

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 5 September 2018

Attendance

Members of the Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Peter O'Neill (Chair)
Cllr Obaida Ahmed
Cllr Jasbinder Dehar
Cllr Celia Hibbert
Cllr Asha Mattu
Cllr Beverley Momenabadi
Cllr Rita Potter
Cllr Clare Simm
Cllr Zee Russell

Co-opted Members

Wolverhampton Youth Council

In Attendance

Cllr Lynne Moran
Cllr Zee Russell

Employees

Andrew Wolverson	Head of Service, People
Rachel King	Head of Service Specialist Support
Adrian Leach	Head of SEND
Dawn Williams	Head of Service Safeguarding
Ruby Hothi	Vulnerable Young Persons Manager

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

- 1 **Apologies**
Apologies were received from the following:

Cllr Rupinderjit Kaur
Cllr Sandra Samuels
Cllr Udey Singh
Cyril Randles
Cllr Simon Bennett
Emma Bennett

2 **Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest recorded.

3 **Minutes of the previous meeting (20 June 2018)**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 June 2018 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 **Matters arising**

There were no matters arising

5 **Draft School Accessibility Strategy**

Adrian Leach, Head of Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND), presented a report for pre-decision scrutiny. The Head of SEND outlined the background to the drafting of Schools Accessibility Strategy document. The Head of SEND advised the panel that there are 850 pupils in special schools and 7,500 pupils with disabilities in mainstream school provision.

There is a statutory duty on City Wolverhampton Council to produce a School Accessibility Strategy.

The Head of SEND outlined the scope and aims of the strategy and explained how the performance of the service will be monitored. The Head of SEND commented that as part of the process members of the public and other groups were invited to take part in a consultation.

The panel were advised that a total 23 written responses were received to the consultation document.

The overall response to the consultation was very positive – an issue highlighted in the response was the need for the strategy to recognise the needs of people with visible and invisible disabilities. The draft was revised to reflect this concern. The Head of SEND commented that the document is expected to have a positive impact on promoting access in schools for pupils with disabilities. The panel were invited the comment on the draft document as part of the consultation process. A summary of the panel member comments is given below:

The panel queried the slow progress in meeting the educational needs of pupils with disabilities aims since the SEN and Disability Act 2001 set out duties and responsibilities on local authorities and schools and later legislation – when considering the comments to the consultation document from parents.

The Head of SEND responded that there is a challenge to the Council in getting academies to meet their duties, but it continues to work with schools to improve their provision. There is also the option for the Council to refer the matter to the Regional Schools Commissioner if there are concerns about a school meeting its responsibilities in respect of existing pupils and future pupils with disabilities.

The panel commented on the need for more staff to be trained in how to support the children with disabilities and the draft report should include a reference to this.

The panel commented that there was concern about the lack of training and support in primary schools – there was also concern about their ability to properly support children with behavioural issues which has sometimes led to them being excluded permanently. The panel suggested the guidance should include a reference to this and evidence that they have taken all reasonable steps to support the children.

The panel discussed the link with the SEND strategy which has been recently updated and suggested that the issue of the professional development of school staff could be presented to a future meeting.

The panel commented on the importance of schools building relationships with parents and highlighted the needs to get their support for the strategy to be successful.

The Head of SEND agreed to note the comments of the panel in the report that will be presented to Cabinet meeting on 17 October 2018.

The Head of SEND wanted to record formally the contribution to the drafting of the report of Henry Gregory (Graduate Management Trainee)

Resolved:

1. The panel comments on the school accessibility strategy document to be included as an appendix to the Cabinet report on 17.10.18.
2. A report on SEND strategy be presented to a future meeting of the panel.

6 **Elective Home Education**

Rachel King, Head of Service Specialist Support, gave a brief outline of the current legislation surrounding the current home education guidance and update on work being done to support parents in Wolverhampton who have decided to home educate their children.

The Head of Service advised the panel about the legal rights of parents to home educate, which the Council cannot refuse. The Head of Service advised the panel of the concerns about the current guidance on home education issued by Government. The Head of Service advised the panel that Department of Education is consulting on proposed changes to the guidance. The results of the consultation and any proposed changes will be published before the end of the 2018.

