



2        **Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest recorded.

3        **Minutes of the previous meeting ( 8 February 2017)**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 8 February 2017 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4        **Matters arising**

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

5        **Financial Support to Carers Offering Legal Permanency to children policy**

Cllr Val Gibson, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, introduced the report.

The Cabinet Member explained the reasons behind the need to review the current policy towards the amount of financial support to LAC children who become subject of adoption order, special guardianship orders or child arrangement orders.

The Cabinet Member advised the panel a review in the policy was needed to comply with current legislation and in response to a judicial review application. A benchmark review exercise was also undertaken with neighbouring authorities to check that the level of proposed allowance for permanence orders was consistent.

Alison Hinds, Head of Service, Looked After Children, gave an overview of the main report and added that the proposed changes would include a more stringent means test. The Head of Service advised that this work had been based on guidance provided the Welfare Rights Team in determining the eligibility criteria for financial support.

The panel queried if option c as listed in para 8 of the report was the preferred option. The Head of Service confirmed that this proposal was the recommendation based on the legal advice from legal counsel to avoid the risk of legal challenge.

The panel queried how the plans for payment of allowances will take account of any Universal Credit allowances paid to carers with reference to the proposed assessment for calculating financial support detailed in the report. The Head of Service explained the impact of the changes on applicant receiving either a means-tested benefit or those with incomes above the current threshold for eligibility for Universal Credit.

The panel welcomed the recognition of the proposals to support families willing to care for family members. The panel queried the financial support that would be available to people aged 18-21 who decided that not to go onto university and the concern that this would put at risk or worse outcomes. The panel wanted reassurance that young people in this situation would be given every opportunity to progress

The Head of Service advised the panel that young people in this situation would be able to access additional financial support, which is updated annually.

The panel queried the risks to the Council if the current policy was not revised. Emma Bennett, Service Director, Children and Young People, advised the panel that there was a risk that the policy could be subject to challenge, however changes were needed to make the policy much clearer and consistent with the legal requirements as regards the payment of allowances to carers currently in the receipt of a fostering allowance.

The Service Director advised the panel the impact of the policy changes will be monitored and progress reported.

Resolved:

1. The panel supported the proposed changes to the financial allowances paid to carers of children subject to adoption, special guardianship or child arrangement orders.
2. The panel comments on the proposed changes to be included in the report to Cabinet meeting on 26 April 2017.

## 6 **Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)**

Claire Darke, Cabinet Member for Education, introduced the report and invited panel comments on the progress made to implement 2014 reforms of SEND (special educational needs and disabilities).

Paul Senior, Interim Head of SEND and Inclusion Education gave an overview of the summary data detailed in Appendix A and the main headlines in the report. The Interim Head commented on the considerable investment by the Council in the early identification and support for children with special needs and long term benefits of this policy.

The panel commented on the findings that Wolverhampton had significantly higher prevalence of moderate and severe learning difficulties when compared to the equivalent figures for England. The Interim Head of SEND and Inclusion Education, commented that figures could be interpreted that there is high incidence of the young people with a range of difficulties or that other areas are under reporting the level of need and or children are being identified much later in life that they have special needs. The Interim Head of SEND and Inclusion Education commented on the work done in Wolverhampton to identify children in pre-schools and this should be considered as a strength, reflecting the importance of the issue to the City.

The panel discussed the work being planned to improve the information available on the website, with the aim of making it more user friendly and a more effective resource for schools about the support available.

The panel discussed the issue of permanent school exclusions and the responsibilities of the local authority and schools to provide appropriate education to young people. The Interim Head of SEND and Inclusion Education commented on the number different policies adopted by schools to reduce exclusions and added that trend nationally was an increase, linked to either a change to level of tolerance towards behaviour which is considered unacceptable, for example, as a result of a local authority becoming an academy. The Interim Head of SEND and Inclusion

Education advised the panel that the local authority will monitor the number of permanent school exclusions and will investigate where there are concerns.

Resolved:

The panel welcomed the progress made to implement the 2014 SEND reforms.

**7 Pupil Referral Unit**  
Alex Jones, Assistant Director, School Standards, introduced the report and commented that it was prepared in response to a request for an update on progress from an earlier report to the panel.

