

# Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 14 November 2018

## Attendance

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

Cllr Peter O'Neill (Chair)  
Cllr Udey Singh (Vice-Chair)  
Cyril Randles  
Cllr Obaida Ahmed  
Cllr Simon Bennett  
Cllr Celia Hibbert  
Cllr Asha Mattu  
Cllr Beverley Momenabadi  
Cllr Rita Potter  
Cllr Clare Simm

### Co-opted Members

Cyril Randles Church of England – Diocese of Lichfield Representative  
Wolverhampton Youth Council

### Employees

Earl Piggott-Smith	Scrutiny Officer
James Barlow	Finance Business Partner
Bill Hague	Head of School Planning and Resources
Andrew Wolverson	Head of Service, People
Alison Shannon	Chief Accountant
Louise Haughton	Principal Social Worker

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## Part 1 – items open to the press and public

*Item No.*      *Title*

- 1      **Apologies**  
Apologies were received from the following:

Cllr Jasbinder Dehar  
Cllr Lynne Moran  
Cllr Paul Sweet  
Cllr Louise Miles  
Emma Bennett - Director for Children's Service  
Meredith Teasdale - Director of Education

2 **Declarations of interest**

Cllr Peter O'Neill reminded panel members to declare any interests relevant to the discussion on the agenda item Secondary School Expansion Programme.

Cyril Randles confirmed any issues relating to Church of England would be declared where appropriate.

There were no declarations of interest recorded.

3 **Minutes of the previous meeting (5 September 2018)**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 5 September 2018, subject to the agreed changes, be approved, as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

Agenda Item 7 – Future of Old Fallings Park Playground

The panel resolved that they support the consultation on the proposed disposal of the Old Fallings Adventure Playground. The Chair advised the panel that a public consultation on the proposal is still ongoing and that no decision had been made about the site. A report will be presented to Cabinet with recommendations about the future use of the site.

4 **Matters arising**

Minute 5 – Elective Home Education

Cllr Beverley Momenabadi, updated the panel on discussions following the meeting with local MPs during which the concerns about the current situation were highlighted. Cllr Momenabadi explained that Pat McFadden MP was unable to attend the discussion in parliament but did write to the Secretary of State with concerns about the present arrangements. A copy of the reply was shared with members of the panel. The panel agreed to note the progress.

5 **Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel 2017/18 Draft Work Programme**

Earl Piggott-Smith, Scrutiny Officer, presented the draft work programme for comment and invited suggestions of future topics. The panel were advised that there were currently no agenda items for the meeting on 27 March 2019.

Resolved:

The panel agreed to consider and suggest topics for future meetings.

6 **Draft Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2019-2020**

Alison Shannon, Chief Accountant, presented the draft budget report and medium-term financial strategy report. The panel were invited to comment on the proposals and respond to the recommendations. The Chief Accountant also invited the panel to suggest changes to the current budget scrutiny process to improve consultation arrangements.

The Chief Accountant outlined the background to the work done to respond to the previous projected budget challenge of £19.5 million for 2019 – 2020 that was presented in a report to Cabinet on 11 July 2018 and again on 17 October 2018. The projected budget challenge figure was now estimated to be £6 million. The panel

were advised that work would continue to identify budget efficiencies, budget reductions and income generation opportunities.

The Chief Accountant advised the panel that comments on the draft budget and medium-term financial strategy will be included in a report that will be presented to Scrutiny Board on 11 December 2018. The Chief Accountant outlined the next steps in the budget consultation process. The panel were invited to comment on the report.

The panel commented on the lack of detail in the budget report about the proposals for budget reductions and income generations relating the children and young people services and would like more information.

The Chief Accountant referred to the link in the body of the Draft Budget and Medium-Term Finance Report which would give Councillors more details on the Budget Reduction and Income Generation Proposals. In addition, officers were present at the meeting to provide more detail around the proposals, if required.

