

Strong Families, Children, and Young People Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 15 March 2023

Attendance

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

Cllr Paul Sweet
Cllr Qaiser Azeem
Cllr Adam Collinge (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Stephanie Haynes
Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre
Cllr Carol Hyatt
Cllr Andrew McNeil
Cllr Louise Miles

Co-opted Members (5)

Wolverhampton Youth Council

Employees

Alison Hinds
Jennifer Rogers
Brenda Wile
Jameel Mullan
Courtney Abbott

Deputy Director of Children's Social Care
Principal Social Worker
Deputy Director of Education
Inclusion and Attendance Service Manager
Quality and Improvement Advanced
Practitioner for Children and Adults
Co-production and Youth Engagement
Manager

Alice Vickers

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.

- 2 **Meeting procedures to be followed**
Cllr Potter explained the process to be followed during the meeting for asking questions.

- 3 **Apologies**
Apologies were received from the following members of the panel:

Cllr Lynne Moran

Cllr Lovinyer Daley

Apologies were also received from Emma Bennett, Executive Director of Families.

4 **Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest recorded.

5 **Minutes of the meeting held on 11 January 2023**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 11 January 2023 be approved as a correct record.

6 **Minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2023**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 8 February 2023 be approved as a correct record.

7 **Cross Party Scrutiny Review Group - Draft Mins 13.12.22**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 December 2022 be approved as a correct record.

8 **Family Hubs and Start for Life Offer Programme**

The Chair invited Alison Hinds, Deputy Director of Children's Services, to present report.

The Deputy Director advised the panel that the presentation will give an overview of the work being done to deliver the vision for early years healthy development through the setting up the Family Hubs network in Wolverhampton.

The Deputy Director advised that following a review of early years healthy development a report was published in March 2021.

The Deputy Director commented on the overall findings from the review and highlighted evidence of a strong commitment across the early years sector to improve how families are supported and areas where improvements in practice were needed to respond to the concerns of families.

The Deputy Director commented on the importance of the first two years of a child's life in terms of the development of their language skills and cognitive function, as examples and the long terms difference making an investment at this stage can make.

The Deputy Director commented on the three objectives of the Family Hub programme.

The Deputy Director advised the panel that Wolverhampton was among the 75 local authorities invited to submit applications to join the Governments Family Hubs programme. The programme has been funded by a Government grant of £300m for the next three financial years to support deliver a range of activities. The application made by Wolverhampton Council was successful and will help to implement quicker changes and improvements in how services are delivered to children and families across the City.

The Deputy Director commented on the importance of the programme in supporting parents and carers to help them nurture their babies and children and to get the appropriate level of support needed to improve long term outcomes in terms of health and education.

The Deputy Director added that the programme also aims to contribute to a reduction in health inequalities for babies, children, and families across England by sharing management information that will influence practice in the future.

The Deputy Director advised the panel about the range of services that Family Hubs are being encouraged to think about delivering as part of the offer, many of which are already being delivered across the City.

The Deputy Director advised that the panel that there are eight Strengthening Families Hubs which currently deliver a range of services with statutory partners such as the police, health visitors, midwives as part of targeted support offer to families. The aim will be to use the Family Hub programme to extend this offer to other families much earlier.

The Deputy Director added that the Council will be expected to deliver specific programmes, for example, infant feeding support, early language support.

The Deputy Director outlined the priority workstreams for the Family Hubs programme and details of the funding arrangements. The plans for delivering the programme will be informed by a local needs assessment. The work will be led by colleagues in Public Health.

The Deputy Director advised the panel that the Council is required to publish a Start for Life offer by April 2023 and that a draft has been completed. In addition, the Council is also required to establish a Parent Carer Panel.

The Deputy Director advised the panel about a planned programme of work to upgrade existing buildings to make them more accessible to parents and carers and to deliver a wider range of services.

