CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 14 July 2021

Attendance

Members of the Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

Cyril Randles
Cllr Rita Potter (Chair)
Cllr Qaiser Azeem
Cllr Christopher Burden
Cllr Adam Collinge (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Wendy Dalton
Cllr Stephanie Haynes
Cllr Gillian Wildman

Members of the Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel in attendance via Teams

Cllr Clare Simm
Cllr Paul Sweet
Cllr Val Evans
Cllr Asha Mattu
Cllr Jaspreet Jaspal

Co-opted Members (5)

Cyril Randles	Church of England – Lichfield Board of Education Representatives
Wolverhampton Youth Council	

In Attendance
Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre, Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Work
Cllr Beverley Momenabadi, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

Employees

Earl Piggott-Smith	Scrutiny Officer
Emma Bennett	Executive Director of Families
Alison Hinds	Deputy Director of Children's Social Care
Phil Leivers	Head of Education Excellence
Jennifer Rogers	Principal Social Worker (Interim)
Brenda Wile	Deputy Director of Education
Julia Cleary	Scrutiny and Systems Manager
Martin Stevens	Scrutiny Officer

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

1 **Welcome and Introductions**

Cllr Rita Potter, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting and advised it was also being live streamed to the press and public. Cllr Potter advised that she was not expecting any exempt or restricted items on the agenda. A recording of the meeting would be available for viewing on the Council's website at a future date.

2 **Meeting procedures to be followed**

Cllr Potter explained the protocol to be followed during the meeting for asking questions and reminded everyone that microphones should be muted and cameras off unless they have been invited to speak.

3 **Apologies**

There were no apologies recorded for the meeting.

4 **Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest recorded.

5 **Minutes of the previous meeting (10 March 2021)**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 10 March 2021 be approved as a correct record.

6 **Education Excellence Strategy (pre-decision scrutiny)**

The Chair invited Cllr Mike Hardacre, Cabinet Member for Education, to introduce the report.

The Cabinet Member thanked the panel for the opportunity and advised that the draft strategy is presented for both scrutiny and challenge. The views of the panel were sought to ensure that the approach to the development of the strategy document was appropriate.

The Cabinet Member highlighted that the strategy document should be seen in the context of a background of continuing and improving educational success in Wolverhampton schools. The Cabinet Member commented on the increase in the number of the number of schools rated as being either 'good' or 'outstanding'.

There is an expectation that the number of schools rated as 'requiring improvement' will be reduced further in the future. The Cabinet Member advised the Panel that the local authority has a duty to monitor the effectiveness of schools. The Cabinet Member commented on the positive working relationship with schools.

The Chair invited Phil Leivers, Head of Service Educational Excellence, to introduce the presentation.

The Head of Service outlined the background to the development of the strategy and how it links to the priorities detailed in the Relighting Our City Plan. The Head of Service commented on the importance of improving the opportunities for young people, both in their school environment, but also when they leave school and move on into further and higher education and employment.

The current strategy replaces the previous School Improvement and Governance Strategy which has had a positive impact on educational results and standards in the

City. The Educational Excellence Strategy intends to build on this success and has been extended to cover Early Years settings.

The Head of Service advised the panel that the service has consulted with school representatives to get their views on what elements of the current strategy should be kept and areas where changes are needed. The work was informed by several task and finish groups that included representation from the leaders in the early years, settings, and school heads. The approach to involve schools at the early stages of developing the strategy was welcomed in the reported feedback on the process.

The strategy will be presented to Cabinet for final approval before it is launched formally in September 2021. The Head of Service outlined the support that would be offered to schools based on their category and the criteria that would be used to determine this. All schools would get a minimum of one day of support from a School Improvement Adviser.

The Head of Service outlined further changes when compared to the previous strategy, for example a specific reference to offering induction to newly appointed Headteachers. The findings will be reported to the Regional Schools Commissioner and Ofsted for those schools whose educational performance is of significant concern. In such circumstances the Council might contact a high performing school to offer some support to a lower performing school.