Emma Bennett, Service Director, Children and Young People, commented on the support that the city can offer to schools to help them to manage the behaviour of children and young people. The Assistant Director, School Standards, commented on the training and support given to teachers and school governors to improve behaviour or deal with children that have been excluded for a range of reasons.

The panel discussed the responsibility of the schools and the local authority to provide suitable alternative education. The Assistant Director, School Standards commented that the school exclusions are monitored and schools are visited if there are trends suggesting that a specific school is not meeting their responsibilities. The Assistant Director, School Standards, added that the authority will meet with schools and offer challenge where there are concerns about the number of exclusions. Paul Senior, Interim Head of SEND and Inclusion, commented that the role of the local authority in this situation is to encourage peer to peer review challenges among schools, sharing what works and building local capacity.

The panel discussed challenge facing schools and other organisations in persuading employers to consider recruiting young people with complex behavioural and emotional issues. The Interim Head of SEND and Inclusion acknowledged the challenge and commented that there was no single agency solution to the issue about how to deal with young people who are disengaged from education.

The panel discussed the responsibilities of the academies to provide alternative education to young person who has been excluded. The Interim Head of SEND and Inclusion added that all schools have responsibilities to offer a place under the Fair Access Policy to meet the needs of an excluded pupil. The implementation of the policy is reviewed by Fair Access Panel, which is chaired by the Director of Education where exclusion cases will be considered.

The panel discussed the future use PRU's and the cost of provision. The Interim Head of SEND and Inclusion commented that demand for provision is changing and some schools have introduced a no exclusion policy and look for alternatives, which will reduce the demand for provision which is costly to provide.

The Interim Head of SEND and Inclusion gave details of cost per child of different levels of support – the cost ranges from £5,000 (Tier 2) to £250,000 to £350,000 to provide secure specialist accommodation, to highlight the benefits of investment in early interventions aimed at reducing the number of people requiring this level of support.

The panel discussed the work done to monitor unregulated alternative school provision. Emma Bennett advised the panel the situation is monitored by Wolverhampton Safeguarding Board, who also undertake visits to offer advice to establishments aimed at improve practices and policies.

Resolved:

The panel agreed to note the briefing paper and progress reported.

8 **Wolverhampton Headstart, Phase 3 - Building emotional resilience and preventing self harm**

Emma Cleary, HeadStart Programme Manager, introduced the report and advised the panel that this was an update on progress since a previous report was presented. The HeadStart Programme Manager advised the panel that the original Big Lottery budget of £8.8 million had been increased to £9.5 million to deliver a range of programmes aimed at building emotional resilience in children and young people. The HeadStart Programme Manager commented on the importance of the building mental health resilience in young people at an early age. The programme will be based on four geographical areas in Wolverhampton and the work is expected to start in September 2017. To support the work of the programme detailed monitoring and evaluation will be done to consider the links between education and health.

The HeadStart Programme Manager advised the panel that baseline assessment work will be done and there will be interim reviews to assess progress against outcome measures and the impact of different programmes. In addition, there will be a series of progress review meetings, both formal and informal, with representatives of Big Lottery Fund.

The panel welcomed the plans and requested that evaluation findings from the programme be reported to a future meeting.

The panel discussed the current provision locally available to children and young people locally needing Tier 4 provision. The panel expressed concern about the reduction nationally in the number of secure beds. Emma Bennett, Service Director, Children and Young People, updated the panel on current availability of secure beds locally and advised the issue is monitored by the Children's Trust Board.

The Service Director advised the panel that were no children from Wolverhampton in Tier 4 secure and non-secure Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), provision and alternative accommodation – for example, specialist provision at Penn Hospital that will support young people if this is considered to be appropriate.

In addition, there is new provision, Section 136 Assessment Suite, available in police stations for young people, which opened earlier in the year.

The HeadStart Programme Manager advised the panel that national evaluation of the impact of the programme is being led by University of Manchester, who will be conducting baseline assessment work involving two different cohorts of young

people; in order to provide evidence about the impact of the programmes and also to measure changes in mental health of the young people involved.

