

# Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

## Minutes - 25 September 2019

### Attendance

#### Members of the Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Rita Potter (Chair)  
Cllr Udey Singh  
Cllr Rashpal Kaur  
Cllr Sohail Khan (Vice-Chair)  
Cllr Paul Sweet  
Cllr Jasbinder Dehar  
Cllr Paula Brookfield

#### In Attendance

Cllr John Reynolds  
Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre

Cabinet Member for Children and Young People  
Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

#### Employees

Earl Piggott-Smith  
Meredith Teasdale,  
Louise Haughton  
Adrian Leach  
Emma Bennett,  
Jennifer Rogers

Scrutiny Officer  
Director of Education  
Principal Social Worker  
Head of SEND  
Director for Children's Service  
Quality and Improvement Advanced  
Practitioner

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## Part 1 – items open to the press and public

*Item No.*    *Title*

- 1        **Apologies**  
Apologies were received from the following members of the panel:  
  
Cllr John Rowley  
Cllr Claire Simm  
Cllr Ruperinderjit Kaur  
Cllr Beverley Momenabadai
- 2        **Declarations of interest**  
There were no declarations of interest recorded.
- 3        **Minutes of the previous meeting (19 June 2019)**  
Cllr Jasbinder Dehar to be added as having attended the meeting.

That the minutes of the meeting held on 19 June 2019, subject to the agreed changes, be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 **Matters arising**

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

5 **Cabinet Member Briefing - Cllr John Reynolds**

Cllr John Reynolds, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, presented a paper detailing responses to questions prepared by the panel about issues related to his portfolio. The Cabinet Member advised the panel that if any additional questions were raised then responses would be included in update to the briefing paper.

The panel were invited to comment and ask supplementary questions on the paper distributed at the meeting. The panel queried the support provided to children of same sex couples. Emma Bennett, Director of Children's Service, advised the panel that the Council does not offer anything different than what is offered to other families. It was noted the Council works with same sex families to offer support to children who have been adopted and fostered.

The panel queried the provision of support to young people in crisis when they attend RWHT hospital and what the arrangements would be if they experience a further crisis. The Director of Children's Service explained how the CAMHS crisis team service would operate at RWHT but advised that the service is not provided by the Council. A young person in crisis would be assessed within the four-hour period when they attend Accident and Emergency. The Cabinet Member agreed that a report on the new service could be presented to a future meeting of the panel by representatives of Wolverhampton CCG if that would be helpful. The panel were advised that the Council does not commission CAMHS services in Wolverhampton.

The panel queried the suitability of support offered by Wolverhampton JobCentre Plus help for young people with disabilities to secure paid work. Meredith Teasdale, Director of Education, advised that in addition to support offered by JobCentre Plus to people with disabilities or illness the Council also offers support through the Wolves@Work Programme. The programme offers targeted support through schemes aimed at supporting young people into appropriate training to help them secure sustainable employment in the future. Wolverhampton Connexions Service also provides advice and support to young people. The panel were invited to send any further questions for the Cabinet Member to the Scrutiny Officer who will arrange for a response to be shared.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for the presentation.

Resolved:

The panel agreed to note the report.

6 **Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Self - Evaluation**

Cllr Michael Hardacre, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, briefed the panel about the background to the SEND Self Evaluation briefing paper. The panel were advised of changes made to the evidence that local authorities are required to provide in preparation for an external inspection and changes to the self-evaluation framework document. The joint inspection of services will be led by OFSTED and the Care Quality Commission who will provide an external evaluation of the local area

services and how different partners are meeting their statutory duties to children and young people in Wolverhampton. The inspectors will make an assessment about how well children and young people are being supported to achieve the best educational outcomes and the performance of partnership arrangements.

The Council is not solely responsible for the delivery of services to children and young people. The services to children and young people are delivered as part of a partnership arrangement with colleagues in Wolverhampton CCG, RWHT, Black Country Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, Public Health, Schools and other partners. Adrian Leach, Head of SEND, advised the panel that Wolverhampton is one of a few authorities who have not yet been inspected and gave a summary of the work being done to prepare for it. The work is expected to be completed in the next few weeks. An inspection of services is expected before the end of academic year. The Council will be given a weeks' notice.

The panel discussed the plans for the "Spotlight of SEND" visioning day on 4 October 2019. The Head of SEND advised the panel the event is aimed presenting information to parents, carers and a range of professionals to get a range of views on the draft SEND document. The new inspection framework requires evidence to be presented to show that the document has been co-produced.

The panel queried the arrangements for monitoring the implementation of any actions arising from the Area SEND Self Evaluation report. A progress report will be presented to the Cabinet Member and other partners to review progress in implementing any follow up actions. The Head of SEND agreed to share a copy with the panel before the end of November 2019.

The panel queried the support available to families and carers of children and young people with disabilities or illness who may need a short break respite care. The Head of SEND advised the panel that parents have access to support through the MASH. The SEND Commissioning Board have discussed the concerns of parents of children with special needs and the specific issue of equality of access to services during the last 12 months and will be making recommendations to parents as the next step and then onto the SEND Partnership Board to consider the report and parent views. The Cabinet Member for Education and Skills praised the excellent work being done by the GEM Centre to support families and children with disabilities.

The panel discussed the concerns about the number of school exclusions and whether more work needed to be done to avoid this. The panel discussed the possible stigma attached to Pupil Referral Units and whether a name change would help parents to see the positive impact that they can have. The Head of SEND advised the panel that a range of actions have been taken in response to the high rate of exclusions and disproportionate number of Black Afro-Caribbean boys. The Council does offer challenge to Headteachers about the decision to exclude.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Skills commented that the Headteacher and School Governors have the right to exclude a pupil. The Head of SEND advised that the issue of school exclusions is on the agenda for a meeting with Headteachers to look at the factors driving the increased number. The panel were advised that the number of exclusion while high, have reduced by 10% compared with the previous period.

