

# **Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel**

## **Minutes - 7 December 2016**

### **Attendance**

#### **Members of the Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel**

Cllr Harbans Bagri  
Cllr Greg Brackenridge  
Cllr Julie Hodgkiss  
Cllr Rupinderjit Kaur  
Cllr Lynne Moran  
Cllr Peter O'Neill (Chair)  
Cllr Udey Singh (Vice-Chair)  
Cllr Daniel Warren

#### **In attendance**

Cllr Val Gibson                                      Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

#### **Employees**

Emma Bennett	Service Director - Children and Young People
Alexandra Jones	Assistant Director - School Standards
Earl Piggott-Smith	Scrutiny Officer
Alison Shannon	Finance Business Partner

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## **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 Mak Singh  
Cllr Welcome Koussoukama

### **2            Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest recorded.

### **3            Minutes of the previous meeting (5 October 2016)**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 5 October 2016 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 **Matters arising**  
Minute 6 – Children Safeguarding Board Annual Report 2015/16

The panel agreed to receive a report on the work of MASH. The report to be presented to a future meeting.

5 **Draft Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2017/18 - 2019/20**  
Cllr Val Gibson, Cabinet Member Children and Young People, introduced the report and explained that a report detailing budget reduction and income generation amounting to £13.5 million was presented to Cabinet for approval. The panel were invited to comment on the proposals that fall within its remit as part of the formal consultation process.

Alison Shannon, Finance Business Partner, gave a brief outline of the proposals in Appendix B and C.

A summary of the panel discussion and comments on the proposals are shown below:

**Supervised Contact Efficiencies**

The panel discussed the implications for children of the proposal to decommission the contract with Spurgeons (a voluntary organisation). Emma Bennett, Service Director Children, commented that as a result of the reduction in demand for the service that a decision had already been made to de-commission the service. The Service Director reassured the panel that if there was a change in level of demand for supervised contact that the service could be recommissioned.

**Children's Transformation Inclusion Support Income Generation**

The panel discussed the proposals for delivering traded services to schools.

**Youth Offending Team Efficiencies**

The panel queried the decision to delete the vacant posts and the implications for the Youth Offending Team service which had rated as being high performing following an inspection. The panel queried the nature of the roles that will be deleted. The Service Director advised the panel that the vacancies had been held for some time and was confident that by changing working practices that effects of the decision could be mitigated.

The panel expressed concern about the decision as evidence suggested that that there had been no change in the demand for services provided by Youth Offending Team; which had been rated as being an exemplar in a previous report presented to the panel. The panel requested a report be presented to a future panel meeting to show if the proposed changes have had an impact on the services provided by YOT.

## **Children's Services Transformation**

Cllr Gibson explained that the reasons for the reduction in the number of looked after children and the range of work done to build on previous progress aimed at reduced demand on specialist services.

Cllr Gibson explained the reduction in the number of looked after children from a total of 800 (2014) to current figure of 627, supported by detailed financial modelling work gave her confidence that the service could achieve the budget target of £2.5 million. The panel was advised that it costs the Council approximately £40,000 a week when a child is placed into care - this figure is based on the modelling work and comparisons with other local authorities.

The Service Director commented on the range of work being done to ensure that the right children are placed into care and other forms of targeted interventions used to support other children to remain with their families, where appropriate, as part of the transformation programme. The Service Director commented that a more targeted approach by the service will lead to change in the LAC profile.

The panel commented on the impact of proposals on the caseload for social workers and the work undertaken to monitor the situation. The Service Director reassured the panel that the social worker caseload is regularly reviewed and additional resources will be provided if needed to meet changes in demand.

The Service Director gave examples of different targeted interventions aimed at identifying families in need of support as part of the early help service offer to families. The Service Director advised that the plan is to provide more intensive support to families in a home setting at a much earlier stage with the aim that this will reduce the likelihood of a child requiring to be placed into care in the future.

The Youth Council representative queried if the members of the Children in Care Council had been consulted about the budget proposals. The Service Director commented that the Children in Care Council had been consulted about the about wider service changes proposed in the budget report.