The service is developing a performance dashboard to monitor maintained schools jointly with colleagues. The dashboard is primarily for use by headteacher, business managers and school governors as a compliance management tool. The dashboard will be regularly updated, and the information used to prioritise support offered to schools and will be made available to academies.

The Head of Service gave further details of the support that would be offered to teachers who are new to headship or those teachers who have moved into a Wolverhampton school from outside the city. The programme will also aim to support deputy heads as part of their preparation to apply for a future headship position. This is an important part of the overall succession planning which is necessary to maintain strong leadership in schools.

The Chair thanked the presenter and invited Brenda Wiles, Deputy Director of Education, to make a few comments before asking panel members to comment and or ask questions about the strategy.

The Deputy Director of Education commented on the positive view of the process in developing the strategy and highlighted the close working relationships between headteachers and the local authority during the process. This positive close working relationship is reflected in their role in developing the strategy document. The service is aware of the impact that the pandemic has had on children and young people in the city, and teaching and the non-teaching staff. The strategy is a good overarching document to begin the process of addressing gaps in learning over the next three years. The Deputy Director of Education endorsed the strategy and rated it highly when looking back over her career in education.

The Chair thanked the Deputy Director of Education for her comments and invited panel members to comment and or ask questions.

The panel were supportive of collaborative working and focus on building on good partnership arrangements during the development of the strategy.

Cllr Adam Collinge highlighted the important contribution and influence of community settings on educational outcomes of children and young people.

Cllr Collinge queried the role in school improvement advisors, and the teams around schools and wanted reassurance that schools will be able to act as critical friends to the Council if they do identify issues within the local community which is affecting the education setting and that there is process for reporting such concerns.

The Cabinet Member commented on the decision to bring together children's service and education under a single director in recognition of creating a whole system approach to supporting children, young people and their families. The Cabinet Member accepted the importance of close working relations between schools and community support networks and the adoption of a whole system approach. The Cabinet Member commented on the benefits of bringing two previously separate leadership teams together into one leadership team.

Cllr Adam Collinge welcomed the commitment from the Council to listen and engage with local schools in order to strengthen relationships. The Deputy Director of Education commented that schools were not just seen as education providers, but equivalent to also like the contribution of other key partners such as health, who are members of a reference group. The group meet regularly to talk about the different challenges, which covers safeguarding issues. The Deputy Director of Education commented on the work of local strengthening family hubs and added that a key priority will be to build on the relationships between the network of these hubs and schools.

Cllr Adam Collinge queried the process for reviewing progress and educational outcomes and suggested that the strategy would benefit from setting smart targets for schools which set out what the Council expect them to achieve. The Cabinet Member commented on the work done to encourage schools and create opportunities to work with the Council to respond to the different challenges they face.

The Head of Service Educational Excellence commented on the importance of smart targets, which have been discussed with the Deputy Director of Education, in addition to performance targets schools have set for themselves. The service wants to progression on the improvement journey. At present 87 per cent of Wolverhampton schools are rated as being either 'good' or 'outstanding'. The Head of Service Educational Excellence commented that would like to see all schools rated as either 'good' or 'outstanding', but they may not all reach 100 per cent rating at the same time. A more realistic to aim would be to achieve 90 per cent of schools rated as either 'good' or 'outstanding'.

The panel agreed that a progress report could be presented to a future meeting of the panel following the planned review detailed in the presentation.

The Head of Service Educational Excellence advised the panel that an annual report on the impact and progress of the strategy is being drafted and should be completed in January 2022.

The annual report alongside the school examination results data could also presented to the panel for discussion and comment.

Cllr Adam Collinge commented on the importance of the listening to the voice of students when developing the strategy document. The Head of Service Educational Excellence reassured the panel that when performance reviews of schools are done this will involve talking to the children and young people about their learning experience and if they feel safe in school.