The Deputy Director commented on the governance arrangements for the programme to ensure that is delivering against the vision and underlying principles.

The Deputy Director outlined the plans to communicate the changes to services the public, how they can access services and range of support that will be available in the Family Hubs. The Deputy Director advised the panel that two existing Strengthening Family Hubs in Low Hill and Graiseley wards will be re-launched as Family Hubs in April/May 2023. There are plans to identify other possible sites for other Family Hubs during the year.

The Deputy Director commented that to achieve the aim of making families aware of the new offer from Family Hubs a change in the culture of Strengthening Family Hubs will be needed as the current focus of the service offers targeted social work interventions where a family would have an allocated strengthened family worker or social worker.

The panel were invited to comment on the presentation.

The panel thanked the presenter for report.

The panel welcomed the plans to establish Family Hubs but suggested that the offer should be available in all wards supported by Government funding.

The panel congratulated the successful bid for funding to deliver the programme.

The panel had concerns about the delays in the Government allocating funding and the impact this is likely to have on when the Family Hubs network will be fully operational and delivering against the key priorities.

The panel also queried the potential for the Family Hubs to offer an outreach support service to families in the local community and more generally about plans to reach families who may not have easy access to them.

The Deputy Director reassured the plans about the timing of the rollout of Family Hubs and advised that the expectation is that five of the hubs will be running by late summer 2023 which will be a good start to the programme.

The Deputy Director agreed with the need to work with a range of community and voluntary organisations, and statutory organisations such as local schools. The Deputy Director reassured the panel that the service will be engaging with local organisations and advised the panel that the aim will be to complement and build on the current offer to families and make them more accessible.

The panel queried the plans for making families aware of the Family Hubs programme and how it will be promoted.

The Deputy Director commented on the importance of getting the communication right with families so that they understand the changes in how the new services will be delivered and how to access them. The Deputy Director reassured the plan that there is a communication plan, which will include the use of different methods, for example, leaflet drops in the areas where Strengthening Family Hubs will be changing to Family Hubs to explain the changes.

The panel suggested offering incentives to encourage parents to visit the Family Hubs and highlighted the importance of engaging with new parents at earliest opportunity and to promote the extended offer.

The Deputy Director welcomed the idea and reassured the panel that the service is working closely with health visitors and midwives in Strengthening Family Hubs and the introduction of Family Hubs will provide an opportunity to engage with more families.

The panel commented on the importance of improving housing provision and highlighted the impact on family welfare of poor living conditions and queried the work being done to engage with providers.

The Deputy Director acknowledged the issue and commented that housing support will be part of the Family Hubs offer.

The panel queried data about the current level of integration between families and the Strengthening Families Hubs and the plans for marketing the offer. The panel also asked for details about the plans for preparing the Health Needs Assessment.

The Deputy Director reassured the panel that the service has baseline data about the level of engagement by families with Strengthening Families Hub. The Deputy

Director added that the data for Family Hubs will not be directly comparable as the focus will be reaching a different group of families.

Furthermore, the DfE has encouraged Councils involved in the Family Hub programme to gather data about how the service will be working to improve current levels of engagement.

The Deputy Director advised the panel that work on the Health Needs Assessment has started and the process will involve looking at local and national data sets from various organisations.

The panel queried if the current functions delivered by Strengthening Family Hubs will remain or moved elsewhere

The Deputy Director confirmed that the services delivered by Strengthening Family Hubs will remain and the plan is to run them alongside the Family Hub offer so families can access both general support and get access to more targeted support from social workers or strengthening family workers, if needed.

The panel thanked the Deputy Director for the presentation.

Resolved:

1. The panel comments on the presentation to be noted and actioned where appropriate.
2. The panel agreed to receive an update on the progress of the opening of Family Hubs at a future meeting.

9

2022 Children's Social Work and Workforce Health Check

The Chair invited Courtney Abbott, Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner, to present report.

The Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner advised the panel that presentation summarises the findings from the main report. The annual health check report covers social work and general workforce working within children's social care teams.

The Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner advised the panel that the report aims to identify areas of strength and areas requiring greater focus to support workforce development planning and continuous improvement. The survey was open for six weeks between September and October.

The Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner commented that the overall findings were generally positive and there was evidence of significant improvements since the previous annual report.

The Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner commented on the low response rate to the survey despite a range of initiatives aimed at improving the situation.

The Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner gave detailed comments on the main areas of strength and development based on an analysis of the survey

responses. The Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner shared a range of quotes from employees about their views of working for the Council.

The Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner advised the panel that an action plan has been developed to address areas of concern. The Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner highlighted specific action focused on improving the survey response rate, for example, giving social workers protected time to complete the survey.

The Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner advised the panel about work being done to improve recruitment and retention in the workforce, for example, benchmarking pay and incentives.

The Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner commented on overall positive views from employees about working with colleagues and across teams and the impact that their work is having on young people and their families.

The panel were invited to comment on the presentation and the report.

The panel thanked the presenter for presentation and report.

The panel commented on a recent visit by Cllrs to a local MASH team where the issue of managing workload pressures as part of a specialised small team working to strict deadlines. The issue of workload pressures was also highlighted as an ongoing issue in the survey responses. The panel queried the timeline when it is expected that employee numbers would stabilise to provide sufficient cover, while accepting the high turnover rate and recruitment challenges in the sector.

Jennifer Rogers, Principal Social Worker, acknowledged the challenge locally and nationally in the recruitment and retention of social workers. The Principal Social Worker commented that the turnover rate of social workers across Wolverhampton is lower than the national average and generally there is stability within the children and young people in care service.

The Principal Social Worker accepted the specific challenges in the MASH service and child protection teams where there is a struggle in recruiting experienced social workers. The Principal Social Worker highlighted the inherent stressful nature of social work and the issue of secondary trauma which adds to the challenge when trying to recruit and retain workers.

The Principal Social Worker outlined the range of work being done to support existing social workers, for example, trauma informed supervision and monitoring casework workload numbers to be able to respond in a more flexible way that takes account of planned holidays and changes in demand.

The Principal Social Worker added that career progression opportunities have been recently created internally for Child Protection Lead Practitioner in recognition of the skills and experience needed. The aim is to help better manage workload issues due to difficulty in recruiting experienced social workers.

The Deputy Director of Children's Services commented on the national shortage of a good quality agency social workers. The Council is working closely with regional colleagues to agree a memorandum of understanding to encourage experienced

emergency social workers to stay within the local authority network rather than accept a temporary move to another authority outside the region.

The Deputy Director of Children Services reassured the panel that the service is working hard across the region to address gaps and highlighted the important contribution of quality agency workers to achieving this aim.

The Deputy Director of Children Services commented on longer term plans for improving the recruitment and retention of social workers and highlighted plans to present a rebrand of what it is like to work for Wolverhampton at a social work recruitment fair on 20 March 2023.

The panel queried the support for new and recently qualified social workers and the possible impact of increased workloads on ability to take up training and career progression opportunities. The panel were concerned about the impact this may have on future retention and recruitment of social workers, adding to workload pressures.

The panel suggested that the survey question asking people if they would recommend CWC as an employer to a friend should be amended to ask why they would not recommend CWC to a friend. The panel commented that this would provide useful information that could help shape plans for improving the recruitment and retention of social workers.

The Principal Social Worker welcomed the suggested and agreed to include the question in next year's survey and the option of 'unsure' as response to the question.

The panel queried the impact of home working on the recruitment and retention of social workers.

The Principal Social Worker commented that the impact of home working on newly qualified social workers and added that there was sometimes a reluctance to ask for help from more experienced social workers who they did not know well.