The Head of Service briefed the panel about the concerns about the current arrangements and supported changes which will give powers to the local authority and allow for more robust monitoring of the quality education that home educated children are receiving. The panel were advised that 269 children were being home educated (2017-18) and a summary of the top reasons for families opting to home educate.

The Head of Service commented on the weaknesses and limitations of the current Elective Home Education legislation – for example, identifying pupils that are being home educated, families who can choose not to engage with the Council and the challenges this presents.

The Head of Service advised the panel that some home educators have successfully home educated their children. However, there was concern that the local authority cannot always be confident that all children in this situation are receiving a good education.

The Head of Service commented on the work done to engage and support parents who choose to home educate and to respond any safeguarding concerns.

The panel discussed the links between children who have either been excluded or not been able to get a place of the preferred choice of school and those who are being home educated. The Head of Service commented that parents are not required to notify the Council if they move to the area and there are children who are not known to the service.

The panel queried if the service was able to get results of children who have completed exams at either GSCE or A Level and was advised that parents are not required to share this information with the council. The service will ask parents known to the service to complete a form to advise them of the outcome, but there is no requirement for them to respond.

The panel discussed the issue of children of travelling families and the work done to monitor their educational progress.

The panel expressed shock that parents who choose to home educate are not required to work with the council and the lack of power of the Council to satisfy themselves that children are getting an appropriate education. The Head of Service advised the panel that there is a legal option to take action for the council if there are concerns about a child.

The panel commented on the United Nations Charter about the right of a child to be educated and how the current policy on home school education meets this obligation.

The panel discussed the role of Ofsted and if they would visit a family being home educated.

The panel were advised that there was no requirement on parents to have a specific training and or qualification before they can home educate a child.

The panel discussed the growth of unregistered schools and if parents were using this option to meet their children's education needs.

Wolverhampton Youth Council expressed their concern about the situation and that there was no legal requirement for a child to attend a school – and commented on the benefits to children of attending school regularly.

The panel were advised that a decision from the Government is expected early next year on their response to the consultation document. A panel member advised that the issue would be raised with her local MP to raise concerns about the current situation of home educated children when it is discussed in parliament.

Resolved:

1. The panel support the concerns highlighted in the report about the children being home educated need for change.
2. The panel support the proposals in the consultation which suggest increasing the powers of the Council to register and monitor the progress of children who are home educated.

7 **Future of Old Fallings Adventure Playground - Briefing Paper**

Andrew Wolverson, Head of Service People, outlined the background to the decision to recommend that it be declared a surplus asset and developed for housing. The Head of Service advised the panel that the site had been extensively vandalised on 25 February 2018 and was now empty. The site requires extensive repairs and have has been secured to prevent further damage. The site has been assessed as being beyond economic repair.

The Head of Service outlined the options for the future use of the site but it has been concluded that the best option was to recommend to Council to dispose of the site. The Council had been in discussions with a special needs group about taking over the site, but the basic running costs were such that it was not considered to be financially viable option.

The panel expressed their sadness about the level of vandalism done to the site and the loss to the community facility which many young people in the past had benefitted from. The panel commented on whether the reduction of staff on the site was considered to be a contributory factor.

The panel with regret supported the proposal to dispose of the site. The panel were advised that a report would be presented to Cabinet Resources Committee in November 2018 for a decision about the future of the site.

Resolved:

The panel agreed to support the proposed disposal of the Old Fallings Adventure Playground due to the extensive vandalism of the site and the lack of alternative funding options.

8 **Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel - Draft Work Programme**

Scrutiny Officer presented the draft panel work programme and invited members to comment. The panel suggested adding an item about the educational requirements for people wanting to apply for an apprenticeship and the support given to people who do not have the necessary grades in English and Maths.

Resolved:

The work programme to be updated to include an item on qualifications for apprenticeships to a future meeting.

9 **Wolverhampton Safeguarding Children Board & Safeguarding Adult Board Annual Report**

Dawn Williams, Head of Safeguarding, briefed the panel about the background to the annual report and explained that the Safeguarding Board is independent of the Council and has representatives of key organisations.

The Head of Safeguarding explained that this version is the first time that the work of the adults and children's boards has been combined into a single report - this change

reflects a recognition of family relationships and need to create appropriate seamless services.

The Head of Safeguarding advised the panel that a number of changes had been made to the layout and content of the report since it was published. The Head of Safeguarding briefed the panel on the changes.

The panel agreed to note the report.