals set by Welsh Government; however a shift in culture required to manage increased levels of risk and that would potentially present challenges across the Council. Officers assured members that the targets set would not influence the services decision making process, if a child was vulnerable within the family setting where the child needed to be removed.

- A Member of the Committee asked Officers to explain the reasons behind Welsh Government asking Local Authorities to complete the templates that were outlined in the report. Officers explained that there were concerns with the numbers of children who were looked after in Wales being significantly higher than in England. A perception could be that the Welsh were more risk adverse, with the implications for the children of Wales being more likely that they would be removed from their families care and brought up within public care. The other motivation for the completion of the templates were to reduce the cost pressure on the service.
- Members enquired about the cost of out of county placements, asking for clarity on why this occurs. Officers confirmed that out of county placements only occur when Newport does not have the provision for the child with foster carers or spaces in a residential home. Officers confirmed that costs had reduced since the opening of the new residential home, and would continue to drop. It was also confirmed that the Authority were recruiting foster carers on an on-going basis.
- A Member asked Officers to explain what risks were acceptable before taking the child into care. Officers replied explaining that society had a different view than the Authority. Risk would be assessed on an individual basis; the service would look at circumstances such as the age of the child, as an 11-year-old child would not need the same level of care as a baby. We would also look at factors such as the family situation and the impact that removal would have on the child, would the outcome end up being worse for the child, we would also look at what level of support the service could put in place to help the family to enable the child to stay in the family home.
- The Committee asked Officers to clarify one of the bullet points on the Reduction Expectation Plan Reporting Template that had been set by the Welsh Government. A Member asked the Officer to explain what was meant by reduction in the number of children removed from parents with a learning disability. Officers confirmed that the template was referring to the parent having the disability not the child, and that the parent/s may also be with Adults Services.
- A Member asked for clarity on the objective - 'deliver effective services to support children to safely remain with their families' asking how that was working. Officers confirmed that the information was laid out in the service plan. The foster worker strategy was in place, offering incentives, funding and 24hr support and training. Figures on Youth Offending had shown a reduction and was continuing to drop.
- A Member enquired about future plans, asking what were the challenges faced by the service and what plans were there for the future interventions. Officers confirmed that they would continue to look at residential care, having discussions for a regional residential care setting. Feedback had been received regarding the family group conferencing, highlighting the benefits of the wider family inputting into the child's package of care. The service would be working in conjunction with the Aneurin Bevan Health Board offering support and intervention at the baby's first scan, at that early stage measures could be put in place to aide and support with parenting skills. Larger families and asylum seeking children were on the

increase. Additional resources would be working with children who had been involved in substance misuse related incidences.

- A Member of the Committee asked for an explanation of the term 'dip sampling'. Officers confirmed that the term was a form of analysis, which means randomly selecting. This allows each item to have equal chance of being selected.
- A Member expressed concerns regarding the cost of out of county placements, asking why the cost would not be transferred to another authority who were at that time responsible for the child's care. Officers explained that the Authority were legally responsible for any Looked After child/children from Newport. If the wider family gain parental responsibility the cost would be removed.
- A Member expressed concerns regarding Looked after Children post the age of eleven, highlighting that exploitation was a risk, why would that child be moved out of the area. The Officer replied explaining that in their experience many looked after child would make their way back to Newport once they had been moved away, that factor would put them at further risk of exploitation. Risks were less likely if the child stayed in Newport as there would be a certain level of support between their existing friendship group and peers and the child would be known to Social Services, the Police and local Wardens. The surroundings and environment that were familiar and that would provide a balance to managing the risk.

The Chair thanked the Officers for attending.

### **Conclusion - Comments to the Cabinet**

The Committee noted the Looked After Children report and agreed to forward the minutes to the Cabinet Member as a summary of the issues raised.

