

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 22 January 2020

Attendance

Members of the Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

Cyril Randles
Cllr Beverley Momenabadi
Cllr Rita Potter (Chair)
Cllr Clare Simm
Cllr Udey Singh
Cllr Sohail Khan (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Paul Sweet
Cllr Jasbinder Dehar

Co-opted Members

Wolverhampton Youth Council

In Attendance

Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre – Cabinet Member Education and Skills

Employees

Earl Piggott-Smith
Emma Bennett
Louise Haughton
Amanda Newbold
Robert Hart

Scrutiny Officer
Director of Children's Services
Principal Social Worker
Head of School Improvement
Head of Inclusion Support

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 Paula Brookfield

Cllr John Reynolds Cabinet Member for Children and Young People
- 2 **Declarations of interest**
There were no declarations of interest recorded.

3 **Minutes of the previous meeting (27 November 2019)**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 27 November 2019 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 **Matters arising**

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

5 **Children's Social Care Self- Evaluation Refresh 2019/20 (report to follow)**

Louise Haughton, Principal Social Worker, introduced the report and explained that this is mid-point review of the service of progress made between April and September 2019. The Principal Social Worker explained the background to the report and the importance of self-evaluation of social work practice in helping to improve children's services. The Principal Social Worker advised that performance is in line with comparator authorities and also progress has been made to reduce number of children and young people in care, a key achievement for the service. In addition, progress has been made to improve retention of children social workers and placement stability through a range of different activities.

The Principal Social Worker outlined the main achievements in the report and the work done to improve the lived experience of children and improvements in the quality of reports following audits. A key area of current work is reducing the number of placement moves. The panel queried how children who have been trafficked outside of Wolverhampton are counted within total figures reported of CSE cases. The Principal Social Worker advised that the Local CSE cases detailed in the report includes children who live in Wolverhampton and the Council is responsible for. The panel were advised of work being done with different local faith communities and planned changes to the role of key worker. The Director of Children's Services advised the role of the work will change to include all types exploitation.

The panel queried the presentation of data in the report which included of mix of percentages and numbers for local CSE cases. The Director Children's Services accepted the error in the presentation and agreed to make the changes. The Principal Social Worker outlined the strategic plans which details plans to further strengthen the quality and impact of the social work practice.

The Principal Social Worker commented on the achievement of care leavers who have gone to University and that it should be celebrated.

Resolved:

The panel agreed to note the progress.

6 **Culture of Belonging Programme**

Cllr Michael Hardacre, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, introduced the report. The Cabinet Member explained that the 'Butler Act' 1944 allowed the parents to choose to home educate their children, which could not be challenged unless there were social services concern. The Cabinet Member explained the support offered by the Council to parents who choose to home educate but added that under current legislation there is no legal requirement on parents to cooperate, if they choose not to co-operate with Council or accept support offered. Robert Hart, Head of Inclusion Support, explained that the service takes a proactive stance to resolving

the issue when parent wants to home educate their child and offers them advice and support.

The Head of Inclusion Support briefed the panel about the main elements of the Culture of Belonging Programme as detailed in the report and an assessment of the data about children and young people who have been excluded from school. The Head of Inclusion Support outlined future plans to reduce the number of fixed and permanent inclusions in Wolverhampton schools. The panel queried the disproportionate number of children with SEN who have been excluded from school.

The Head of Inclusion Support commented that the use of internal inclusion and isolation areas in schools to resolve a behaviour issues are not included in statistics about exclusions and is therefore difficult to monitor.

The Head of Inclusion Support explained that the criteria permanent exclusion describes a situation where a pupil is considered to be a risk to the safety of other pupils. The Head of Inclusion Support outlined the action taken following the permanent exclusion from school and the appeal process. The Head of Inclusion Support advised that at the final appeal stage the panel cannot insist that the school accept the child or young person back.

The panel queried if parents had the option to home educate their child to avoid the risk of them being excluded. The Head of Inclusion Support advised the panel of the options available to parents and support that would be offered by the service. The panel discussed the issue of identifying children considered to be a risk of exclusion and work being done to achieve this.

The panel discussed the profile of pupils excluded – the majority are at secondary school and disproportionately involves children in aged 9-11 and 14-16, boys are 16 times more likely to be excluded, there is an 80% greater risk of exclusions for children with mixed ethnicity and 300% increased risk for children with SEN. The Head of Inclusion Support outlined to the panel the action being planned to reduce the number of school exclusions. The panel queried the reference in the document to there being no financial implications to the plans detailed in the report. The Head of Inclusion Support advised that an estimated £5 million is spent annually on alternative educational provision.

The Director of Children's Services advised that the structure of the behaviour teams has been restructured which has released funds to support the Culture of Belonging Programme.

The panel queried the statistics about the profile of pupils educated in Pupil Referral Units (PRU). The Head of Inclusion Support advised that the aim is to have the pupil placed in PRU for the shortest possible period and to work towards returning them to mainstream education.

The average length of stay of placement in a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) ranges from 12 to 28 weeks for children without EHCP plan. If a child has EHCP then the service will aim to provide the right package of support and assessment of needs. The panel were advised that there have been no permanent exclusions from a PRU. The Head of Inclusion Support agreed to check data on the number of fixed term exclusions and report the findings to the panel.

