

# CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

14 FEBRUARY 2023

## PRESENT

Councillors Miss L. Blackburn (Vice-Chair), J. Bennett, R. Duncan, F. Hornby, S. Maitland, S. Procter, M.J. Welton, D. Western (in the Chair), and S. Zhi

### In attendance

Councillor Hynes	Executive Member for Children's Services
Jill McGregor (virtual)	Corporate Director of Children's Services
Pamela Wharton	Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care
Karen Sample (virtual)	Director of Education Standards, Quality, and Performance
Ruth O'Keefe	Head of the Music Service
Jilla Burgess-Allen	Consultant in Public Health
Alexander Murray	Governance Officer

## APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors G. Whitham, A.M. Whyte, D. Acton and M.P. Whetton

## 17. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations were made.

## 18. MINUTES

The Governance Officer informed the Committee that the minutes from the last meeting were not ready in time due to the close proximity of the meetings, but they would be submitted to the Committee's next scheduled meeting.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held 24<sup>th</sup> January 2023 be deferred to the Committee's next scheduled meeting.

## 19. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

No questions were received from the public.

## 20. MUSIC SERVICE

The Head of the Music Service went through the presentation that was distributed with the agenda and informed the Committee of the number of staff within the service and gave a brief overview of the programmes that the service delivered including providing support to 835 children in primary schools 521 of whom had instrumental lessons at the music centre. All children performed concerts at the end of each term so that they had experience of playing in a professional venue. The number who attended ensembles had reduced greatly through the pandemic and the Service were focused upon increasing those levels. While the service was

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based in the centre it was accessed by children and young people from all over the borough. The Committee were informed of other programmes the service ran which included a year six transition programme so that all new children in secondary school play music together.

The Chair noted that the work was mainly based upon young children and asked whether they found that those who engaged at a young age continue. The Head of the Music Service informed the committee that the infancy work was due to a programme and many schools started in key stage 2. The Service did find that those who started young did continue into later years.

Councillor Hornby welcome the service within Trafford and asked whether there was any provision in the most deprived areas. In response the Head of the Music Service spoke about the work being done in collaboration with schools to help young people to access music who would not otherwise be able to, which included a bursary system for children who wanted to come to the centre to learn.

Councillor Bennet noted that there had been some issues around the use of the Claremont centre and asked whether they had been resolved. The Head of the Music Service responded to Councillor Bennet by informing the Committee that the service was not planning to move to Stretford and that they would stay at the Claremont Centre in the short term while alternative options were reviewed.

[Note: At this point in the meeting Councillors Welton and Zhi declared an interest as their children used the service.]

Councillor Welton noted that the Council had been looking at moving from the Claremont due to the service being oversubscribed and asked whether any consideration had been given to setting up a satellite centres at other locations. The Head of the Music Service responded that a number of options were being considered including ways to increase provision at the centre and satellite centres.

Councillor Zhi asked how many young people from a minority background used the service. The Head of the Music Service gave a brief answer at the meeting and offered to provide a full breakdown after the meeting.

The Head of the Music Service informed the Committee that Concerts were to be held at Stellar Hall on the 25<sup>th</sup> of March and invitations would be sent out to all Councillors.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

## **21. IMPACT OF THE COST OF LIVING ON CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

The Corporate Director of Children's Services introduced the item and the Officers who would deliver the item.

The Director of Director Education Standards, Quality, and Performance spoke about the early years part of the report which had been prepared by the Head of

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Early Years and Family Help who was unable to attend the meeting and any questions would be responded to afterwards.

The Consultant in Public Health informed the Committee that the impact on children was particularly felt with 60% of homes across GM having reported some instances of food insecurity. Energy bills had reduced due to people needing to use the heating less, but other costs were continuing to rise. The problems people faced were exacerbated by the lack of residents claiming the benefits they are entitled to. Even when people did claim benefits, they were often insufficient to meet the need they were intended to address for example the cost of formula was more than the benefits people were given to buy it. Within early years 68% of providers were struggling to pay for heating. The living room project provided 58 warm spaces across the borough. Figures had not been collected as to how many people were attending the warm spaces, but anecdotal information was that they were being used, particularly when activities were held at the spaces. The warm spaces located in buildings used by older people were seeing them bring their children and grandchildren along with them. With regards to the Council's work force support was being provided to staff who were on the lower pay bands through salary uplifts.

The Director of Education Standards, Quality, and Performance then spoke to the Committee about the early years provision and the impact the Cost-of-Living crisis was having upon the sector. There had been a noticeable impact on the work force with the sector seeing a steady reduction as the crisis went on. The Council had seen a marked improvement in the awarding of Primary School places with the latest sufficiency statement showing 95% of children had been placed at their first choice and a 100% had been placed at one of their top 3 choices although there were still difficulties for placements among higher age groups. The take up of the Council's early education offer was very high as was the two-year-old nursery hours take up. Trafford was a net importer of children, but they were still able to meet the demand within the borough. Spoke about increase of take up to 80% from 68%.