Cabinet Member, Children Cllr Beverley Momenabadi, commented on the important role of school governors in school to holding schools to account and the training and support offered by the Council to be a critical friend. The Cabinet Member thanked the Head of Service Educational Excellence and Cabinet Member for Education for their contributions to the development of the strategy.

Cllr Wendy Dalton queried the lack of references in the strategy document to SEND training and support offered to schools. The Deputy Director of Education agreed to note the comment and report back to the panel. The Deputy Director commented that there is a separate SEND strategy document and reassured the panel that Council while prioritising academic outcomes there is also a focus on assessing how inclusive schools are in welcoming children with special needs and the progress made. In addition, the Council also has school improvement advisers who focus on the reviewing the provision of SEND and inclusion in schools.

The Council has responsibility for supporting SEND children and young people.

The panel suggested that a report on the service and the current offer, and the training offered to schools to support children SEND be added to the agenda for a future panel meeting. The Deputy Director of Education agreed to look at the issue and report back the findings to a future meeting.
Cllr Wendy Dalton expressed concerns about the lack of educational psychologists and the impact that this is having on parents needing support.

The Director of Children's and Adults Services advised the panel that there was no shortage of education psychologists in Wolverhampton and the current resource compares well with other local authorities. The service has however experienced an increase in demand arising from referrals for Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans, where education psychologists would be involved in the assessment and review process. The service is offered as an additional option which schools can choose to purchase as it not a statutory service.

In addition, the Council also provides support to schools in managing issues around social and emotional behaviours among children and young people, which is supported by the work of the educational psychology service.

The Chair of the panel queried if there was a reference in the strategy document to mitigating against the effects of any future disruptions to children's education as a

result of Covid 19. There was also concern about the support offered to children that may be affected by having to learn remotely.

The Deputy Director for Education responded that the service has been impressed by the quality and improvements in the school emote learning packages over the past 16 months. In addition, there is evidence that schools are ready to adopt a blended approach to education where children have been sent home to self-isolate. In this situation children have been able to continue their learning. The Deputy Director of Education added that the Head of Service Educational Excellence leads the development of an extensive assessment package to understand the progress made by every child in terms of their learning. The package also includes an assessment of the social and emotional impact of the disruption caused by Covid 19 to children and young people.

The Deputy of Director of Education commented that in a recent meeting with the Head of Service Educational Excellence it was reported that findings from teacher assessments for reading development for children across Wolverhampton show an improvement. The findings suggest that some parents have been able to spend time reading with their children which has contributed to the progress. However, there is also an acceptance that some children have missed out on the curriculum and would have benefited from being in a school setting rather learning remotely at home.

Helen, a member of Wolverhampton Youth Council, expressed concerns about the actions taken by schools in preparation for a visit by Ofsted inspectors and the view that pupils are manipulated to behave in a certain way during the period which gives an unreliable picture. There was concern that inspectors do not get to see the actual behaviour of students and as a result their report will not lead to the necessary recommendations which can lead to an improved situation.

The Deputy Director of Education welcomed the comment and agreed that Ofsted judgements are limited in the areas inspected. However, the panel were reassured that when local authority reviews take place, they will cover issues such as student behaviour in addition to reviewing academic outcomes of a school.

Cllr Stephanie Haynes, queried work done to measure the effects on children who have had to study remotely, and the disruption caused by Covid 19 cases and restrictions in schools, and specifically what was being done to measure the social effects of children learning remotely. Cllr Haynes highlighted concern that for some children the home is not a safe place and impact on children in a ‘bubble’ being sent home in response to a Covid 19 case.

The Deputy Director of Education explained the policy advice to schools when a child has been in close contact with someone who has tested positive and advised that in this situation a child will be able to return to school after a negative PCR test.

The Deputy Director of Education reassured the panel that schools are very experienced in assessing how well a young person is doing and being in school allows teachers to monitor their welfare. However, when a child is working at home it will not be possible for schools to check on their welfare. The service works closely with social care colleagues, and early help services to monitor the welfare of children.

