

SE21. Following The Public Pound: Services To Children and Young People – 2020/21 Annual Reporting Statements

The committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services which provided an update regarding the work of the external organisations that receive funding, provide services to children and young people, and fall within the Following the Public Pound reporting and monitoring arrangements. The reporting period is April 2020 to March 2021.

Funding was provided by Children's Services to external organisations to provide services which could not readily be provided by the Council. As part of the Following the Public Pound arrangements, reporting statements were prepared by the relevant monitoring officer for consideration by the Scrutiny Committee (External).

Organisation	2019/20	2020/21	Appendix
Aberlour Early Years Outreach	£159,060	£159,063	1
Aberlour Family Support Centre Langlees	£110,937	£110,937	2
Barnardo's	£500,000	£500,000	3
Home-Start Falkirk West	£28,014	£28,014	4
NHS Forth Valley CAMHS Clinical Psychologist for Looked After Children	£33,100	£78,500	5
NHS Forth Valley Speech & Language Therapy	£465,040	£515,040	6
One Parent Families Scotland Falkirk	£82,523	£82,523	7
Quarriers Children's Rights Service	£86,200	£86,200	8
Transform Forth Valley Time For Us	£38,870	£38,870	9
"Who Cares?" Scotland Advocacy Service	£27,970	£27,960	10
TOTAL	£1,531,714	£1,627,114	

Robert Naylor gave an overview of the report. The committee then considered the monitoring officers' reports.

The committee first considered Aberlour Early Years Outreach and sought clarification on what was meant by 'Families outwith the catchment area where an alternative support could not be sourced'. Cathy Megarry explained all areas of Falkirk were covered through the contracted family support providers where they provide the majority of their support locally. However, in cases where specialist assistance was required and their local provider could not help, they would be given help from another area. She stated that a

'Postcode Lottery' would not exist with this approach, however, evidence would support that individuals prefer their local providers.

Following a question on how families were identified, the Service Manager clarified it was through Social Work referrals as well as health and education colleagues. Multi-agency meetings also took place which would lead to a referral to the most appropriate agency.

In terms of concerns being raised by local residents regarding a child's welfare and then knowing which agency to contact, Ms Megarry stated that an inhouse service was provided, 'Initial Response Team', who dealt with reports provided by the public. This programme was a One-Stop-Shop service for all child protection and welfare concerns which provided a quick response.

The Service Manager explained that the pandemic had significant impact on families who had pre-existing issues. This impact was also mirrored on service delivery; much of the service had to be paused due to restrictions but Aberlour employees managed to source suitable IT equipment and found other ways to engage with families such as garden visits. Furthermore, Falkirk Families Support Line was established to provide a response to difficulties experienced by families due to Covid-19 restrictions – due to services moving online, this service was no longer running. She stated that the impact that Covid-19 had on families was difficult to quantify but expected to remain for a long time.

Members then focussed on Appendix 2 and asked why Aberlour had a specific facility in Langlees. The Service Manager explained that Langlees had historically been deemed an area of high priority for family support – it covered Langless, Bainsford and New Carron principally, however, was open to service to all areas of Falkirk if needed.

The service was expected to support 45 families, however, 77 were supported and the committee asked how this was possible. Cathy Megarry explained that 45 was the target set out in the Joint Working Agreement and Aberlour had managed to exceed this through new flexible working methods. She stated that some families had provided positive feedback on working remotely whereas others still required face-to-face contact.

Following on, members asked for clarification on what was meant by 'VIG' in relation to Home-Start Falkirk. Laura Hardley-Stove explained it was an abbreviation for Video Interactive Guidance. It was an intervention that could work alongside families to show visuals of positive behaviours and areas of improvement, it could also be utilised as a measurement of improvement.

The committee noted that CAHMS did not provide a specialist service for Looked After Children and asked why this was. Gayle McIntyre explained that due to this group having the highest levels of needs, they required a specialist service that could respond quickly and flexibly thus different to CAHMS. CAHMS had a referral criteria as well as a long waiting list – if young people did not attend appointments they were often removed from the service entirely which could be troublesome for those in care.

Members raised concern over the long waiting list which had been a barrier to referrals for those in need. Furthermore, they highlighted the difficulty in liaison with GPs and school counsellors due to the requirement for pupil's permission.

In the reporting period, 112 young people worked with the psychologist which was an increase of 43 from the year prior, the committee sought information on the capacity of the service and the impact this increase had. The Service Manager explained the year prior experienced minimal staffing numbers (0.5 psychologists for the year) hence the lower number. Due to the recruitment of 1 full-time psychologist, service had picked up. Furthermore, the pandemic demanded a change in service providing, such as online consultations, allowing more free time for professionals. In terms of the waiting list, there was not one at present allowing psychologists to be responsive. She stated that the numbers of those working with the psychologist was high when recognising there was only 1 full-time clinical psychologist employed in the service.

The committee wished to know how successful video consultations had been to which the Service Manager stated CAHMS carried out 102 face-to-face consultations throughout the pandemic – the decision to carry the consultation online or in person was dependent on the individuals needs. She recognised that in-person consultations would be preferable, however, the demand of the pandemic had required the service to adapt and proven to be moderately successful. Engagement had slightly decreased although the service had been consistent.

In terms of the funding for NHS Forth Valley Speech and Language Therapy, the business year of 2020/21 saw 57% of funding from NHS and 43% from the Council. The committee asked how this balance was decided upon. Kerry-Anne Drinnan clarified that it was jointly funded due language barriers existing most prominently in schools therefore the necessity to upskill school staff. The Service Manager explained that it was usually split 55%-45%, however, the change was reflective of the change in service being provided within schools and no longer clinics. This model was more efficient as the removal of NHS funding would require the Council to establish a bespoke service and recruit specialists which the NHS already had.

Members sought clarity on the difference between education staff requests for assistance and self-requests as education staff often encouraged parents to self-request. Ms Drinnan stated that the model used to be solely based upon parental requests with minimal intervention of schools as they were unable to discuss an individual case. The model had adapted to allow parents and schools to work together to provide help for the child, however, parental permission to make an educational request remained therefore some parents make the request themselves.

The committee then considered Time 4 Us which had experienced 92% attendance in appointments in the period April 2020 – March 2021, however it asked for clarity as to what happened with the other 8%. Lesley James

confirmed that 8% had failed to show to their appointment – Time 4 Us undertook a blended approach to the service for families, however, the approach taken was dependent on the needs of the family. The Senior Service Manager stated the reasonableness of 92% attendance taken into consideration the ongoing pandemic.

Decision

The Committee approved the report and acknowledged progress by the external providers in meeting the Council's priorities.