The following is a summary of panel discussion about proposals for budget reduction and income generations

### **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Tier 3 funding to Black Country Partnership Foundation Trust**

The panel queried the reduction in the budget of £137,000 for the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and the implications for children and young people needing support. Andrew Wolverson, Head of Service People, advised the panel that the service undertook a review of funding for services at Tier 3 as part of the budget preparation work. The review involved comparing the approach adopted by neighbouring local authorities to funding of this service and the evidence showed that very few provided funding at this level. Most of the council's reported that they focus their funding at Tier 2 level of support for people needing a lower level of mental health support. The panel were advised that Wolverhampton CCG is responsible for meeting the needs of children and young people needing access to specialist mental support. The Head of Service People advised the panel that there have been detailed discussions with colleagues at BCPFT and WCCG about the proposals.

The Head of Service advised the panel that not all the monies have been identified as savings from the proposal and that some of the money currently paid to BCPFT will be re-used to commission a service for Children and Young People in care.

The panel queried the impact of the budget reduction on the ability of the Council to meet the needs of young people with mental health concerns and how our provision compares with that offered by neighbouring authorities. The Head of Service People reassured the panel that the principal underlying the approach is that the council co-fund mental well-being services at Tier 2 and that services at Tier 3 remain the responsibility of the CCG to fund and deliver. The expectation is that an increase in investment at Tier 2 level will reduce the number of young people being referred to Tier 3 by intervening much earlier with support. The current Tier 2 service will be re-commissioned in three years' time and the specification will be based on the learning from the HeadStart programme and which projects have been successful.

The panel queried the impact on the service of children diagnosed with autism if funding is reduced and if the new service could meet the current level of demand for support. The Head of Service People advised that Robert Hart has responsibility for developing the autism strategy. The scrutiny officer agreed to re-circulate a briefing paper prepared by Rob Hart about the current strategy. The panel agreed to add the topic to a future agenda item for the panel to consider. The Head of Service People advised the panel that the needs of the young person would be detailed in the education health and care plan, which details the support needed.

### **Supervised Contact Centre Provision for Children and Young People**

The panel queried the implications of reduced spending on the supervised contact centre provision. The Head of Service People advised the panel that the figures quoted do not represent a budget reduction. The panel were advised that work had been done to review the current use of the service and a number of efficiencies had been identified that could create extra capacity, if alternative provision was provided where supervised contact was required. The change in usage would allow the service to be offered to other potential users such as parents looking for private contact arrangements and other local authorities looking for similar provision. The service would provide a source of income for the council.

Mark Taylor, Director of People, explained that the consideration would be given to adding a note explaining in future budget reports a situation where an increase in income has helped to reduce a larger savings in expenditure than would have occurred without the income.

### **WV Active Catering Offer**

The panel queried the reasons for the reduction in the budget for the service. The Director of People advised the panel that a review of the catering service at WV Active venues had been done as the service does not generate enough profit to cover the costs of providing it. The responsibility for the WV Active service has been transferred to the Director of Public Health who is looking at use of vending machines to replace the current catering provision. The Council is looking to reduce the level of subsidy to the catering service.

The panel queried if there were plans to make use of the space in the centres that would be left, if the catering service was removed and the subsequent loss of income. The Director of People advised the panel that no decision had been made about the future use of the space, but the aim is to make the best use of any space.

Resolved:

1. The panel comments on the draft budget and medium-term financial strategy 2019-2020 to be included in the feedback in the report to Scrutiny Board.
2. A report on the autism strategy to be presented to a future meeting of the panel.
3. The Chief Accountant to review the presentation of the budget savings proposals in future reports to give more details about the impact of the planned changes on the level of service provision.

4. The Chief Accountant to consider the presentation of budget reports to show how proposals for income generation have lessened the impact on the overall budget.

7 **Children and Young People Service Improvement Plan - Quarter 2 Update**  
Louise Haughton, Principal Social Worker, presented the update report on progress in delivering the priorities detailed in the 2018 -2019 Children and Young People Service Improvement Plan. The Principal Social Worker outlined the changes to the layout and content of the report. The panel were advised the service was on track to deliver priorities in the plan by the end of Q4.

