

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 15 October 2019

Attendance

Members of the Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

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

In Attendance

Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

Employees

Earl Piggott-Smith	Scrutiny Officer
Kush Patel	Commissioning Officer
Andrew Wolverson	Head of Service, People
Emma Bennett	Director of Children's Services
Adrian Leach	Head of SEND
Amanda Newbold	Head of School Improvement

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
- 2 Declarations of interest**
There were no declarations of interest recorded.
- 3 Minutes of the previous meeting (25.9.19)**
That the minutes of the meeting held on 25 September 2016, 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 Michael Hardacre**

Cllr Hardacre, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, offered apologies for the late submission of the written response to the list of questions prepared by members of the scrutiny panel. The Chair suggested that Cabinet Member should be invited to give a briefing on the main headlines and the panel to be given the opportunity to ask any urgent questions. The panel supported this approach and agreed to defer the report to a future meeting for more detailed discussion. The Cabinet Member agreed to the proposal.

The Cabinet Member outlined the changes in the education landscape which had led to shift in the decision-making powers and responsibilities away from the local authority to schools and governing bodies. The approach to improving educational outcomes is now based on partnership working.

The Cabinet Member gave an example of funding for Adult Education Service, which was previously directly administered by Council on behalf of Government. The funding for the programme is now administered by West Midlands Combined Authority who have responsibility for adult education skills training across the region.

The Cabinet Member commented on positive progress made during the previous three years in education service in terms of the performance of Wolverhampton schools and also improved rating of the local authority nationally. The panel commented on the level of public understanding about the relationship between schools and the local authority and the limits of local authority power to intervene. The panel commented on the generally positive relationship with schools and the progress made. The Cabinet Member encouraged panel members to consider becoming school governors to help them understand the changes in how schools are managed.

Resolved:

1. The panel agreed to defer consideration of the report from the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills to a future meeting of the panel.
2. Panel members are asked to consider becoming a school governor at their local school.

6 **Transforming Children's Services Programme (report to follow)**

Andrew Wolverson, Head of Service People, introduced the report and gave an overview of the projects within the Transforming Children's Service programme and an update on progress to date. The Head of Service People advised the panel that the children's service authority was rated in 2016 as being "good" following an inspection and was the only authority in the region to achieve this rating. The work of the projects is overseen by members of the Programme Board.

The Head of Service People gave details of the impact of projects to date and further activities planned to support children and families. The panel were asked to consider questions listed in para 7 of the report and specifically 7.2 *Is there a way of involving scrutiny differently in the oversight of the transformation programme going forward that brings it alive for them?*

The panel queried the plans for the future of Troubled Families Programme and other projects which are due to end in March 2020, which have proven to be successful in meeting their objectives. The Head of Service People advised the panel that he attends Wolverhampton Regional Troubled Families Group and at a recent meeting of the group it was reported that the future funding of the programme is likely to be included in Governments Comprehensive Spending Review plans. The expectation is that the successful programmes will get further funding.

Emma Bennett, Director of Children's Services, commented that the Transforming Children's Services Programme is one of a number of Payment by Results (PBR) funded programmes and the approach adopted in Wolverhampton has been to use the funding to change the ways services are delivered and as a means to invest to save.

The Director of Children's Services has made the case with MCHLG in feedback that short term funded schemes are not helpful and argued for more long-term funding for such schemes. The panel commented on the positive progress made by the programme.

The panel queried if there were sufficient resources to meet the needs of the current number of looked after children in Wolverhampton and the impact of the programme in helping to reduce this figure. The Director of Children's Services commented on the future of the Transforming Children's Services Programme and the impact in the long term would be a reduction in the number of children and young people referred to social services, which will achieve savings to the Council. The panel discussed the changing number of looked after children in Wolverhampton. The Director of Children's Services added that at its peak 807 children were on the looked after children list - the current target is 549 and is expected to reach 595 by March 2020. The panel were reassured by the Director that anything lower than a figure of 550 children would be a concern, however the current number would suggest that the service is getting the balance right and the panel should feel reassured.

The panel were reassured by the findings in the report and agreed future updates should be done by exception where there are concerns about progress towards delivering excellent services to children and families in Wolverhampton.

Resolved:

1. The panel agreed to note the report and the progress made by projects and programmes aimed at reducing the high number of children and young people in care.
2. The panel agreed to receive future reports on progress of Transforming Children's Service by exception in order to meet its governance responsibilities as outlined in the report.

7 **HeadStart Sustainability**

Kush Patel, Children's Innovation Lead, introduced the report and gave brief update on the HeadStart sustainability plan and progress to date. The Children's Innovation Lead outlined the reach figures for the programme and the success of work done to engage parents and the wider community. The programme has exceeded its original forecast for number of young people it has engaged. The Children's Innovation Lead advised the panel that the programme is moving from learning to the embedding

stage. The development of sustainability plans is being supported by the National Children's Board (NCB).