In response, the idea of having dedicated time in the office to help build working relationships is being considered in recognition that social work is a difficult job and the need for someone to have the opportunity to have an informal debrief with colleagues, where they have experienced secondary trauma or get some advice with a case.

The Principal Social Worker commented on the benefits of hybrid working to social workers and to the service more generally.

The panel queried the reference in the report to City of Wolverhampton Council being involved in commissioning a regional leadership course for women of colour which will start in Spring 2023. The panel asked for details of the evidence used to support the decision.

The Principal Social Worker commented that the decision was based on an analysis of equalities data on grade and progression within social work which showed the higher grade the smaller the number of women of colour.

The panel asked for details about the number of people who completed the survey and asked for the information to be included with percentage figures.

The panel also queried the plan to use Teams rather email for communication as there was a concern that this would mean less accountability.

The Principal Social Worker commented details of the numbers of eligible people who were sent a survey link is in paragraph 3.1 of the report. The Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner advised the panel that 93 social workers and 78 members of the wider workforce responded to the survey.

The Principal Social Worker reassured the panel that in reference to using Teams Channel rather than emails it was considered to be more interactive and has led to better engagement. The panel were advised that Teams would be used mainly to send reminders and to promote future events.

The panel discussed the presentation of the data and agreed that in the interest of full transparency the actual number and the percentage should be included in a future report.

The panel thanked the presenters for the report.

Resolved:

1. The panel comments on the findings of the Children and Young People's Service social work and wider workforce health check 2022 to be noted.
2. The panel support the proposed actions to improve social work practice as detailed in the report.
3. The Principal Social Worker agreed to include the suggested changes by the panel in the next report.

10

Young Opportunities (YO!)

The Chair invited Alice Vickers, Co-Production and Youth Engagement Manager, to present report.

The Co-Production and Youth Engagement commented on the development of the Youth Engagement Strategy (#YES) and the range of programmes aimed at improving the wellbeing of all children and young people living in Wolverhampton.

The Co-production and Youth Engagement Manager commented that as a result of the success on co-production work with young people the service has been funded by Adult Social Care to support their plans to undertake similar work with social care service users.

The Co-production and Youth Engagement Manager gave a summary of the key performance indicators and successes of the #YES programme since August 2022 to date against the following themes – Being Connected, Being You and Being Healthy.

The Co-production and Youth Engagement Manager commented on the success of the National Make Your Mark Vote in Wolverhampton in January 2022 where 10,500 children and young people across the City took part and chose their top four themes.

The Co-production and Youth Engagement Manager commented on the leading role of young people in allocating grants to commission services with an estimated value of £2.5m. This work was supported by the new co-production hub which has provided the opportunity for young people to get together.

The Co-production and Youth Engagement Manager highlighted the increase in the number of activities for children and young people over the summer holidays.

The Co-production and Youth Engagement Manager advise the panel about progress in the development with young people of the YO! Wolves website. The website will provide information about activities and support to young people and their families. The website will also have a separate dedicated sections and related information for young people, which is intended to be jargon free and easy to navigate.

The Co-production and Youth Engagement Manager gave further details of the planned activities and funding to support the delivery of the themes.

The panel were asked to comment on the report and the presentation.

The panel thanked the presenter for the excellent report.

The panel queried if there was any specific funding for children in care who may need help with transport costs to take part the planned activities.

The Co-production and Youth Engagement Manager acknowledged the issue of transport costs for children and young people in care and care leavers and more generally for families in financial difficulties. The service has been working with regional partners such as West Midlands Combined Authority, who have responsibility for transport provision within the city and with colleagues represented on the West Midlands Children's Participation Leads Network to improve the situation. The group is working together to see what extra support can be given for care leavers and to share best practice.

The Deputy Director of Children Services commented on the importance of children, particularly children in care being able to take part in activities across the City and the role of the Council as corporate parent to think about supporting this aim. The Deputy Director commented on other short-term activities to support young people with transport costs.

