



Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 24 September 2014

Attendance

Members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Julie Hodgkiss (Chair)
Cllr Mark Evans (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Susan Constable
Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre
Cllr Paula Brookfield
Cllr Lorna McGregor
Cllr Peter O'Neill
Cllr Christopher Haynes
Cllr Martin Waite
Cllr Daniel Warren
Cllr Jas Dehar

Pamela Chibanguza	wolverhampton youth council
Kashmire Hawker	Wolverhampton Youth Council
Elizabeth Williams	Wolverhampton Youth Council

Employees

Earl Piggott-Smith	Scrutiny Officer
Emma Bennett	Assistant Director - Children, Young People and Families
James McElligott	Assistant Director, Learning and Achievement
Emma Balchin	Service Manager School Workforce and Governance
Alexandra Chilcott	Head of Standards and Vulnerable Pupils

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

- 1 Apologies for absence**
Apologies were received from the following

Hadeel A Ahmad
Portia Tsvangirai
- 2 Declarations of interest**
Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre declared a non-discloseable pecuniary interest in agenda item 5 (Wolverhampton Governance Strategy (2014-16)) in so far as they relate to Governor of the City of Wolverhampton College and Director of the Central

Learning Partnership Board.

The following Councillors declared a non-discloseable pecuniary interest in agenda item 5 (Wolverhampton Governance Strategy (2014-16))

Cllr Paula Brookfield
Cllr Peter O'Neill
Cllr Sue Constable

3 Minutes of the previous meeting (14.9.14)

Cllr Waite queried the comments attributed to him about the community asset transfer in the discussion on the reduction of outdoor play provision.

Emma Curran was the Youth Council representative who attended the meeting.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 14.8.14 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 Matters arising

Cllr Hodgkiss briefed the panel on a request to consider a report on primary schools re-organisation. The panel were presented with the option of arranging a special meeting to consider the issue as either a pre-decision scrutiny item or an informal review group.

A further suggestion was proposed to either consider the item after it has been presented to Cabinet as post-decision scrutiny, or through the Call-in process.

The panel agreed to have a special meeting to undertake a pre-decision scrutiny of the proposals before the report is considered by Cabinet on 12.11.14.

Resolved

A meeting date to be arranged for the panel to undertake pre-decision scrutiny of 2015 Primary Schools Expansion Programme proposals.

5 Wolverhampton Governance Strategy (2014-16)

Jim McElligott gave a short introduction to the report and set out the objectives of the strategy.

Jim commented on the responsibilities of the Council to support the work of school governors in improving school educational performance.

Jim commented on the important role of the Council to monitor and where necessary take action where there are concerns about the effectiveness of the governance arrangements at Wolverhampton maintained schools.

The panel welcomed the report and the proposals to work towards to achieving the highest standards of governance across all Wolverhampton schools.

The panel discussed the role of the local authority in maintaining ongoing engagement with maintained schools, particularly at the early stage where there may be concerns or warning signs, to avoid the need for more direct action in the future.

Jim explained that the proposals were part of the overall school improvement strategy aimed at positively engaging with schools and where necessary challenging the performance of school governing bodies. Jim commented on the work of the school governor's team to build a dialogue with schools and encourage debate. Jim commented on the rating criteria applied to the effectiveness of school governing bodies. Jim commented on the power of the local authority to recommend the dismissal of the school governing body.

The panel discussed the role of the Council in assessing the performance of school governing bodies and whether this duplicates the role of OFSTED.

Jim commented that the Council has a duty to hold schools to account for their performance and to take action where the governance arrangements are considered to be weak.

The panel commented that the Council expectations of school governors could deter potential applicants and make schools less representative of the local population. Alexander Chilcott commented that the changes only relate to local authority school governors, and not the other parent governors representatives on the local community. Jim commented that the plans are aimed at making school governing bodies 'fit for purpose'.

Jim commented that there are currently 35 local authority governor vacancies across primary schools.

The panel commented on role of the Council in monitoring the quality of training and advice provided by non-local authority organisations delivered to schools.

Jim commented that schools can buy in the services from other organisations but there is an expectation that local authority governor representative would take up the core offer of training from the Council. Jim commented on the programme of training and support offered by the Council to school governors.

Jim encouraged Councillors to consider becoming school governors as they have the skills mix needed to improve the performance of school governing bodies.

The Youth Council commented that they no contact with the school governors at their schools.

Resolved

The panel supported the recommendation and the proposals for securing the highest standards of governance across all Wolverhampton schools.

6 **Responding to the growing numbers of Looked-After Children**

Emma Bennett gave a presentation on the work being done and planned to respond to the growing numbers of looked after children in Wolverhampton.

Emma explained that the strategy was not just a response to the financial pressures facing the Council but recognition of its statutory responsibilities and the desire to deliver better outcomes for children and young people.

Emma gave details of current trends and the gap between the rates per 10,000 of looked after children in Wolverhampton compared to national figures.

Emma gave specific examples of projects under the Families r First programme to help children to stay in families using a mix of targeted and specific support.

Emma gave an overview of the case for change, the key principles of the programme, and details of the three work streams to respond to the increase in the number of looked after children.

Emma explained that there is regular reporting of progress in the work being done to reduce the numbers of looked after children to senior managers.

Emma commented on the work being done with Essex, who have made a number of changes which has resulted in a stabilisation in their looked after children numbers. The learning from Essex is being shared with Wolverhampton. An important part of the programme is a focus on providing help and support to families at an earlier stage.

The panel commented on the reliability of the predictions about the future numbers of looked after children. Emma accepted the population profile of Wolverhampton made it hard to predict numbers and gave an example of having to deal with admitting 14 children into care on a single day. Emma highlighted the concern about the numbers of children unknown to the Council who were taken into care.

The panel commented on concerns about the approach and the extent to which it can give children and young people the best possible life chances. A specific area of concern was that there were too many loopholes in the plan which could potentially leave children in vulnerable situations. There was a need to ensure that children at risk would be removed immediately. It was important there was a tight criteria that would not leave vulnerable children at risk.

Emma referred to the key principles of the programme and the importance of referring the right children through the system.

The panel commented on whether the impact of high profile child abuse cases had led to social workers becoming more cautious and as a result more children were being placed into care.

Emma explained that the service tracked figures in Wolverhampton and there were a low number of children placed in residential care. The majority of children in care were placed with foster carers, which are still counted in the numbers of looked after children.

Emma also commented on the number of children on care orders which places responsibilities on the local authority.

The panel queried the reasons behind the growth in the numbers of looked after children. Emma commented on the range of factors placing pressure on families.

The panel welcomed the programme but considered that the service faces a major challenge in making progress in reducing the number of looked after children. The panel commented on the incremental growth in the numbers of looked after children in Wolverhampton and pressures placed on professionals in managing the demand.

Resolved

The panel agreed to receive an update on the progress of the programme at meeting on 14.1.15. The report will include a breakdown in the number of the children placed in different placement types.

The meeting closed at 7.15 pm