A further progress report will be presented to the panel after June 2019.

The Principal Social Worker explained that a key change to drafting a plan was to bring together performance data and the experiences of parents and children into a single document.

The panel were advised that work is being done by the communications team to produce a video to further embed restorative practice across the workforce to support the changes in the service. This was given as an example of work to deliver the vision for the Children and Young People Service.

The panel were invited to comment on the report.

The panel queried if there was a child or parent friendly version of the Improvement Plan document. The Principal Social Worker advised that there is no other version of the document but agreed to discuss the idea and report back to a future meeting of the panel.

The panel queried what work is being done to capture the experiences of children and young people who receive support from the service. The Principal Social Worker commented on the change in focus to improving the quality of practice in addition to collecting information used to measure progress against performance indicators. As part of the work done to improve the quality of the service, social workers will speak to children and young people to find out what their experiences are of the service. The aim will be to collect the information more consistently to get a better picture of the overall experiences of young people. The Principal Social Worker advised the panel that the service has introduced a programme for managers and heads of service to observe practice of people supporting families and young people to provide information about their experiences.

The panel queried what happens in situations where a parent or child declines the offer of support.

The Principal Social Worker advised the panel that if a parent declines the offer of a support then no further action would be taken, unless there are safeguarding concerns. In this situation the matter would be referred to the child protection service if there were child protection concerns. The service would try to work with the young person or family to build trust by explaining the benefits of getting early help.

The panel queried the reasons for the delay in progressing the establishment of the Regional Exploitation Group and the implications for work to respond the challenge

of child sexual exploitation in Wolverhampton. The panel commented on recent cases in neighbouring authorities where gangs had been convicted of abuse. The Head of Service People commented on the different response needed where the person is under 18 or over 18 where there are concerns about possible abuse such as sexual exploitation. The Head of Service People advised the panel that if the person is over 18 then the person would be assessed as an adult and where the person was under 18 then there would be an assessment of the level risk. The approach would be to involve the necessary support services that could work with the young person to reduce the level of risk.

The panel queried the support available to young people with disabilities. The panel were advised that in this situation support would be provided on basis of the education plan till the person was aged 25 years, as they would still be considered as being vulnerable in this situation.

The panel queried the support offered to children with autism as there was concern that schools were not meeting their needs. Andrew Wolverson, Head of Service People advised the panel that a briefing on the autism strategy drafted by Rob Hart, which details the plan for supporting children and young people, was previously shared. The scrutiny officer agreed to re-circulate a copy to the panel. The panel agreed to add the topic to the agenda for discussion at a future meeting. The Head of Service People commented on the importance of schools working positively to support children with autism. The panel commented on the concern that children in this situation were often the target of bullying at school and it was important to support them.

The Head of Service People added that the Council will work with schools to devise appropriate interventions to support children and there is expectation that alternatives to modified timetables, temporary exclusion should have been attempted first. These options should be considered by schools as a last resort. The Head of Service People commented on the work done with headteachers to promote sources of advice for schools and pupils, for example, online counselling services who can refer a young person to more specialist support, if necessary.

Resolved:

1. The panel comments on the Children and Young People Service Plan to be noted.
2. An item on autism strategy to be added to the agenda for the panel meeting on 27 March 2019 for discussion.

## 8 **Troubled Families Update**

Andrew Wolverson, Head of Service People, introduced the report and gave an overview of the work done to deliver the Government's National Troubled Families Programme. The programme in Wolverhampton is known locally as "Families in Focus".

An updated draft the of the PBR Action Plan was sent previously to panel members for information.

The Head of Service People advised the panel that the performance of Wolverhampton at the start of the programme was behind those of neighbouring authorities but has since improved.

