

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 1 November 2017

Attendance

Members of the Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Peter O'Neill (Chair)
Cllr Udey Singh (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Julie Hodgkiss
Cllr Rupinderjit Kaur
Cllr Daniel Warren
Cllr Lynne Moran
Rosalie Watkins
Cyril Randles
Jon Dovey
Cllr Jonathan Yardley
Cllr Zee Russell
Cllr Malcolm Gwinnett
Cllr Bhupinder Gakhal

In attendance

Meredith Teasdale - Director of Education
Bill Hague - Head of School Planning and Resources

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 Welcome Koussoukama
Cllr Mak Singh

2 **Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest recorded.

3 **Minutes of the previous meeting (6 September 2017)**

Resolved:

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

4 **Matters arising**

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

5 **Draft Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2018-2019 to 2019-2020**

Cabinet in October were presented with the Draft Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2018-2019 which enables the council to set a balance budget.

There were no new specific budget reduction proposals that fell in the remit of this panel.

There had been 4 evening consultation meetings with public and breakfast meetings with businesses along with an online and paper survey.

In Paragraph 3 it was noted that the significant existing budget reduction targets of £3.75 million related to looked after children. The Children's Transformation Programme had been implemented and sought to reduce demand on specialist services by safely preventing family breakdowns. Significant progress had now been made and nationally the numbers of looked after children were increasing but the numbers were remaining level in Wolverhampton. It was important to try to ensure that children remained with their families safely

The panel noted sections 4.1.6 of the report which highlighted a potential overspend and actions regarding how to reduce deficit.

There were a significant number of young people in care and a young people's pilot team had been set up to try and help keep them remain at home safely

Officers stated that they were also reviewing the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and would be looking for more cost-effective placements where possible. Officers would also be looking to recruit in-house foster parents.

The Director for Education stated that the Education Department had delivered savings over the last few years but due to increased demand there was an overspend. The Director stated that the dedicated schools grant was ring fenced and there was core funding but that there were some implications due to having to place some children out of the City. The Schools Forum had agreed to retrospectively fund some of this. Officers were looking at the strategy to ensure that children's needs were being met locally. This was linked to funding more places in the City and having services in the City to cut down on transport costs.

The panel commented on the previous overspend in 25 July and queried what the situation was now. Officers confirmed that there was still some overspend but over the summer there had been a piece of work looking across the whole of children's services and a recovery plan put in place to consider how the Council could mitigate against risks. At the moment it was estimated that there could be £700,000 of efficiencies in 2017/2018 and further work currently being carried out as shown in the list under section 4.1.6.

The panel requested further clarification of the education savings.

The Director stated that the Council was seeking to reduce the number of children who had to be educated outside of the city and the knock-on transport costs of this.

There was no income associated with this but savings and on costs. The Council was also looking at the services we trade with schools to ensure that we are bringing in the right income. The Director stated that in some cases the needs of a child might be so complex that the City could not meet them and that it was often costly to place the child outside of the City.

Members referred to pages 7 and 8 of the report where it referred to reducing agency social workers, members queried how many agency staff the Council had and at what stage it was decided to make an agency worker permanent.

It was confirmed that in children's social care there were 31 agency workers (most of these were against vacancies or maternity leave or sickness) and that these staff could be made permanent if they decided to apply for a job, there was an ongoing recruitment campaign and constant advert out. There was also a robust recruitment offer and officers had reviewed the relocation package the previous year. The panel also noted that in most cases regarding agency social workers, agencies tended to pay more money which unfortunately undercut the efforts of Local Authorities. Officers stated that there was a West Midlands agenda protocol so there were capped rates for agency workers which had helped with recruitment.

The panel voiced some concerns in relation to the review of the MASH and the use of updated thresholds.

Officers stated that they were looking at how the MASH made decisions and that they had refreshed the thresholds documents to tightened up on areas such as escalation, consent and responses to cases.

The panel queried how the Council were looking to redress the overspend on transport and requested an assurance that there would not be changes in access criteria.