The HeadStart Programme Manager advised the panel that the research will involve the analysis of qualitative and quantitative data about the impact of the programme. The HeadStart Programme Manager advised the panel that young people will be involved in the design the evaluation tools for the programme.

The Service Director advised the panel that the Children's Trust Board will be monitoring the performance of the HeadStart programme.

The panel welcomed the report and the opportunities presented by the funding to work with young people at an early age and provide support where needed.

Isobel Ricketts, Wolverhampton Youth Council, welcomed the extra resources that will be provided by the HeadStart programme and was very supportive of the programme.

The panel commented on the focus on specific areas and suggested how learning can be shared with other schools that could potentially benefit a wider range of young people. The HeadStart Programme Manager advised the panel of the funding criteria issued by Big Lottery to work in only the agreed geographical areas. The panel were reassured that there is a clear expectation from Big Lottery that learning will be shared with other schools across the city

The HeadStart Programme Manager added that there is an existing support programme available to schools in the city and other resources were also available as part of traded services offer.

The panel welcomed the report and agreed to receive a report on progress of the programme in 12 months.

Resolved:

The panel to receive a report on progress against outcomes detailed in the HeadStart programme in March 2018.

## 9 **Update on Youth Offending Team Inspection Action Plan**

Councillor Val Gibson, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, introduced the report to the panel and praised the achievements and performance of the service against national standards.

The Cabinet Member advised the panel the Youth Offending Team (YOT) was one of the best performing units nationally and the work had been commended at a recent conference. Sally Nash, Head of Service YOT gave a summary of the main findings of the recent inspection report and the progress made to implement the action plan.

The Head of Service reported that significant progress had been made in each of the recommendations detailed in Joint Inspection Action Plan (March 2017).

The Head of Service advised the panel that progress against the action plan has been submitted to the Youth Justice Board and Her Majesty's Inspection of Probation for approval. The Head of Service added that outstanding issues from the action plan

will be carried forward into the new Youth Justice planning regime, when the guidance is published.

The Head of Service gave a brief summary of the progress achieved in the six areas for improvement detailed in the action plan and areas where further work is needed. The Head of Service commented that report also includes further details requested by the panel about the performance of the service in respect of child sexual exploitation.

The Head of Service advised the panel that there are plans to appoint a research doctorate student to undertake research study exploring the effectiveness of the YOT evaluations. The research work will be start later in the year and will help the YOT Management Board to better understand the reasons for the success of the service. In addition, the Head of Service and Superintendent Keith Fraser are working jointly to review 'out of court' disposal interventions. The Head of Service advised the panel that the YOT Management Board will continue to monitor the progress of work in these areas. The Head of Service repeated previous concerns about the overrepresentation of young black men in the criminal justice system, but who are also underrepresented in terms of accessing preventative and support services and the need to better understand the reasons for the service.

The Head of Service advised the panel that issues of diversity that were raised previously by the panel will be included as part of the performance report to the YOT Management Board

The Head of Service updated the panel in response to their interest to the development of a reoffending toolkit that was discussed at a previous meeting. The development work is being led and supported by Chief and is aimed addressing the issue of diversity. In response to a panel request an equality impact assessment has been completed on the action plan.

The panel queried the progress in the development of the 'Work Box' in offering young people careers advice and guidance. The Head of Service briefed the panel on progress.

The panel queried the possible impact on the funding of programmes following the Brexit decision. Emma Bennett, Assistant Director, accepted the possible impact of any changes and in particular jointly funded work- for example, a scheme to create 25 job coaches aimed at getting people into work and also helping to supporting them in the job.

The panel wanted to formally congratulate the Head of Service on the well drafted and presented report and in particular the summary of service achievements while acknowledging areas for further improvement. The Head of Service commented that the findings of the research by the doctorate student will identify which interventions work and why, and also look in detail at the triggers that encourage and support behaviour change. The planned research will also include ethnographic research with service users.

The panel suggested that the findings of the research should be added to the future work programme.

The panel welcomed the report.

Resolved:

1. The panel formally acknowledged their high performing Youth Offending Team against national standards.
2. The panel agreed to receive a report on the findings and recommendation of the doctorate research when completed.

The meeting ended at 19:26