The panel queried the possibility of using a fund managed by West Midlands Combined Authority to prevent loneliness to support children in care. The Co-production and Youth Engagement Manager confirmed that a bid was submitted to the fund but was unsuccessful. A further application will be made in the next funding round bid.

The panel queried the lack of awareness among providers about applying to the Holiday Activities Fund to deliver summer holiday activities and there was concern from residents about the uneven availability of the offer to young people in some areas of the City.

The Co-production and Youth Engagement Manager commented on the work being done to work with providers to deliver the Holiday Activities Fund and 42

organisations have successfully bid for funding. As a result of the huge level of interest a best value exercise was done on the applications submitted.

The Co-production and Youth Engagement Manager reassured the panel about work being done to make sure all areas are covered.

There are discussion with schools across the region to use funding from Governments National Youth Guarantee Offer and Sport England to target schools which could be used as locations to deliver activities. However, a big issue for providers is the difficulty in finding relevant and safe provision in the area to deliver services. The Co-production and Youth Engagement Manager suggested that a report on the spread of holiday activity provision could be presented to a future meeting.

The panel asked for details of the Government funding from National Youth Agency to set up professional standards for youth training and the preparation being made to deliver the Governments National Youth Guarantee Offer.

The Co-production and Youth Engagement Manager commented on the success of a recent celebration event for people who have recently qualified in youth training. The group has been supported by the Wolverhampton's Community Action Team to help develop voluntary sector organisations.

The Co-production and Youth Engagement Manager offered to present an update on progress of youth workers programme to a future meeting.

The panel queried the work being done to encourage providers or community groups to stay active in the area without long term funding and specifically work being done to help organisations become more resilient. The panel also queried work being done to empower and support residents to have a say in which activities are delivered.

The Co-production and Youth Engagement Manager commented that there is a provider forum where providers can showcase different ways to engage and work with local communities. There is a draft service specification which will outline the responsibilities of the providers and how should show how they will contribute to the priority themes and standards.

The Co-production and Youth Engagement Manager commented about using the process to signpost families and encourage them to access other opportunities. The aim will be that when provider activities are full, they can encourage young people to access the services offered from other local providers with spare capacity. The service is also encouraging smaller groups to work together and submit bids from the Council and to apply to other funding bodies as part of efforts to build community resilience.

The panel thanked the presenter for the report.

Resolved:

1. The panel endorse the outcomes of the Youth Engagement Strategy 2020 – 2023 and the principals for developing the Young Opportunities brand.
2. The panel comments on the presentation to be noted.

3. The information requested by the panel to be presented to a future meeting

11 **School Exclusion and Suspensions**

The Chair invited Brenda Wile, Deputy Director of Education, to present the report.

The Deputy Director introduced Jameel Mullan, Inclusion and Attendance Service Manager, who would also be contributing to the presentation.

The Deputy Director explained that the report was presented in response to a request from the panel for detailed information on school exclusions rates and suspensions, with a specific focus on how pupils with protected characteristics are represented in the data.

The Deputy Director advised the panel that data on exclusions, suspensions and attendance is published annually and the information in the presentation covers the academic year ending 2022.

The Deputy Director advised the panel that the presentation will explain the findings from the analysis of the data and the action being taken and or planned in response.

The Deputy Director commented that the presentation would give a summary of the findings from the Inclusion Summit in October 2022. The Deputy Director commented on progress made in drafting the Inclusion Framework Development, and the Alternative Provision Framework documents and their contribution to reducing the number of exclusions.

The Deputy Director commented on the work being done to engage with all schools to create a shared ownership of the issue. The aim of plan is for schools to work towards achieving the highest standards in respect of inclusion.

The Deputy Director gave further details about the development of the Alternative Provision Framework, which is due to be implemented in April 2023. The Deputy Director advised the panel that alternative provisions are settings where young people who need some additional support after being excluded to enable them to continue their learning journey. There are 18 quality standards that are used to measure performance and to provide a level of assurance about the quality of the current offer.