The Deputy Director of Education acknowledged the impact of home schooling on children's education and development and accepted that it will difficult to measure due to the level of disruption caused and it is likely that the impact of Covid 19 will not be known for a long time. The Deputy Director of Education added schools have strong pastoral support teams and learning mentors to support children.

The Chair commented on the importance of listening to and engaging with young people to find out about their educational experiences. The Deputy Director of Education outlined the different ways for young people to share their views.

Cllr Adam Collinge queried the methodology used to select schools who were invited to be members of the consultation group involved in developing the strategy. The Head of Service Educational Excellence advised the panel that all school leaders were contacted and asked to nominate volunteers to represent the sector. The school leaders involved were a good representation of the different schools in Wolverhampton.

Cllr Adam Collinge requested more details about the reference in the strategy document to sharing the Team Around the Setting Dashboard with Academies detailed in Annex 5. The Deputy Director of Education agreed to consider how this offer could be promoted with schools.

Cllr Adam Collinge commented on issue of the increase in the number of children being home educated during the pandemic and queried how the strategy will support children in this situation.

The Director of Children's and Adults Service commented that the panel previously considered reports on elective home education and the Council has responded to an earlier consultation proposed Government changes. There has been an increase in the number of children being home educated locally and nationally during the pandemic. The Council is still waiting for an update from Government on any changes to the current home education policy.

The Director detailed the support available to families who are home educating their children, for example there is a dedicated officer that works with elective home educated families. The service only has a small number of parents who choose not to engage with the service, but there is a robust process to do necessary educational and welfare checks.

The Cabinet Member expressed concern about current arrangements and the limited powers for the Council to check on the progress of children being home educated, while supporting the decision of parents who choose this option for their children. The Cabinet Member advised the panel a letter was sent to the three MPs for Wolverhampton expressing their concern to the Secretary of State for Education.

The panel thanked the presenters for the report.

Resolved:

1. The panel supports the aims of the draft Education Excellence Strategy 2021-24 and welcomes the inclusion on early provisions and the encouragement for greater collaboration and shared responsibility between the local authority and education

providers settings, with the aim of improving outcomes for children and young people in Wolverhampton.

2. The Head of Service Educational Excellence to present a progress report on impact of the strategy to the panel meeting in January 2022. The report to also include an update on the impact of the strategy and dashboard results and a comparison of educational attainment and outcomes by different education settings.

7 **Principal Social Worker Annual Report 2020 - 2021**

Jenny Rogers, Principal Social Worker for Children and Adults introduced the introduced the annual report.

The Principal Social Worker advised the panel that the report sets out progress against the key priorities during 2020-2021, the response of social workers to Covid 19 and specifically the work done to support the safety and wellbeing of social workers across adults and children's teams. The presentation however would focus on the work done by children social services.

The panel were advised that a key responsibility of the Principal Social Worker is to ensure quality of practice and support continual learning and improvement, which has been important area of work during the response to the pandemic.

The panel were reassured that during this period children and families continue to be supported to a high standard by social work teams. In addition, quality assurance checks and practice weeks continued using Teams to make sure that the service continued to meet the statutory duties and improve social work practice.

The Principal Social Worker reported an increase in the number of case files rated as ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ compared to the previous year – 70 per cent of case files were rated ‘good’ or ‘higher’ compared to 57 per cent in 2019 – 2020. In addition, there has been a reduction in the number of case audits rated as requiring improvement or inadequate which is evidence of good progress.

The Principal Social Worker commented that another priority of the role is the recruitment and retention of social workers and detailed a number of specific initiatives such as fast track social work programmes and social work apprenticeships, as examples aimed at maintaining a future supply of social workers to help the service meet future demand.

The Principal Social Worker commented on the national shortage of social workers and highlighted the importance of investing in such programmes. The importance of retaining existing social workers was highlighted. The Principal Social Worker commented on the progression pathway for both adults and children's social workers which was launched last year. The aim of the initiative is to support the learning and development of social workers to encourage them to stay with the Council. The feedback from social workers has been positive.