The Director of Education Standards, Quality, and Performance spoke about support packages being offered which were detailed within the report. The Committee were informed of action being taken at a national and regional level with uplifts being provided at both levels, but it was still not enough to meet all of the increases schools faced. This was especially true within special schools due to the additional associated costs they faced. The Committee were informed of the additional funding which had been made available and the work the Head of Exchequer services had been doing to track where the funding had gone. The majority of the funding had been used to provide free school meals, energy, and water plus additional food support. The majority of the award had been distributed through cash, then vouchers, and third-party providers.

Following the overview Councillor Hornby asked what could be done to encourage those not claiming free school meals and the healthy start offer. The Director of Director Education Standards, Quality, and Performance responded that the health care workers and family information service worked to promote the support offered. There had been a drop off in uptake after the universal provision ended

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and the Council was working to help people know they can apply and to take the stigma away.

Councillor Hornby asked if there was data as to who was not claiming. In response the Director of Education Standards, Quality, and Performance stated that it was Trafford assist who provided that information to the service and they would ask the service for the information and feed back to the Committee. The Consultant in Public Health stated that it was no longer a voucher which had improved take up and removed some of the associated stigma.

The Chair asked if anything was being done to signpost to those who had not had to access the service before. The Director of Director Education Standards, Quality, and Performance responded that the information was available through the Council Website and Family information service but would feedback the Committee's points around signposting.

Councillor Blackburn asked whether there was an increase in unregistered child minders or whether families were picking up the slack from the reduced number of registered workers. The Director of Director Education Standards, Quality, and Performance responded answered that she was not aware of there being any more unregistered and that she felt families were providing more care due to changes in working styles leading to more free time.

Councillor Proctor asked whether Trafford were working with the National Childminders association on recruitment. The Director of Director Education Standards, Quality, and Performance responded that she would have to take this back to provide a response. However, it was a national problem with many factors leading to people leaving the service and was a very complex picture with no simple solution and despite the reduction Trafford was still one of the highest nationally in delivering the sufficiency.

The Executive Member for Children's Services noted the comment about the reduction of people qualifying with those skills and whether the council was doing anything to address that. The Director of Director Education Standards, Quality, and Performance responded that work with Trafford College was ongoing to address this. Funding had been received which was focused on the current workforce but could be a mechanism to do more around workforce development. The Corporate Director of Children's Services added that there was work being done in adult social care to offer lessons to encourage young people into the profession and looking to learn from this and do something similar for young people's services.

Councillor Welton noted that Councillor Winstanley was working with Springfield Primary School around a green energy scheme to reduce energy costs and asked whether the roof spaces across all schools and nurseries could be utilised. The Director of Education Standards, Quality, and Performance responded that many schools were aware of schemes, but the amount of time it took to see the 25% reduction had reduced the uptake. However, it was looking like uptake would increase as the high costs of energy continued.

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Councillor Zhi noted that there was additional capital funding and asked whether the schools did those projects on their own or if the Council coordinated those programmes. The Director of Education Standards, Quality, and Performance responded to Councillor Zhi that schools were responsible for that funding and ensuring that the schools get the most out of that funding, although the Councils finance team that would support schools in using contractors.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That additional information regarding claims of free school meals and whether the Council work with National Childminders association be provided to Committee Members.

## **22. OFSTED INSPECTION OUTCOME**

The Corporate Director for Children's Services gave a brief introduction stating that the slides looked at the highlights but also identified the areas where work was still needed.

The Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care introduced the presentation and informed the Committee that the inspection had been a full three-week inspection which was of greater depth than previous inspections. The Council had welcomed the inspection as it was a way to ensure self-assessments had been accurate and the outcomes aligned with those of the self-assessment. The Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care spoke of the previous finding of inadequate, the issues that the Council had had, and how the Council had improved since 2019 in areas including leadership, first response service, and partnership work. The Committee were informed of the areas where the Council still required improvement and the measures the service was taking to address them. The Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care stated that the Council wanted to keep improving and did not want to be rated "requires improvement" but to be rated a "good" or "outstanding" across all services. The Committee were informed of a peer review the Council were conducting with Bolton Council in March to help to develop the service further.

Trafford had been very honest with the inspectors when the complex and additional needs service was inspected about the work that needed to be done for the service to be where they wanted to be. The service had just appointed a new manager at the time of the inspection and the Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care spoke to the Committee about issues the service faced, which were national problems, caused by a lack of qualified professional able to support children and young people in care with additional needs.

The Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care informed the Committee that the service was reviewing the Council's Corporate Parenting strategy and the way Board meetings were delivered. A key element of the revised approach was having the young people attend all of the meetings. Worked had also been done to review the care leaver offer and the results would be going to the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board for approval.