The Deputy Director commented that a directory of alternative providers across Wolverhampton will be published shortly which schools can also use to commission services on a temporary basis.

The Deputy Director advised the panel that the presentation slides are based on EDI Education dashboard. The dashboard has been developed to provide an analysis of the data based on age, gender ethnicity, religion and SEND against key performance indicators, for example, EDI KPI measure - *permanent exclusions (all) ethnicity group compared to Census data 0-17 population with starting point and current snapshot.*

The Deputy Director commented that the Inclusion Summit held in October 2022 was a very successful event and was attended by high profile local key speakers and national figures.

The feedback from school staff who attended the event was very positive. The Deputy Director advised that panel young people were involved and led a series of the workshops. The event was attended by 100 people.

The panel were invited to comment on the presentation and specifically their views of the data and what additional information would be helpful in a future report when reviewing progress against the performance targets.

The panel welcomed the reference to the work done to agree a data sharing agreement with schools.

The panel highlighted concerns about the findings in the presentation about permanent exclusions by gender which showed that males are three times more likely than females to be excluded and the persistence of this trend over time.

The panel queried the reasons for the high level of exclusions among male pupils and the factors that have contributed to this situation and the contribution of the inclusion strategy in tackling the issue.

Jameel Mullan, Inclusion and Attendance Service Manager, commented that main reason for permanent exclusion is persistent disruptive behaviour. The Inclusion and Attendance Manager added that there has also been an increase in cases of violence and assaults involving young people, reflecting the trend regionally and nationally of increases in the level of aggression in schools.

The Inclusion and Attendance Service Manager advised the panel that detailed analysis shows an increase in the level of assaults against young people and adults.

The Inclusion and Attendance Service Manager added that there is more work to be done to understand if the increase is linked to pupils returning to school after having had a period of absence due to the pandemic. There is further research being done which involved analysis of data and interviews with young people to better understand the issue and help identify young people known to the service who may be at risk of permanent exclusion.

The findings on the research are expected to be completed in September 2023. The Inclusion and Attendance Service Manager agreed to present the findings to a future meeting of the panel.

The panel commented that it would have been helpful to include the sample size numbers in the presentation slides to better understand the issue and suggested it should be added to future reports.

The panel queried the EBSNA pathway for pupils with SEND referenced in the presentation. The Deputy Director of Education advised the panel that the service offers support to young people who are not attending school because they have emotional or mental health challenges.

The Inclusion and Attendance Service Manager added the EBSNA refers to Emotionally Based School Non attendance and advised the panel that the service offers a bespoke pathway for children that have a medical or emotional reason that means they are unable to attend mainstream school. The service was launched in January 2023.

The panel queried the expected difference in terms of attendance rates by young people that should be expected in the future because of the programme.

The Inclusion and Attendance Service Manager confirmed this was the aim and added that the service has created a reflective supervision session with school which provides different levels of support provided by a range of professionals. In addition, schools can also access more support resources if needed.

The panel welcomed the introduction of the service.

The panel commented on the link between a pupil's experience at school and poverty and queried if this issue has been considered in the analysis of school exclusion data. The panel suggested that free school meals data could be a possible proxy indicator of poverty.

The panel suggested it would be helpful in future presentations to include national school exclusion data as a comparator to better assess and understand local performance and progress.

The panel commented on the importance of recognising the primary responsibility of Headteachers and school governors for reducing school exclusion rates, while accepting the wider collective responsibility of Wolverhampton Council to support children's educational development.

The panel also cautioned about comparing the exclusion rates between local schools without considering the impact of other factors.

The Deputy Director welcomed the idea of using free school meals in the analysis of school exclusions data. The Deputy of Director advised the panel that school exclusion rates analysed on a ward basis can be provided to panel members on request.