The service has worked with the Council’s Organisational Development team to develop good training opportunities for social workers which has been shown to be successful in the move from offering an in-person support to offering support online.

The Principal Social Worker advised the panel that the service as continued to hold Social Work briefings. A virtual social work conference was held earlier in the year on the theme of safeguarding, which had presentations from people with a lived experience of the service in the past. The conference has helped to improve social practice and the feedback from social workers to the event has been positive.

The Principal Social Worker advised the panel that all Wolverhampton social workers successfully re-registered in November 2020 with Social Work England, who is the regulator for the service. The service has been able to support more social work students and recruit 15 new practice educators who study, an additional qualification in order to support social work students. This was highlighted as evidence of the commitment of the service to supporting the next generation of social workers. The Principal Social Worker commented her pride in the work done by social work teams in responding to the issues presented by the pandemic.

The Principal Social Worker briefed the panel on the range of work to promote issues of equality, diversity and inclusion across the service and commented on a video created for national Social Work Week to showcase the work of the Council in this area. The video included the voices of people who had experienced discrimination and racism. In total, 130 people took part from across the UK in the virtual event. The Principal Social commented on work done to raise the profile of social work and to showcase the work being done in Wolverhampton and future priorities for the service. A key priority of the role will be to aim to move from a good Ofsted rated authority to an outstanding this year.

The panel thanked the Principal Social Worker for report and presentation.
Cllr Adam Collinge queried the reduction in the number of Quality of Practice audit completed from 82 in 2019-20 compared 33 audits done in 2020-21 and details of plans for increasing the number done over the next 12 months.
The Principal Social Worker responded that the reduction was due to the impact of Covid as social workers adjusted to the new working arrangements. The Principal Social Worker reassured the panel and outlined plans for improving both the quality and the number of audits completed.

Cllr Adam Collinge requested more details of the action plans developed to address issues highlighted in the findings from the annual Social Work Health Check .The Principal Social explained the reason for not including details in the report and advised the panel that progress is reported separately and that action plans are monitored and reviewed. The Principal Social Worker advised that an issue highlighted in the survey was a slight increase in stress levels, which is understandable given COVID 19 situation, but is also lower than previous years. In in order to address these issues there are plans to revise the current supervision procedures and policies.

The Chair queried the extent to which the Principal Social Worker is managing the combined role for adults and children and suggested if the role would benefit from having a separate lead for children.

The Director of Children’s and Adults advised the panel that the Council took the decision to combine both roles on the basis that this would both improve standards and support the whole family approach. The Director commented that the approach has worked well.

The Director added that the Principle Social Worker has a team that supports her to meet her responsibilities. The role is also supported by other Council departments. The Director reassured the panel that if the current arrangements were found not to be working then the situation would be reviewed.

The Chair asked the Principal Social Worker to detail the key future challenges to the role and explain how she would mitigate them going forward. The Principal Social Worker highlighted the ongoing challenge presented by Covid 19 and supporting social workers, some of whom are experiencing post pandemic fatigue, who also had to adapt to the fast pace of change and rapidly changing situation.

The Principal Social Worker commented that social work is a people profession and social workers need to be around other people to learn and improve practice. The other future challenge is how the service adapts to the 'new normal' and helping newly qualified social workers to gain the skills and knowledge needed who may have to work remotely. A key challenge is supporting the wellbeing of social workers in this situation.

The situation will be mitigated by the continued investment in the recruitment of social workers and being involved in regional initiatives such as the West Midlands Teaching partnerships. The service will also be working with universities to make sure courses are fit for purpose and at the end students are ready for the realities of social work. There is the ongoing challenge of the recruitment and retention of social workers, while the situation is working well now, it could change in the future.

A further future challenge is thinking about how to get feedback from social workers about what is working and not working for them. The current health check survey gives an important 'temperature check' but there is an acceptance of the need to do more and being more responsive to social workers.

The final challenge is moving the inspection rating from 'good' to 'outstanding' as there is desire to wanting the best outcome for the children and families in Wolverhampton.

