

Subject:	Overview of the impact of the arrangements with Achieving for Children.
Reason for Overview and Scrutiny report:	Children's Overview and Scrutiny Panel has received regular information on the overall performance of the services, and the commissioning report in October 2018 on the effectiveness of the arrangements with Achieving for Children for the Council. This report sets out what impact has been gained from the arrangements at an operational level.
Responsible officer(s):	Kevin McDaniel, Director of Children's Services Hilary Hall, Deputy Director Strategy and Commissioning
Date:	18 th January 2019

SUMMARY

1. This paper builds on the regular performance reports submitted to the Children's Overview and Scrutiny panel and the overall assessment of the commissioning arrangements. It provides a qualitative assessment of impact, rather than details of specific performance indicators.
2. Members of the panel have asked if the arrangements with Achieving for Children, namely the joint ownership of the company and the explicit commissioning arrangements, are creating the conditions and opportunities that we anticipated when the idea was formulated.
3. Through a summary appendix which has looked across five broad areas of the work carried out by Achieving for Children, this report identifies the following conditions:
 - The larger scale of the workforce is creating opportunities for improved staff recruitment, best practice sharing and use of expertise.
 - Significant effort has been expended to implement some common approaches which have made a positive difference for young people.
 - Work with schools is still a locally driven set of relationships and engagement with RBWM services continues to be crucial.
4. The progress suggests that more benefit could be achieved with tighter integration through the use of common ICT systems in social care for example; however this needs to be balanced by retaining appropriate local control of key policy considerations.

1 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The council made an outline decision in March 2016 to deliver Children's Services differently and concluded in September 2016 to join with Achieving for Children. The cabinet report¹ from the September meeting set out a full business case and summarised the key potential benefits thus:
 - An opportunity to secure resources to meet residents' needs through having access to different income streams, thereby reducing the call on the taxpayer.

¹ <https://rbwm.moderngov.co.uk/documents/g6264/Public%20reports%20pack%2029th-Sep-2016%2019.30%20Cabinet.pdf?T=10>

- Scope for more integrated, cross-organisational – private, public and voluntary – delivery of services tailored to residents.
- Scope to drive innovation and sustain and improve services.
- An ability to operate in a competitive market, with less rigid procurement frameworks.
- An ability to meet the required financial savings, 4% of gross operating budget, by 2020.

- 1.2 While it is too early to be certain of sustained progress on these wider benefits, the operational oversight through monthly commissioning meetings indicates that day to day performance is in line with expectations. This performance was last reported to cabinet in November 2018².
- 1.3 The arrangements provide delivery flexibility for Achieving for Children; however, the council retains policy control for services to residents. This combination will direct the actual innovations that come forward for residents.

2. WHAT HAVE WE LEARNT?

- 2.1 The appendices A-E set out some key changes in the impact we have had over the first 12-15 months of operation with AfC. They are set out in four resident facing service areas and one looking at the internal service areas.
- 2.2 Children’s social care and early help services have seen a significant shift in the ability to attract staff. Anecdotal feedback is that this is because of the opportunity to work with AfC and a wider group of professionals. The roll out of Signs of Safety and Family Resilience as part of the Partners in Practice programme has increased interest in the training offer and supported a strong retention rate.
- 2.3 Youth and Community services have been able to compare the processes used by AfC, particularly in the area of Quality Assurance, to identify areas where increased focus would make a difference, especially from partners. Staff report that the ability to understand what those partners do in other areas has been a valuable tool in driving local engagement.
- 2.4 Education services have been focused on local leadership in RBWM, where there is an operational focus in the other area of AfC for mainstream school provision. This has resulted in sharing specific expertise to the benefit of particular schools seeking a given experience. The shared Virtual School highlights that where policy aligns between both AfC areas, there is opportunity to increase the effectiveness for residents. This is underway in fostering and could apply to a number of other processes such as Education, Health and Care Plan development; Education welfare; and pupil premium leadership work where the policy frameworks are similar across AfC.
- 2.5 School support services have seen the least impact of the arrangements. They have been more successful in renegotiating arrangements for local schools and have used the opportunity to simplify the operation of contracts, for example removing a complex revenue sharing scheme on school meals in favour of a lower price for residents and a known management income for the council.
- 2.6 The internal support services have begun to increase standardisation where the process, tools and policies are similar across AfC. This is generating efficiencies and indicates that

² <https://rbwm.moderngov.co.uk/documents/g7252/Agenda%20frontsheet%2022nd-Nov-2018%2019.30%20Cabinet.pdf?T=0>

where AfC and RBWM can agree to common approaches there is efficiency and resilience improvements to be gained.

- 2.7 Across all of these areas it is clear that the arrangements have allowed for the generation of a more inclusive culture which, in turn is making staff more confident to speak up for children and their families. Activity in this area includes annual staff awards (run on a peer-led basis); a staff selected well being initiative which has resulted in a free, weekly exercise class run by the staff; and an active social network which encourages wide participation. This has been highlighted by Ofsted in their recent focused visit and is a crucial element of good children's services.

3. WHAT WILL WE TAKE FORWARD

- 3.1 There are three key strands which will enable us to demonstrate success in using the benefits created by the arrangements.
- 3.2 Within the RBWM operational area there are more opportunities to use standard approaches across AfC to gain the most efficiency. This includes moving closer to the AfC ICT approach (Google based platform) for all day to day work such as report creation and editing. We could also migrate social care recording from PARIS to the Liquid Logic system used in Kingston and Richmond. While RBWM would have a standalone database, the processes, reports and practices would be common and drive efficiency.
- 3.3 There are some areas across AfC where one set of resources, such as the Virtual School, can deliver for all three council areas with the alignment of policy work. The Local Authority Designated Officer function has begun to operate from January 2019 and there is further potential in other areas. This will be developed as a theme in the AfC business plan which is being developed during the spring of 2019.
- 3.4 The Partners in Practice investments by the DfE in AfC are being rolled out in RBWM in the next 12 months, including Signs of Safety and Family Resilience. That work will develop a strong and consistent skill base which should enable us to drive sustainable transformation in early intervention services for residents.