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The service was looking to strengthen the Council's approach to life story work. The Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care spoke to Committee Members about the importance of front-line managers in improving the service and the work to strengthen the management accountability within the service. very honest with the inspectors highlighted that the inspection had noted that practice was inconsistent across the service but assured the Committee that the service was looking to improve in a number of ways including through the introduction of a mentoring programme.

The Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care had picked out some of the quotes from the inspection report to share with the Committee which included that Trafford had some of the best child centred plan recording they had seen. Councillor Maitland noted the quotes and emphasised how good they were. Councillor Maitland then asked about the life stories and later life letters and whether any examples could be shared with the Committee. The Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care responded to Councillor Maitland and informed her that a presentation was going to Corporate Parenting Board on the review of the care leaver offer which could be shared with the Committee. The Corporate Director for Children's Services stated that the Committee could be shown examples of elements of the life stories, but the work was a culmination of lots of pieces of work that were taken and stored by the Council and included reports, notes, photographs, and other little pieces that add to recollection. The service previously focused upon addressing gaps in the recording, but this work focused on the richness of the recording.

Councillor Proctor welcomed the outcome of the inspection and the improvements Ofsted had acknowledged, but also welcomed the services attitude and response to the inspection where they were clearly focused upon where things still needed to improve. Councillor Proctor also welcome the planned work to improve the out of hours service. Councillor Proctor then asked a series of questions about the inconsistent service for housing of 16 and 17-year-olds, lack of consistency in foster care, and lack of consistency in supervision of social workers. The Corporate Director of Children's Services expressed her disappointed in herself about the service for 16 and 17-year-olds as a lot of work had been done in the area but it had not been delivered in time for the Ofsted inspection. The biggest issues identified by Ofsted related to policies and procedures that needed updating. The service had been very focused on sorting out placements but not looking into the deeper causes of the need for the provision of the young person. A session was planned with staff from a range of stakeholders to look into addressing the deeper causes and the Council would soon publish the updated offer for young people in Trafford. The issues identified by Ofsted relating to social workers were mainly due to the inspector looking at the last 12 months when the Council had achieved a large amount of improvement within the last six months.

With regards to looking after staff, providing them with supervision, and all of the support that they needed The Corporate Director for Children's service noted that Ofsted had said that staff they spoke to reported that they received support and supervision, but it had not been captured in the documentation. The Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care added that the service was focused upon

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providing consistency for children and foster carers. A report had recently been delivered to the Corporate Parenting Board about all the work that had gone into increasing stability within the workforce. The service faced multiple difficulties due to turnover of staff and work was ongoing to reduce turnover and managing transitions to minimise the impact when they did happen. The Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care felt that the service was improving and she spoke of the important role foster cares had on the Corporate Parenting Board and the Have Your Say Board in providing feedback and challenge and ensuring their views were heard.

Councillor Blackburn asked whether there was adequate time for reflection for social workers. The Corporate Director of Children's Services responded that Trafford was undertaking a piece of work which looked at case supervision and differentiating it from reflective supervision, which linked to the quality assurance framework. This piece of work was to enable staff to take a well-rounded approach to their job and enable them to identify areas where they needed to improve. Work was also being done with managers to embed the approach within the service. The Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care spoke about the importance of having peer support available throughout the team and how the service was looking to build that approach into team structures, as the covid 19 pandemic had shown the importance and value of working together and building relationships when working together.

Councillor Blackburn asked whether a time frame for improvement of out of hours service could be given. The Corporate Director of Children's Services responded that it was hoped that the work would be done in March and April 2023. The Corporate Director of Children's Services was planning to meet with the Corporate Director of Adults to look at actions that could be taken from work they had done and would like to start that work in the summer. The Corporate Director of Children's Services added that some parts of the work were already underway and that the aim was to ensure a smooth handover from day workers to out of hours workers.

Councillor Blackburn asked how the service was performing around young people in custody. The Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care informed the Committee that the service had had challenges around visiting during covid and there were currently a number of vacancies within the after-care service. Once those vacancies were filled the workload would reduce and help to lead to improvements within the service. They were vulnerable young people and the service was looking at improving the support and planning to enable them to fit into society following their time spent in custody.

The Executive Member for Children's Services noted the excellent work of the Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care and the Corporate Director of Children's Services. The Executive Member noted the work of the Committee in scrutinising and supporting the service in the journey between the inadequate and the latest review. The Committee were assured that the Council's improvement journey would continue moving forward. The Executive Member pulled out the Minister's comments in the letter about the change in culture in Trafford to one that was focused upon the child. The Executive Member spoke to the Committee about

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how the voice of the child was key in all that the council did which could be seen in the way services had changed in the last year.

The Chair echoed the thanks of the Executive Member for Children's Services for the work of the Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care and the Corporate Director of Children's Services on behalf of the Committee for all their working in improving Trafford's Children's services.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That the Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care and the Corporate Director of Children's Services be thanked for all of their work on improving Children's Services in Trafford by the Committee and the Executive Member for Children's Services.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 p.m. and finished at 8.12 p.m.