Cllr Wendy Dalton reported a very positive experience in conversations with social workers about their experience of working for Wolverhampton Council.
Cllr Wendy Dalton queried if the service was having difficulties in retaining social workers and the use of agency workers. The Principal Social Worker advised the panel that there were only a small number of vacancies and agency workers are used when needed. The pool of social workers will also be increased by an initiative social worker in schools programme.

The panel welcomed the report and agreed to support the recommendations.

Resolved:

1. The panel agreed to the endorse the work and report of the Principal Social Worker.
2. The panel support the priorities detailed in the Principal Social Work Plan 2021-2022.
3. The panel welcomed the commitment of the Principal Social Worker to increase the number of case audits included in the review to pre-Covid 19 levels.

4. The panel to receive an update on progress against priorities in the work plan to a future meeting

8 **Children and Young People's Social Work Self-Evaluation 2021- 2022**

The Chair invited Alison Hinds, Deputy Director of Children's Social Care, to present the report to the panel.

The Deputy Director briefed the panel on the headlines detailed in the executive summary of the presentation.

The Deputy Director advised the panel there is a requirement for the local authority to complete an annual self-evaluation of its children and young people's services. The process also gives the service the opportunity to review work done during the previous year and identify what has worked well and what could have been done better.

The Deputy Director highlighted the flexibility and adaptability of social workers in managing the restrictions of the pandemic while continue working with and supporting children and families. The Deputy Director praised the efforts of social workers who continued to safeguard the children of the city and maintain strong relationships with families and adapted to the need to work differently. The Deputy Director also praised the role and contributions of partner organisations across the City to protect and work with vulnerable children, supported by a strong and stable workforce.

The Deputy Director advised the panel that the service did see an increased demand for support at certain points during the year when schools returned, which was expected. The increase in demand is in line with regional and national trends.

The panel were reassured that the service continues to work with families at the earliest opportunity and where it is necessary will use its powers to intervene at the right level and only when required for the appropriate right length of time.

The Deputy Director commented on the increased placement stability for children in care throughout the last year, which is supported by a strong cohort of foster carers which has helped to keep children stable during the Covid 19 pandemic. The carers worked hard to support home learning and family time arrangements so children could stay to their family remotely during this period.

The Deputy Director commented on the improvements made to the services offered to families, for example the local House Project for care levers which helps young people in care to move into independent living with a range of specialist support. The aim is help young people to successfully take on and maintain their own tenancy at 18. The service has successfully managed to move 10 young people into their own tenancies.

The Deputy Director commented on a new project funded by DFE which involves social work teams based in schools. The project involved asking schools to volunteer to take part. At present 12 schools are part of the programme. There are six schools and social workers in, and some feeder schools taking part and six control schools.

The early stages of the project have been positive and has helped build relationships with school colleagues that will help to make sure children and families get the right level of support.

The Deputy Director advised that panel that a new multi-agency missing, and exploitation hub service was also set up this year. This is a partnership approach aimed working with other agencies to tackling the issue of exploitation in the city and to better understand where children are at risk and how the service can help prevent children becoming at risk of exploitation. The project will be evaluated in 2022.

The panel were invited to comment on the presentation.

Cllr Adam Collinge queried the reasons for the increase in the referrals to the service from school and expressed concern about the number of isolated children being home educated who may not be known to the service.

Cllr Collinge also queried how children in this situation will be monitored and expressed concern about the under reporting of cases known to the service.
The Deputy Director commented that the increase in the number of school children being referred to service is what would have normally been expected following the return in September. There has been no significant difference in the level of demand and referrals when compared to previous years at this time of the year. The situation will be continued to be monitored and the service will work with schools to review referrals and provide the appropriate level of support. The Deputy Director reassured the panel that there are robust safeguarding arrangements in place. In addition, there are regular meetings with partner agencies which provide opportunities to review the situation and to share information. The information is supported by monthly performance meetings which can help identify sudden increases in the number of referrals and or themes which can be investigated in more detail where necessary. The work of the MASH team would also support this work.