The Children's Innovation Lead detailed changes to the governance structure of the programme and gave a presentation on the four priority themes. The panel were updated on progress against each of the theme areas. The panel were invited to comment on the report. The panel queried plans to both recruit and retain existing parenting champions detailed in the report. Andrew Wolverson, Head of Service People, advised the panel that there is a dedicated parent champion co-ordinator to support this work, which also supported by the Adult Education Service. The co-ordinator manages 40 volunteers and there is commitment from the Council to maintain and grow the number of volunteers because of the benefits of encouraging parents to talk.

The panel queried decision making process about future plans for projects funded by HeadStart and in particular the risk of job losses when the funding ends in 2021. The Head of Service People responded that the specific project had achieved the target set at the point. The project ended earlier than planned in order to meet the timeline for inclusion in the national evaluation programme, this meant activities had to be brought forward to meet the deadline. The evaluation of the programme is done by Manchester University. The staff involved in the projects were not employed by the HeadStart programme and the aim was to be a test and learn programme and some projects would be ended early if they were not having the expected impact.

The panel discussed the help offered to young people to get them work ready and the involvement of schools. The Children's Innovation Lead advised the panel that the programme has been successful in getting schools involved.

The panel were advised the panel that the programme board will be using the expertise of the NCB to review the constitution and to develop plan for sustainability of successful projects. The NCB are looking at arranging a showcase event to promote the impact and lessons learnt from the programme.

The panel queried the efforts to improve the skills of the workforce and whether to extend co-production to give young people a more active role in the development of the future work and direction of the programme.

Head of Service People commented on work done to map what support services are available to young people.

The panel queried the reasons for originally selecting the areas chosen to be included in the programme. The Head of Service People explained the criteria that was used and explained further work is ongoing to identify gaps in provision. The work is part of the action plan which CYP Emotional Mental Health and Wellbeing Partnership Board which is aimed at getting a better understanding of the needs of young people.

Resolved:

1. The panel agreed to note the progress of the HeadStart sustainability plan.
2. The panel comments on the future plans as the programme moves from 'test and learn' to 'learn and embed' to be considered by the HeadStart Partnership.

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

Earl Piggott-Smith, Scrutiny Officer, presented the report and advised the panel of recent changes to the work programme. The panel were advised that the work programme would be updated to reflect any actions agreed during the meeting. The panel were advised to submit any changes to the draft work programme.

Resolved:

The panel agreed to note the report.

9 **Youth Engagement Strategy**

Andrew Wolverson, Head of Service People, presented the Youth Engagement Strategy and outlined the background and the key aims. The Head of Service commented on the success of the Summer Squad. The events have generated a lot of interest from young people in the activities on offer and received 21,000 'hits' on the website and the next Summer Squad programme is expected to increase from 200 to 300 activities.

The Head of Service People briefed the panel about plans for developing youth activities for the October school half term. It is planned to arrange 50 different activities during the period and has been promoted on the website. The overall aim is to build on the success and to develop an online offer that young people would be willing to engage with.

The Head of Service commented on the excellent response to youth organisations across Wolverhampton to the initiative wanting to get involved in the future plans to offer a range of different activities.

The Head of Service commented on the benefits of involving members of Children in Care Council in developing the content of the programme.

The panel discussed the issue of young people who may not want to engage or need support to get involved in the activities on offer. The panel commented on the option of using detached or outreach youth work to make young people aware of what is on offer. The panel discussed the impact of poverty and deprivation on the willingness of young people to get involved during school holidays. The panel discussed concerns about the risk of young people disengaging aged 12 -13 from more structured activities and the need to be flexible in these situations.

The panel discussed the location of activities available to young people.

The Director of Children's Services commented on the work done to increase the youth offer across the City. The panel suggested an interim report on progress of the strategy in 6 months' time. The panel commented on the need to consider feedback from the survey of young people.

The panel commented on the positive impact of youth work and welcomed efforts to engage with young people. The panel discussed the offer available to young people with special needs and queried how events were promoted to this group. The Head of Service People advised the panel that young people were asked to share their views about how events should be promoted.

The response from young people was they wanted activities that were accessible to everyone. The panel suggested that giving more detail about the events will help people to decide if it was suitable for them as individual needs vary so much rather than activities promoted to young people with special needs. The Head of People Service added that this was a challenge to the planning of events, but the co-production approach would help to improve how events are described. The panel discussed the demographic profile of young people using the service and suggested further work to be done to find out this information.

The Director of Children's Services commented on work planned to collect this information about the people who have attended events and will use this to review the balance between the universal and targeted youth offer. The panel suggested that information about events could be more descriptive, for example a 'a noisy activity' to help people to decide if it was suitable activity for them. The Head of People Service commented on the work to involve young people in the design of activities in the past and also in deciding what activities were offered, which had been successful. The panel were advised that 40,000 Summer Squad booklets had been distributed.

Resolved:

1. The panel agreed to note the report and the progress made to develop the youth engagement strategy document.
2. The panel to receive an interim report on progress of the strategy in March 2020.

The meeting closed at 19:45