

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 19 June 2019

Attendance

Members of the Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

Cyril Randles
Cllr Celia Hibbert
Cllr Beverley Momenabadi
Cllr Rita Potter (Chair)
Cllr Clare Simm
Cllr Udey Singh
Cllr Rashpal Kaur
Cllr Sohail Khan (Vice-Chair)

IN ATTENDANCE

Cllr John Reynolds

Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

Co-opted Member

Wolverhampton Youth Council

Employees

Earl Piggott-Smith
Meredith Teasdale, Director of Education
Mai Gibbons
Rachel King
Louise Haughton
Robert Hart
Andrew Scragg
Emma Bennett

Scrutiny Officer
HealthWatch Representative
Senior Commissioning Officer
Head of Service Specialist Support
Principal Social Worker
Interim Principal Education Psychologist
Youth Service Participation Worker
Director of Children's Services

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

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

Cllr Rupinderjit Kaur
Cllr Roger Lawrence
Cllr John Rowley
Cllr Paul Sweet

2 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest recorded.

3 Minutes of the previous meeting (27 March 2019)

That the minutes of the meeting held on 27 March 2019 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 Matters arising

Minute 5 – Wolverhampton Joint Autism Strategy

Rob Hart, Head of Inclusion Support, advised the panel that further to the discussion about the need to include in the strategy a reference to celebrating the achievements of people with a diagnosis of autism, a number of actions had been taken forward in response to this comment.

The Head of Inclusion Support advised the panel that autism awareness training for council employees and those in other organisations has been developed. The training will emphasise both the range of talents and abilities that people with autism have, and also the positive achievements.

5 HeadStart Sustainability Planning Update

Mai Gibbons, HeadStart Contracts Manager, presented a briefing based on the findings of the HeadStart Sustainability Consultation report. The HeadStart Contracts Manager outlined the five key sustainability priorities when funding from The Big Lottery ends in 2021.

The HeadStart Contracts Manager advised the panel that as part of sustainability planning work a consultant had been appointed to help determine which parts of the current programme could continue in the future, the challenges in trying to do this and the views from a range of stakeholders about the impact of the work. The briefing includes a summary of the main findings from the local evaluation. A copy of the full final report will be circulated to the Scrutiny Panel members for information.

The HeadStart Contracts Manager advised the panel that Big Lottery have commissioned a formal national evaluation to assess the impact and learning from all six partnerships that have been funded to 2021.

The HeadStart Contracts Manager outlined the five key priorities agreed by members of the HeadStart Partnership Board that would be taken forward as the sustainability plan for HeadStart. The HeadStart Contracts Manager outlined the progress made to date against the key priorities.

The panel queried if any of the local community or voluntary organisations could apply for funding from other lottery funded sources to continue their work. Emma Bennett, Director for Children's Services, advised the panel that discussions have been held with representatives of Big Lottery regionally to consider joining up other funding opportunities. The plan will be to facilitate future funding bids for the voluntary sector rather than applying for individual bids. The panel expressed concern about the progress of consortiums signing agreements and whether they would be ready to submit funding bids to sustain their funding in the future. The Director for Children's Services advised the panel that there was confidence that the necessary progress would be made by the remaining consortiums to have an

agreement signed. The panel were advised that smaller organisations would be involved in submitting a funding bid led by larger organisations. This approach would ensure that they would be part of the bid and have specific funding allocated to them if successful.

The panel queried the involvement of schools and expressed concern about the ability of schools to contribute funding to either continue current funding or to apply the learning from the evaluation of the HeadStart programme. The Director for Children's Services advised the panel that the service is aware of the financial challenges facing schools and other options are being considered to build on the work of the programme. Discussions are ongoing with headteachers involved about the development of a toolkit for schools.

The panel thanked HeadStart Contracts Manager for the briefing papers.

Resolved:

1. The panel welcomed the progress reported and agreed to receive an update on progress against the sustainability priorities in June 2020.
2. HeadStart Contracts Manager to share a copy of the full HeadStart Sustainability Consultation report with the Scrutiny Panel for information, when published.

6 **Elective Home Education England - CWC response to consultation (report to follow)**

Rob Hart, Head of Inclusion Support, briefed the panel on the draft response from the City of Wolverhampton's Council to the Government's response to the consultation on the proposed changes to how children who are Electively Home Educated are monitored and supported.