The Council was not looking at moving any thresholds and that the transport policy had not changed. Officers were however looking at having more conversations with parents and emphasising the need to promote and support independence as young people overtime needed to be able to transport themselves and this could often come down to confidence. This was linked to the other objective of trying to have more children placed in the City.

Officers stated that a lot of work had been done looking at behaviours and overriding need including encouraging independence. The Council had a moral duty to ensure that if a child with SEN could get to school on their own then they should as in the future this would give them more confidence to go to college. This was a well-regarded service at the moment but needed more emphasis on whether transport was the right choice, was it necessary, will requirements change as the child gets older etc. Members considered that resources needed to be in place to help with the transition for people with learning disabilities to help show them what to do, how to catch a bus etc.

The panel requested information regarding the number of children accessing higher education, The Director for Education confirmed that she would send this information out to the Panel members.

Resolved:

1. That feedback be provided to Scrutiny Board for consolidation and onward response to Cabinet on the Draft Budget 2018-2019.
2. That feedback be provided to Scrutiny Board for consolidation and onward response to Cabinet on the approach to Budget Consultation for 2018-2019.
3. That feedback be provided to Scrutiny Board for consolidation and onward response to Cabinet on progress on key budget reduction targets as detailed above.

6 **School Place Planning**

A report updating the panel regarding school place planning activities in Wolverhampton was introduced by Head of School Planning and Resources.

The report highlighted current pressures on school places, outlined the anticipated future needs of communities, and detailed the status of proposed expansion programmes.

The panel considered that it was worrying that the Local Authority had to negotiate with academies to get children into school.

The question was raised as to whether the Council was looking at development in the north of the City where hundreds of houses being built and how the primary and secondary differences had been mapped.

It was stated that people were now more willing for their children to travel to the school of their preference and clarified that the Council could only seek to expand good or outstanding schools which made the task even more difficult. It was stated that a school might be in the right place but the Council could not seek to expand it if it did not have the required rating.

It was also stated that due to parental preference the Council was looking to expand popular schools. At the moment this had resulted in more being done in the south of the City where there was increasing demand which marked the start of a longer-term expansion programme. It was stated the in the future the Council would look to mirror what it had done with primary schools in the secondary arena but that it had to be recognised that there were less but bigger secondary schools resulting in less options for development.

A panel member stated that in his opinion, Wednesfield was struggling and was already short of primary places with more housing planned.

Officers stated that this was part of the rationale of moving from 3 to 4 planning areas. The Council needed to be really sure that the number of children in that part of the city equalled demand for schools in that area. The Council did monitor places across the city and also considered areas for contingency sites. If there was a need to create additional primary places then this was accepted but it also had to be noted that this could then be a future issue for secondary provision and that creative

solutions were required. Officers confirmed that the concerns of the Councillors in Wednesfield had been noted and were reflected in the projections.

The panel commended officers on a brilliant paper.

The panel queried what the school appeals were like and whether there was a backlog. It was confirmed that there was no backlog but a large number of in-year appeals continued to come in. The Council had a legal duty to provide a right to appeal and the City Council had the best success rate in the West Midlands with a team that was focused on process and if possible finding solutions for families that negated the need for an appeal.

The panel considered the fact that expansion post 16 was a very different issue and that note needed to be taken of current year 9 figures which would then lead to issues post 16.

Officers agreed that yes Post 16 was a very different situation and that the Team had modelled several scenarios regarding what a school might look like without a 6th form and whether the idea of a 6th form quarter should be pursued. There was currently an appetite from schools to get stuck into 6th form agenda.

The representative from the Youth Council expressed some concerns in relation to the expansion of St Peters which was already a large school over a large geographical area that consisted of poorly planned buildings which resulted in students having to go through one building to get to another building. There were already three lunch sessions at the school lasting for 30 minutes each which was not enough and the school could not support more pupils.

