

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 25 November 2015

Attendance

Members of the Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Jasbinder Dehar
Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre
Cllr Julie Hodgkiss
Cllr Rupinderjit Kaur
Cllr Welcome Koussoukama
Cllr Peter O'Neill (Chair)
Cyril Randles
Cllr Martin Waite
Cllr Daniel Warren
Cllr Richard Whitehouse
Emmerson Morris
Emma Curran

Employees

Emma Bennett	Service Director - Children and Young People
Earl Piggott-Smith	Scrutiny Officer
Alison Shannon	Head of Finance
Penny Williams	Interim Democratic Services Manager

In attendance

Cllr Val Gibson	Cabinet Member for Children and Young People
Cllr Claire Darke	Cabinet Member for Education

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 Paula Brookfield
Cllr Christopher Haynes
Cllr Arun Photay
Rosalie Watkins
Kashmire Hawker

2 **Declarations of interest**

No declarations of interest were made relative to items under consideration at the meeting.

3 **Minutes of the previous meeting (28.9.15)**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 28.9.15 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 **Matters arising**

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

5 **Budget Review - Draft Budget 2016/17**

Education

Cllr Claire Darke, Cabinet Member for Education, introduced the budget proposals related to her portfolio. Cllr Darke made the following comments about the proposals

Building Schools for the Future Private Finance Initiative Refinancing

Cllr Claire Darke explained that this is one off savings as a result of refinancing of PFI schemes related to Highfields and Penn Schools.

Panel comments and questions

The panel queried the implications of Highfields School becoming academy and the extent to which it would affect the achievement of the savings. Cllr Claire Darke explained that a future change in the status would not affect the savings and also there were no plans to look at achieving similar savings at other schools built as part of the Building Schools for Future programme. Cllr Val Gibson commented that each school will be looked at on an individual basis if there is an opportunity to refinance a PFI scheme in the future.

The panel queried if the same method could be applied to all other PFI schemes to achieve similar savings. Cllr Darke explained that the option to re-finance would depend on the ownership status of the school and provision in the PFI agreement to make a change that could generate similar savings. The Council will look for opportunities to get a better financial deal from PFI agreements as and when appropriate.

The panel queried if future PFI deals will be affected by the drive to encourage nationally that all schools become academies. Cllr Darke explained that the Council will continue to look for opportunities to make changes that would be more financially beneficial and or generate savings.

Primary Capital Programme (expansions) - utilise grant now secured to replace prudential borrowing

Cllr Darke explained the reasons for making the change to replace prudential borrowing with a grant.

No comments recorded on the proposal

Children and Young People

Cllr Val Gibson, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, introduced the budget proposals related to her portfolio. Cllr Gibson made the following comments about the proposals

Drawdown of one off grants for Children and Young People

No comments recorded on the proposal

Youth Offending Team - efficiency savings

Cllr Val Gibson explained that the savings would be achieved by the deletion of a small number of posts. The deletion of these will have no impact on the service. Cllr Gibson explained that there is flexibility in the grant budget for further reductions.

No comments recorded on the proposal.

Budget Pressures - Fostering Allowances within Looked After Children's Services

Cllr Gibson explained the reason behind the increase in fees.

No comments recorded on the proposal.

Children's Services Redesign

The panel agreed to consider this proposal as part of the discussion on the next agenda item.

Resolved:

The panel comments to be included in the feedback report to Scrutiny Board and onward to Cabinet on the Draft Budget 2016/17.

6 Children's Service Re-Design

Cllr Val Gibson, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, outlined the proposed changes detailed in the report for the redesign of the current early intervention and prevention model. The changes support the aim to reduce the number of children being taken into care.

Cllr Gibson explained the benefits of the planned changes and the expected outcomes. Cllr Gibson explained the work done with external consultants, iMPower to support the project. Cllr Gibson explained that new structure will be aligned to the new planned multi-agency safeguarding hub.