Cllr Adam Collinge queried the monthly variations in the number of visits made by social workers within five working days of a referral being made to the service in the report. The Deputy Director explained the work being done to increase the number of children that are seen within the target of five working days. In addition, social workers are encouraged to improve the recording more accurately during assessments visits. The overall picture shows an improving situation.

The Deputy Director added that the performance measure for initial visit for Children in Need (CIN)is not a statutory duty for the authority. The issue was highlighted during the last Ofsted inspection and is seen as good practice to monitor children with low levels of concern. The Deputy Director reassured the panel that were there are child protection concerns then a visit would be made immediately as part of the Council's statutory duty. The variation in number of initial visits has been due to the difficulty in contacting the family and need in some situations to get consent to engage with family.

Cllr Adam Collinge queried the number of children who have moved from being assessed as being a Children in Need (CIN) to the requiring a child protection plan and the success of current policies and plans to prevent this where appropriate. The Deputy Director advised the panel most cases where children have been assessed CIN plans are closed after 12 months, which would suggest that the level of

intervention is at the right level for families referred to the service. The situation will be continued to be reviewed and the threshold for assessing for risk.

Cllr Stephanie Haynes expressed concern about the link between the poor performance of a football team and the increased reporting of domestic violence and cases of child abuse.

Cllr Stephanie Haynes queried the reasons for why there has not being an increase locally in the number of referrals for child sexual exploitation (CSE), when the figures show an increase nationally.

The Deputy Director agreed that there has not been a local increase in the number of referrals to the service related to CSE and expected more research would help to explain the reasons for this. The positive impact of exploitation hub and soft intelligence form the police and other partners is helping the service to better understand the risks to children in Wolverhampton.

The Chair asked the Deputy Director to outline key future challenges to the service and plans for mitigating their impact.

The Deputy Director highlighted the retention and recruitment of social workers in the future as a challenge and commented on work done to create opportunities for training and development to help them become more skilled and experienced and want to continue working in Wolverhampton.

The recruitment of recruiting good agencies social workers to replace social workers and the financial offer was highlighted as a challenge. The service is working with colleagues across West Midlands to look at ideas for maintaining the quality of social workers at the required level and that the workforce is strong enough to support families in the city.

A further challenge for the service is offering the right levels of support and training to social workers. There is an action plan which sets out the how the service is going to achieve this and continue to improve the services to children and families across the city.

The panel thanked the Deputy Director for the report and presentation.

Resolved:

The panel welcomed the report and the progress made towards seeking to ensure children and young people in Wolverhampton have the best possible start in life.

9 **Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel 2021- 2022- Draft Work Programme**

The panel invited Earl Piggott-Smith, Scrutiny Officer, to present the report to the panel.

The Scrutiny Officer briefed the panel on the criteria for selecting possible topics for the work programme and reports scheduled for future meetings. The Scrutiny Officer advised the panel that there were other opportunities for the panel to cover issues of interest, for example, informal meetings with lead officers and site visits. The Scrutiny

Officer advised the panel that an extra meeting date has been added to the work programme with the agreement of the Chair and Vice Chair.

The Cabinet Member for Children advised the panel about the summer festival programme and that a report on the Yo programme is scheduled to be presented to the panel in October 2021. The programme will be offering over 350 activities and about 50,000 children and young people are expected to take part. There are further details of events on the website.
The Cabinet Member invited panel members to promote the activities in their wards and to encourage children and young people to get involved.

The Scrutiny Officer invited panel members to suggest topics for the work programme

Cllr Wendy Dalton discussed the local SEND offer. The panel agreed to invite representatives of the Voice for Parents to present evidence when the topic is discussed at the meeting on 19 October 2021.

The panel thanked the Scrutiny Officer for the report.

Resolved:

1. The panel agreed the proposed changes to the draft work programme report.
2. The panel agreed to add an extra meeting on 16 March 2022 to the work programme.