The Committee wished to make the following comments to the Cabinet and requested the following information:

1. The Committee were grateful to hear that the pressures from Welsh Government would not diminish the threshold and services provided to the at risk young people in Newport.
2. The Committee again raised concerns over the use of the abbreviation LAC for Looked After Children and requested that in the future all reports use the term in full. The Committee felt that the young people who were looked after could be labelled with the term LAC and that this would have a negative impact on them.
3. The Committee wished to highlight the collaboration between Social Services and Midwives as an excellent example of partnership working.
4. The recruitment of foster carers in Newport is vital to keeping Looked After young people local. The Committee asked if Officers could let them know if there was anything they could do to help increase the number of foster carers

#### 4 Additional Learning Needs Out of County Placement report

Attendee:

- James Harris - Strategic Director – People
- Sarah Morgan – Chief Education Officer
- Katy Rees - Assistant Head of Education - Inclusion

The Assistant Head of Education - Inclusion presented a brief overview to the Committee and highlighted the key areas for consideration.

Looked After Children may require Out of County residential placements which were determined by Social Services. Those pupils often had combined residential and education packages. Sometimes those placements had to be made quickly to ensure the safety of the pupil, however the education package would be reviewed within six weeks to ensure its suitability to meet the pupil's needs. There were also pupils with Statements of Special Educational Needs who were classed as Out of County because they attend a local mainstream School in another authority. The table below illustrates the types of placements along with the number of pupils accessing the placements:

Members asked the following:

- A Member of the Committee commented that with the average cost of placing a child Out of County costing around £30,000, would the Authority be able to offer places to neighbouring Authorities to generate income? This money could be then used to offset the costs of sending Newport young people out of county. The Assistant Head of Education – Inclusion replied explaining that there had been a reduction in the number of Out of County placements made by the LA over the last three financial years, and a further decrease was forecast for 2019-20. There were a combination of factors that contributed to the reduction of Out of County placements, which would include working with Newport Live and Catch 22. Close links had been developed between Social Services and the Education Department to ensure co-ordinated support for our most vulnerable pupils. Through the monthly Brighter Futures and Complex Needs Panels pupils at risk of placement breakdown were discussed in detail and joint solutions were considered to try to reduce the need for an Out of County placement.
- A Member asked for feedback on the Newport Live project, Catch 22. The Officer replied confirming that feedback from the young people as well as Newport Live was positive. They were holding regular meetings and getting up to date analysis of incidents and repeat offenses from staff internally to the project and those based in schools.
- A Member expressed concerns around the term LAC for Looked After Children, the Member requested that Officers and everyone concerned should not abbreviate Looked After Children, to LAC due to the stigma of being labelled as a LAC child. The Officer replied confirming that the abbreviation would cease to be used in Education documents.
- A Member expressed an interest in the links with Social Services and the Contracts and Commissioning Team. The Officers replied explaining that close links had been developed between Social Services and the Education Department to ensure co-ordinated support for our most vulnerable pupils. Through the monthly Brighter Futures and Complex Needs Panel, pupils at risk of placement breakdown were discussed in detail and joint solutions were considered to try to reduce the need for an Out of County placement. Since April 2019 a Special Educational Needs Officer had been based within the Social Services contracts and commissioning team for two days per week to review the

contractual agreements with Out of County providers and their compliance. This process also related to placement fees and conditions that were subject to on-going negotiation in order to achieve the most appropriate provision for the pupil in the most cost effective way. This joint working had also led to four pupils returning to live in local residential placements and be educated locally at a reduced cost for both service areas. A joint service protocol and panel had been developed to identify further pupils who could return to local placements in the future.

### **Conclusion - Comments to the Cabinet**

The Committee noted the Additional Learning Needs Out of County Placement report 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 Member:

1. More information was requested on the Out of County figures provided by Officers. This information should include financial information and information on young people who were placed in neighboring authorities and those further from Newport
2. The Committee commented on how positive it was to have evidence of Social Services and Education working collaboratively together for the benefit of the young people of Newport.

## **5 Scrutiny Adviser Reports**

Attendees:

- Daniel Cooke – Scrutiny Adviser

### **a) Forward Work Programme Update**

The Scrutiny Adviser presented the Forward Work Programme, and informed the Committee of the topics due to be discussed at the next two Committee Meetings:

**5 November 2019**, the agenda items;

- Education – Mid-Year Service Plan Review

**19 November 2019**, the agenda items;

- Children and Young People Social Services – Mid-Year Service Plan Review
- Adults and Community Social Services – Mid-Year Service Plan Review

### **b) Action Arising**

The Officer explained that the outstanding actions were being chased for responses.