The panel discussed the role and PRUs. The Cabinet Member for Education and Skills commented that the success of work done by people working in PRUs and that currently all are rated as being at least good by Ofsted and that there is strong focus on getting pupils back into mainstream education. The Cabinet Member praised the excellent work of the people working in PRUs in offering appropriate pastoral, behavioural and physiological support to pupils referred to the service.

The panel discussed the funding of the PRU and what happens to funding given to a school based on pupil numbers at the start of the year who is later excluded. The Director of Education and Skills explained how school budgets are readjusted where pupils have been excluded. The local authority must deduct from the school's budget in-year the amount within the formula relating to the age and personal circumstances of that pupil, pro rata to the number of complete weeks remaining in the financial year from the 'relevant date'. The PRU is a funded service.

Resolved:

1. The panel agreed to note the progress.
2. The Head of SEND a progress report on actions from Area SEND Self Evaluation with the panel before the end of November 2019.

## 7 **Early Years Update - Outcome of Peer Review**

Cllr Michael Hardacre, Cabinet Member Education and Skills, briefed the panel about the background to the findings from the Early Years Peer Review, with a special focus on speech and language. The Cabinet Member commented on the importance of having external peer review of services to help drive forward improvements in service delivery and the benefits of the non-confrontational approach adopted by the inspectors. The Cabinet Member added that the report shows that the service is moving in the right direction.

The panel were advised that a report on the findings will be presented in November 2019 to members of the Strengthening Families Board. Funding has been agreed to develop the early years workforce and a number of different projects aimed at mapping training needs and what can be done to avoid duplication is being planned.

The panel discussed the provision of support to children who have English as a second language at Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.

Emma Bennett, Director of Children's Service, commented on the work of the recent parenting programme and the plans to roll out the scheme.

The panel welcomed the report and the progress made by the service.

Resolved:

The panel agreed to note the report and the progress made.

## 8 **2019 Children and Young People Workforce Health Check**

Louise Haughton, Principal Social Worker, introduced the report. The Principal Social Worker explained the background to online survey aimed at checking the "health" of the Council's social workforce. The survey followed recommendations from the Social Work Task Force report published in November 2009 which concluded that good social work practice carried out by a "healthy" motivated workforce can lead to better outcomes for families and reduce demand and costs. The Council has signed

up to the report and as part of its commitment produce an annual report. The survey has since been extended to include the wider social care children's workforce.

Jennifer Rogers, Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner, gave a presentation of the main findings from the survey and invited panel members to comment on the report. The Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner summary was that overall good progress had been made towards building on previous strengths and also to identify areas for improvement. The Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner commented on work done since the action plan was agreed and published as a result of the survey findings.

The panel discussed the issue of manageable caseload for social workers and whether it should be reduced. The Director of Children's Service commented that caseloads have been reduced over the last 12 months and eight extra social workers have been recruited which has helped to reduce this further. This work is complimented by visits to social work teams to talk about issues and they report that caseloads have reduced. The average caseload is about 18. The Principal Social Worker added the caseload numbers are closely monitored on monthly basis. In addition, managers of teams have access to monitor caseloads of social workers. The Principal Social Worker commented on the past culture of social workers working long hours – often 45-50 hours a week but things are changing and there is an acceptance of the need to find a better balance between work and home life.

The Director of Children's Service commented on the workforce plan and work done to reduce the rate of turnover. The current rate for Wolverhampton has reduced to 50% of the national average. The panel queried if current situation where social workers working long hours has affected their ability to attend training sessions to maintain their practice. The Principal Social Worker advised that booklet of training events and learning opportunities has been published and there are mandatory courses to be completed.

The panel discussed plans to rollout Eclipse system which is expected to reduce the amount of time on inputting details, in response to the concerns of social workers. The Principal Social Worker briefed the panel on the benefits of the system and that it would offer better functionality – both social workers and health visitors use the system. The panel welcomed the introduction of the new system. The panel were reassured that appropriate checks have been introduced to comply with data protection and information governance requirements and maintain appropriate client confidentiality. The Director of Children's Service advised the panel that safeguarding concerns would take priority using the existing arrangements for sharing information in this situation with agreed process for sharing confidential or sensitive information.

The panel discussed the reasons why social work staff were leaving the organisation.

The Principal Social Worker commented on the importance of having a stable workforce and added that the Council is taking part in a national research programme which is developing a tool to identify issues that make social work staff feel stressed. The response from staff has been very positive and they have been willing to contribute to discuss issues with the researchers.

The panel requested a breakdown of responses to the question about the percentage of people never, rarely or occasionally feeling stressed. The Director of Children's Service agreed to provide a breakdown in future reports for clarity.

Resolved:

1. The panel comments on the Children's Workforce Health Check 2019 to be considered by Principal Social Workers.
2. The panel agreed to note the report.

9 **2019 Children's Social Work Health Check**

Jennifer Rogers, Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner, gave a presentation of the main findings from the survey of social workers and invited panel members to comment on specific highlights in the report which would be most helpful to the panel. The Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner commented on the main findings from the annual survey. The Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner invited panel comments on the report.

The panel were advised that the responses to the survey are completely confidential. The panel welcomed the report and the progress made.

Resolved:

The panel agreed to note the report.

10 **Children, Young People, and Families Scrutiny Panel - Draft Work Programme 2019-20**

The Scrutiny Officer presented the draft programme report to the panel who were invited to comment and make changes as appropriate.

Resolved:

The panel agreed to submit suggestions of changes to the draft work programme.