The panel queried the range of categories used in the analysis of exclusion by ethnicity and suggested care should be taken in how such data is presented and used. The panel were concerned about the risks of making decisions based on a small sample size and suggested caution should be used when deciding actions to be taken. The panel commented on the importance of understanding the specific underlying factors that may be contributing to the increase in the rate of permanent exclusion and that any conclusions are supported by evidence.

The Deputy Director accepted the comment about the importance of including numbers against the percentage figures presented and the inclusion of national comparator data.

The Deputy Director highlighted the successful reduction in permanent school exclusion numbers from 20 to 23 pupils in the autumn term (September – December 2022).

The Deputy Director accepted the need to be careful about conclusions based on the data stated about exclusions by ethnicity.

The panel suggested a future report should also include a table to show changes in exclusion rates on termly basis to better understand changes over time.

The Deputy Director welcomed the suggestion and agreed to consider the idea.

The panel queried if data collected from schools as part of the sharing agreement could be used to compare performance against national exclusion data sets. The panel commented on possible challenge in persuading schools to share data with the Council.

The Deputy Director acknowledged the challenge as there is no legal requirement on schools to provide exclusion data.

The Deputy Director commented on the findings of recent exclusion published data for Autumn Term 2021/2022 in primary, secondary and special schools and the good progress made to reduce the number of exclusions. The Deputy Director commented on the contribution of schools and others in achieving this success.

The panel commented on the importance of understanding the reasons for exclusions within a specific area and not assume the contribution of factors such as living in deprived areas or the poor educational performance of a school when considering the numbers of reported exclusions.

The Deputy Director agreed with comment and added that schools may have a different threshold level for permanent exclusion compared with a neighbouring school and it was therefore important not to make assumptions based on areas level of social deprivation.

The panel queried the link between the high rate of permanent exclusion and the lower rate of suspension detailed in the chart and suggested if an increase in suspensions would result in lower rates of permanent exclusions. The panel also queried if the evidence presented suggested schools were choosing to use the option to suspend pupils as means of reducing the number of permanent exclusions.

The Deputy Director commented that the reference to use of suspensions (previously called fixed term exclusions) was an interesting observation and agreed to ask the Inclusion and Attendance Service Manager to investigate the matter further and report findings to the panel.

The panel commented on the different thresholds for suspensions and permanent exclusions, highlighting that the use of suspension as a sanction as part of efforts to improve behaviour with the aim of bringing them back into education. In contrast a permanent exclusion may be because of single incident rather than a series of events over time. The panel suggested the reasons for exclusion or suspension should be included in future reports to better understand the issue.

The panel discussed the threshold for exclusion and suggested that a pattern of persistently disruptive behaviour and not a single incident could also result in a decision to permanently exclude a pupil.

The panel highlighted concern about the issue of 'grey exclusions' where the school asks the parent to remove their child because of concerns about their behaviour to avoid them being excluded or encouraged to consider home education as an option. The panel expressed concern about the educational welfare of pupils in this situation and lack of local authority oversight of such decisions.

The Deputy Director had similar concerns about this type of exclusion and advised the panel that the Council will investigate if notified by parent and the school will be asked to explain the reasons for decision where a child is home educated.

The Deputy Director outlined further steps that would be taken to get reassurance about the reasons and to check parents understand the implications of this decision.

The Deputy Director acknowledged the challenge presented by schools having different threshold for the permanent exclusion of pupils.

The panel thanked the presenters for the report.

Resolved.

1. The panel comments on the presentation to be noted and an update provided on specific suggestions of changes to the content to a future meeting.
2. The panel agreed to add the issue of school exclusions to the panel work programme for 2023 – 2024 and to receive an update on progress against planned actions detailed in the presentation.
3. The Deputy Director of Education to share a final draft of the City of Wolverhampton's Inclusion Framework and the Quality Assurance Framework for Alternative Provision with the panel when available.