Officers stated that the Council was not in full control but that work had been done with governors at the school and with the head teacher and that all parties needed to have full confidence that the proposal was viable and that in the case of St Peter's that there was full confidence. Officers noted that the points regarding navigating around the school were extremely valid and suggested that students fed this back to the school through the School Council and that the school could perhaps engage the pupils regarding their concerns. Officers stated that the site was not as large as some of the sites and agreed that there may be some issues with the buildings but that they had worked with the school to ascertain what the school needed to function properly particularly in relation to teaching space and social spaces including dining areas.

Resolved:

That the comments of the panel be noted.

- 7 **Wolverhampton Safeguarding Children Board Annual Report 2016 -17**
A report was introduced by the Head of Safeguarding to provide Scrutiny with a copy of the Wolverhampton Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB) Annual Report and to inform Scrutiny of the safeguarding activity 2016/2017 and to present the progress made against the priorities for that period.

The Annual Report was agreed by the WSCB and provided an overview of how partners had discharged their safeguarding responsibilities over the preceding year.

The Wolverhampton Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB) was a statutory body set up in accordance with the Children Act 2004, and Care Act 2015, respectively. The Board was a partnership of enthusiastic members, dedicated to the improvement of practice and services that safeguard children in Wolverhampton.

The Annual Report was a summary of WSCB work during 2016-17.

Key points to be noted in the report were:

1. That the Safeguarding Report was subject to OFSTED and required improvement.
2. There was a need to improve how the organisations scrutinised themselves and other organisations.
3. The excellent partnership with the City Council was noted but there were some concerns that it was not monitored as well as it could be. There was work required in this area and the Board was well on track to do this and it formed part of its strategic action plan.
4. The panel noted the work of the BeSafe Team. This team involved young people in the City with an interest in safeguarding who wanted to make a difference in Wolverhampton. Work had included the Bullying Charter which had been introduced and adopted by all schools and around healthy relationships. There had also been a takeover day when the team took over the Board and encouraged it to reconsider its priorities and how it managed and monitored those who provided services and the affect they had on children.
5. There was now more focus on quality assurance. The Board had reinvigorated the Quality Assurance Committee to enable a better audited schedule and better challenge.
6. Multi agency case file audits had increased across agencies to share learning more effectively and two serious case reviews had been published. Learning from these serious case reviews were now embedded in learning and the board continued to oversee and actions required.

It was important to note that the Board was responsible for all the children in the City not just the most vulnerable children.

There had been a lot of work around Child Sexual Exploitation and from a very low base line (10 reports of identified children at risk) by the end of the period were reporting 50 and were now up to 130 which meant that these children could now start to get the correct support.

Page 42 of the Report dealt with the OFSTED recommendations.

It was noted that this was a Partnership Board and funded by the Partnership. The Local Authority was the largest contributor but not necessarily the biggest voice but had been positive in helping the Board achieve its expectations.

The Youth Council representatives stated that they were really pleased with links to BeSafe team and queried how much engagement the Board had with school safeguarding officers. The Head of Safeguarding stated that there was quite a lot of contact now and that there was a head teachers safeguarding group.

The panel queried how close are our links were with other Boards. The Head of Safeguarding stated that there were links between boards and local authorities and that there were 14 boards that we were closely linked with and shared information, policies and procedures with and that there were also very close links with the Black Country; training was shared and there was a joint child death overview panel and chairs forum.

Resolved:

That the comments of the panel be noted.

8 **Final Decision on the Proposed Merger of Springdale Infant School with Springdale Junior School**

A report was submitted for pre-decision scrutiny regarding the change in circumstances at infant and junior school.

The report detailed the outcomes of Informal Consultation and Formal Consultation (Representation) on the proposed merger of Springdale Infant School with Springdale Junior School. The paper would seek Cabinet approval to merge the two schools to create a primary school to cater for pupils aged between 3 and 11 years with effect from 1 January 2018.

It was confirmed that the Head teacher from the infants' school was no longer in place so the Head teacher from the Junior School was already running both.

Resolved:

That Cabinet be informed that Scrutiny Panel supports the recommendations listed in the report.