The Head of Inclusion Support detailed the key milestones against which the impact of the policy would be assessed and agreed to present a report to a future meeting of the panel. The report will be presented Children and Families Together Board meeting on 5 March 2020 to consider and endorse the proposals detailed in the report.

The panel discussed the issue of school exclusions and the high number of black and mixed ethnicity boys in Wolverhampton represented in the data. The panel requested more details of the nature of the issue. The Head of Inclusion Support advised that the number of boys excluded at primary school has reduced, while the numbers of secondary school exclusions has generally stayed the same.

The panel queried concerns about the rationale of schools reportedly sending a pupil considered to be at risk of exclusion being sent to another school for several weeks before returning back. The Head of Inclusion Support advised that members of the Fair Access Panel meet to consider hard to place or excluded children and the work done to ensure a return to full time schooling at the earliest opportunity. The service shares the findings of performance dashboard which details exclusions and will have a conversation about policies and the need for further training and support, where necessary.

The panel commented on the value of schools employing learning mentors in the past to work with young people considered to be at risk of being excluded and suggested that this should be part of the offer aimed at reducing the number of exclusions. The Director of Children's Services advised that schools are given a range of support to help them manage behaviour and support children at risk of being excluded. There are discussions ongoing to review the commissioning of school support services.

The panel queried the concerns about reasons for high number of exclusions when schools convert to an academy and if there was evidence to support this view. The Head of Inclusion Support advised that there was no evidence of direct correlation between these two events, however where there is evidence of a spike in the number of fixed term or permanent exclusions in schools then the service would present the findings to the school and challenge them about the reasons for this change.

The Head of Inclusion Support commented on the new Ofsted framework and how it is being used to both challenge and support schools. The panel queried the number of pupils with EHCP who have been excluded from school.

The Head of Inclusion Support agreed to provide the information. The panel queried the provision of PHSE lessons in PRUs and expressed concern about the current arrangements. The Head of Inclusion Support reassured the panel.

The panel suggested a visit to a PRU would be helpful. The Scrutiny Officer to arrange details. The Director of Children's Services advised the panel that a local PRU had recently been inspected by Ofsted.

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

Resolved:1

1. Scrutiny Officer to arrange visit to Wolverhampton Pupil Referral Unit.
2. The Head of Inclusion Support to provide details of the number of fixed and permanent exclusions involving children with EHCP and also the number of children with SEN, without an EHCP, who have been excluded from school.
3. The Head of Inclusion Support to present a report on the progress report on the work of Culture of Belonging Programme Board in meeting their objectives 12 months after operation to a future meeting of the panel.

7 **School Improvement Annual Report (report to follow)**

Cllr Michael Hardacre, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, introduced the report and made general comments on the progress made to improve educational performance of schools.

The Cabinet Member commented that the City is matching the performance at national level and reported that 84% of Wolverhampton schools are rated as being either good or better by Ofsted.

The Cabinet Member commented on the good working relationship with Ofsted and the involvement of advisers from the School Improvement Service in the consultation events relating to changes to schools and early years inspection framework attended by senior representatives from HMI. The Cabinet Member commented on the improved performance of Wolverhampton Schools compared to statistical neighbours at KS1 and KS2 for maths, writing and english. The improvement in educational performance has been consistent for four years. The panel were invited to comment and ask questions about the report.

The panel queried the longer-term organisational plans following the departure of Director of Education given the importance of the position to achieving educational performance. The Cabinet Member advised the panel that there is no statutory requirement to have a Director of Education role. The departure of the previous holder has created an opportunity to look at the current structure. Emma Bennett, Director of Children's Services, advised the panel that Amanda Newbold has taken the lead on schools in the interim and that further discussions are ongoing about options for the future. The panel were assured that the Cabinet Member would be involved in these discussions.

The panel queried the relationship between School Improvement Service and Regional Schools Commissioner. The Director of Children's Services meets on termly basis with Commissioner to discuss issues on a set agenda for the meeting. The relationship was described as being very positive.

The panel discussed the educational performance of the Pupil Referral Units. The Cabinet Member advised that all four PRUs have been by Ofsted as being either good or outstanding. The panel queried the impact on school performance in Wolverhampton schools pass rates as a result of Department of Education changes to the exam grading. The Head of School Improvement commented on unvalidated results Progress Measure 8 at Key Stage 4 which shows progress in school performance as improved since 2018 and is now above national and statistical neighbour average. The majority of children are considered to be making the right level of progress.

The panel queried the action being taken by the service to support three schools judged to be inadequate. The Head of School Improvement advised that since the report was published two of the schools has converted to an Academy and have been inspected by Ofsted and their performance will be monitored and support offered.

Resolved:

The panel agreed to note the report. The panel wanted to acknowledge the improved performance of schools and the ongoing progress made in areas of education among schools in Wolverhampton.

8 **Children, young people and Children Scrutiny Panel 2019 20 - Draft Work Programme**

Earl Piggott-Smith, Scrutiny Officer, briefed the panel on the agenda for the next meeting of the panel. The Scrutiny Officer advised that details about a planned visit to the Pupil Referral Meeting would be sent when agreed.

Resolved:

The panel agreed to note the report.