Cllr Gibson explained that the new model will cover the age 0-18 – the age will be extended to 25 cover disabled young people. Cllr Gibson explained that the eight locality strengthening families hubs will be aligned with the existing learning communities. The sites for planned outreach work with families will be provided on an ad-hoc basis - rooms will be booked in local venues which are suitable for families.

Cllr Gibson explained that the planned changes will be supported by the transfer of commissioning responsibilities of health visiting and school nursing to Public Health within the local authority. Resources will be distributed on the basis of need.

Cllr Gibson referred to example case studies and also reductions in staffing numbers. A number of the posts were vacancies and there will be opportunities for re-deployment of staff in the new structure.

Cllr Gibson explained that £2.8 million of the savings £6.8 million will be reinvested in the service. Cllr Gibson explained that the local authority will always need to have provision to bring children into care where necessary. The proposed plan was aimed at reducing the number of Wolverhampton's looked after children to a figure that is closer to that of neighbouring authorities. In line with statistical numbers a reduction in the number of looked after children to 500-600 will also lead to a corresponding reduction in the number of staff.

Emma Bennett, Service Director, Children and Young People, explained that the changes are timetabled to be implemented by April/ May 2016. Service Director explained that the staff concerned had been briefed about the plans and they welcomed the changes. Service Director commented that staff queried in the briefing session if the proposed model would be sustainable for the future

Cllr Gibson explained that there is a requirement on the Council to provide universal services that the proposed changes support other targeted interventions such as Troubled Families aimed at improving and sharing best practice and also part of wider efforts to change the culture of the service.

The panel queried what a realistic number for the number of looked after children in Wolverhampton. Service Director explained that a figure of 500- 600 would bring the Council closer to the figure of comparator authorities. The looked after children figure for Wolverhampton is much higher when considering areas with higher levels of deprivation. The current number of looked after children is 697. Cllr Gibson explained that the changes are aimed at getting only the right children into care and that early intervention work will help to reduce the demand for specialist services.

The panel welcomed the report and supported the recommendations.

The panel queried the plan to align the eight locality-based design with the Schools Learning Communities. There was concern about the low level of attendance at meetings and queried the nature of the relationship with schools. Service Director explained that there has been a positive response to briefings from schools and the changes have been welcomed.

The panel queried the wording of paragraph 8.4 of the report and the specific reference to young person with disabilities and suggested that this should be changed to refer to a young person with special needs. Emma Bennett agreed to make the correction to the report

The panel queried the wording of paragraph 10.2 of the report and suggested a change to make it clear the original meaning and intention.

The panel queried paragraph 11.3 of the report and if there was clarity about the role of the School Readiness Officer and how the proposal relates to original idea of having a single point of contact. Service Director explained the change is part of work to provide a universal offer and targeted support.

The panel queried the reference in paragraph 14.7 of the report to the use of Valley Park Campus as outreach base as there was information that ownership of the site was in the process of being transferred. The agreement to change ownership is due to be signed in early December. Service Director explained that alternative location would be found if the site was not available for use as an outreach base.

The panel queried the proposed new staffing structure which suggested that the number of frontline workers would be reduced much more than the number of managers. The understanding of the current policy was that savings would be achieved through reductions in backroom staff, while protecting front line staff numbers.

Service Director explained that the table detailed in Appendix 1 did not reflect the reality of the impact of the planned changes on the numbers of managers compared to the number of frontline staff and accepted that the information will be changed to make it clearer. The situation is complicated by the some current roles being reclassified to reflect changes in post holder responsibilities.

Emmerson Morris queried how the plans will affect the support that young people receive in the future. Service Director explained that the changes would help young people get a more targeted response. Key workers will work with the whole family and there would be an increase in intensive flexible support when there is a crisis. Service Director outlined the type of crisis support available to young people and the level of support will increased if extra resources are needed.

Resolved:

The panel support the proposals for the children service re-design, subject to full consideration of the issues highlighted and suggested changes to the draft, as part of the formal consultation process.

The meeting closed at 18:43