The Head of Service People explained the reasons for this was that a decision was made at the start to take a different approach to identifying families as part of efforts to embed the approach as part of an overall family support programme which is expected to lead to better outcomes in the future. The number of claims has increased to 30%, which is better than regional and national performance.

The Head of Service People advised the panel that the approach had been recognised nationally and the Council is seen as example of good practice and had visits from other authorities to see the work being done to support families.

The Head of Service People advised the panel that the council is working with partner organisations to get them on board with the different approach to supporting families.

The panel discussed the challenges to delivering the programme. The Head of Service People advised that getting people into employment was the issue that all authorities were struggling to make progress. The Head of Service commented on initiatives such as Work Box scheme, which is aimed at helping people back into employment and training.

The panel queried the financial implications to the Council if the target set by Government is not reached. The Head of Service People replied that a decision was made not to set up a separate team to deliver the programme and instead the approach has been to embed the new ways of working, with a focus on improving future practice.

The panel queried the implications in the action plan of the decision to put on hold the peer review with Birmingham City Council. The Head of Service People advised the panel that while there was a willingness from Birmingham, a decision was made by the Council not to go ahead with the plan at this time. The council is currently working with a London borough to offer peer challenge, who is doing good work on reducing levels worklessness.

The panel discussed the funding of the Troubled Families programme.

The panel queried if Families in Focus programme would be able to help in a situation where a family was at risk of losing their home. The Head of Service advised that the programme would not be able to pay rent arrears in this situation but would refer a family to an agency that could offer financial advice.

The focus of the current approach is ensuring key people are aware that a family is in financial difficulties at much earlier stage before court action is taken and they get the advice needed. The programme could help a family to pay a rental deposit on a new property if evicted in these circumstances.

The Head of People advised the panel of the work done to build relationships with the police and other agencies to support the delivery of the transformational element of the programme.

Resolved:

The panel agreed to note the report and the progress made against performance targets.

9 **Exclusion of press and public**

That in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business as they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information on the grounds shown below]

10 **PART 2 - EXEMPT ITEMS, CLOSED TO PRESS AND PUBLIC**

Part 2 – exempt items, closed to the public and press

Minutes:

Resolved:

That in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business as they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information falling within the paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Act

11 **Secondary School Expansion Programme 2019-20 and Primary School Provision**

Bill Hague, Head of School Organisation, presented a report on the Secondary School Expansion Programme 2019-20 and invited panel members to comment on the proposals. The panel were advised that comments on the proposals would be included in the report to Cabinet on 21 November 2018.

The panel were briefed on work done to provide both temporary and permanent solutions to meet short and medium-term demand for secondary school places in Wolverhampton. The Head of School Organisations commented on the range of challenges facing the service in meeting demand and avoiding an oversupply of school places.

The Head of School Organisations explained work done to assess demand for places and the options for meeting the changing needs of the local population.

A key challenge facing the Council is that it is not in full control of all the factors relating to the effective and timely supply of school places in Wolverhampton. The Regional Schools Commissioner is responsible for determining if academies can expand to meet increased demand for places.

The panel were advised that the Council were not planning to establish any new primary schools at present. However, the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) has proposed the opening of a primary free school in the Wednesfield South Ward. The Secretary of State is the decision maker in relation to any applications to establish a Free School. This decision will have implications for meeting the demand for secondary school provision in the future, if approved.

The panel were briefed on the level of a future demand for secondary school provision and the options for meeting this need. A key aspect of the strategy of meeting demand for extra places is working with schools to fully utilise the existing space, where possible before undertaking any major building work.



The panel discussed the assessment of proposals relating to each of the schools listed in the report. The panel expressed concern about schools being allowed to expand if they are performing poorly according to Ofsted.

The Head of School Organisation reassured the panel of what action the Council would take in such circumstances to ensure children received a good education.

Resolved:

1. The panel agreed to note the report and the progress made to meet the projected demand for secondary school places in the future.
2. The panel note the options being discussed for increasing school capacity and level of funding required to deliver them.

The meeting closed at 19:40