Resolved:

1. The panel comments on the draft budget 2017/18 be included in the report to Scrutiny Board.
2. That a report be presented to a future meeting of the panel to show if the proposed changes to the Youth Offending Team service have impacted on the services provided to young people.

## **6 City of Wolverhampton - Vision for Education 2030**

Alex Jones, Assistant Director – School Standards, introduced the report.

The Assistant Director advised the panel that the draft report will be revised to include comments received. The Assistant Director briefed the panel on the main highlights of 'The Vision for education 2030 – shaping a City of Learning' document. The panel were advised that work is being done to agree a definition of the term 'City of Learning' that will encourage the idea of lifelong learning.

The Assistant Director commented on the important economic and employment benefits that the provision of good schools can bring to the City.

The panel discussed the Ofsted outcomes target for primary and secondary schools summarised in the report. The panel welcomed the progress made to improve educational outcomes and the achievements to date. The panel queried if the report had been presented to City Board and Business Champions for comments. The Assistant Director confirmed that document has been shared with key groups.

The panel discussed the reference to the provision of support to vulnerable children and how schools use their funding. The Assistant Director explained that special schools have a delegated budget to meet the needs of vulnerable children.

The Assistant Director commented on the process used to set the educational targets to be a top performing council for education by 2030 at primary and secondary school level. The panel commented on the challenge in achieving this outcome at a time when the majority of secondary schools are independent of the local authority and budgetary cuts in the education service. The Assistant Director acknowledged the budgetary challenges facing the service but commented that the service has a good relationship with the vast majority of schools and is committed to building on progress made. The Assistant Director commented that the service is looking at schools budget surpluses estimated at £5-£6 million and challenging schools to explain their reasons for maintaining surplus balances of 20% - 30% above recommended levels – 5% primary school and 8% secondary schools. The service will focus on spending money on meeting the educational needs of current children in Wolverhampton. The Assistant Director explained the role of Schools Forum in challenging schools to explain reasons for maintaining budget surpluses above recommended levels and the sanctions it can impose.

The panel commented on the issue of increased demand for school places and the extent to which current provision can deal with the expected 'bulge' in pupil numbers, while still offering parents a choice. The Assistant Director commented that 97% of parents get an offer of a place at preferred choice of schools. The Assistant Director suggested that the panel might find it useful to invite the service lead responsible for managing the demand for places to present a report to a future meeting.

The panel discussed the range of challenges facing the educational service, for example, the shortage of teachers and the increase in the number of school appeals as signs of pressure on the service. The Assistant Director commented on the work done to make teaching an attractive and that investment in school facilities and improved educational results will help to support this aim. An assessment by Ofsted reported that 88% of quality of teaching in Wolverhampton schools was rated as being "good".

The panel queried building 'snagging' issues at schools redeveloped as part of the Building Schools for the Future programme and delay in completing the necessary work. The Assistant Director advised the panel that discussions are on-going to get the necessary work done at the two schools concerned and was confident that the issues will be resolved.

The panel queried the proposal to establish an arms-length wholly owned trading company and the risks to plan. The Assistant Director explained that the majority of the cost of the schools standards service is provided by schools and current trading activity. Furthermore, the provision of the service does not provide a financial burden on the Council. The establishment of a fully traded company would allow the service to make a profit, which is not possible at present. The change would also allow the service to bid for lottery funding.

The panel commented on the recent results of the PISA and the poor performance of UK when compared to other countries, when considering local results of 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics and science (with a focus on mathematics). The Assistant Director acknowledged the challenge to close the educational performance gap and that more work will need to be done to improve future results.

The panel discussed the demand the places at popular schools and the resulting increase in the number of school appeals.

The panel welcomed the draft document.

Resolved:

1. The panel comments on the draft City of Wolverhampton Council's Vision for Education 2030 to be considered when finalising the draft.
2. A report on plans for meeting the demand for schools places to be presented to a future meeting.
3. A report on impact of increasing pupil numbers on the schools appeals service to be presented to a future meeting.