The Head of Inclusion Support outlined the background to the issues which led to the Government to consider making changes to the current arrangements. The panel had expressed serious concerns about the current arrangements when a report on the national consultations was presented to them on 5 September 2018.

The Head of Inclusion Support advised the panel that the Department of Education undertook a consultation inviting suggestions and comment about whether current arrangements for children who are home educated was adequate and also views on the national guidance. The findings were published in April 2019. The Government made four further proposals that were included in the public consultation. The public consultation ends on 24 June 2019.

The Head of Inclusion Support advised the panel of the national response from local authorities to the proposed changes and gave a summary of the response from the City of Wolverhampton Council (CWC) to each specific proposals that Government had invited comments on. The Head of Inclusion Support, was supportive of first three proposals but did express concern about the financial implications on introducing a duty on local authorities to provide support to home educating families, should they request it. The panel were advised that the panel that CWC currently offer advice and guidance but there was concern that an example given in the consultation document that support could include assistance with the cost of examination fees and also doing checks on private tutors would require extra funding and additional employees support, if implemented.

The panel expressed their disappointment at the Government's response to the consultation and the failure to address the concerns expressed in September 2018 about a lack of independent assurance about the quality of education given to children who are home educated.

The panel welcomed the introduction of a register for children who are home educated but expressed concerns about the lack of power for the local authority to intervene when there is evidence to suggest a parent is not providing suitable education. There is no definition of the term 'suitable education' in the legislation.

The Head of Inclusion Support advised the panel that CWC can issue a School Attendance Order where there are concerns. (School Attendance Orders are issued to parents of children who are outside the school system when the local authority has reason to believe that children are not receiving an education. The School Attendance Order will name the school the child must attend and will direct the parents to register the child at the named school.)

At present 38 parents are choosing not to engage with the local authority, however, the concern of the service is among those families where the reasons given for wanting to home educate suggest that the full implications of the decision, have not been properly considered.

The panel discussed the range of support offered to families who are home educating their children. The panel queried how the local authority can verify that a child is getting a suitable education and also checks done where there are safeguarding concerns, in particular children who move into the area but do not notify the local authority. The Director for Children's Services advised the panel that the Council has access to other information where families are not engaging with support services. The information is shared between local authorities to monitor children moving between different areas. The Director for Children's Services advised that a risk assessment is done where there are safeguarding concerns about a child or young person and that support is given where needed. The Director added that the service has good working relationships with families who have home educated their children for many years.

The panel queried the support offered to families where a home educated child has special education needs. The Head of Inclusion Support advised that the Council will work with the family to implement an education, health and care (EHC) plan and they can access to specialist support if it is identified as part of the child's EHC plan, when they have a child who is home educated.

The panel were advised that CWC has responsibility to provide alternative education to a child who has been excluded from school within six days. Meredith Teasdale, Director of Education, explained the role of the Council in ensuring that schools meet their responsibilities to support a pupil who has been excluded from school. The panel queried the funding implications for schools where a parent decides to home educate their child.

The Director of Education advised that part of the school funding formulae is based on a census count of the number of pupils in each local authority reported annually in

October, which is then used to calculate the budget allocated to the school in the next financial year.

The panel discussed the reporting of exam results to the Council and the issues caused when the information is not provided. The Director of Education advised that some parents who have chosen to home educate for philosophical reasons may not want to engage with the education system and therefore may not see the value in participating in school examinations delivered by the state.

The Head of Inclusion Support advised the panel that young people aged 14-16 do have other options if they want to take an exam. The young person could approach a college or training provider, with having attended a school previously.

The panel discussed concerns about safeguarding matters and general welfare for young people who are home educated. The panel discussed the benefits of children socialising and working with other children on projects and expressed concern that this may have on children who are home educated, particularly in the future. The Head of Inclusion Support advised the panel families who have home educated for many years have established community that work together to support each other, and children have the opportunity to socialise with other young people.

John Reynolds, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, commented that he shares the concerns about the current arrangements for monitoring the progress of children who are home educated. The Cabinet Member added that the issue of concern is for parents who have decided to home educate their child without have an established support network and or seeking advice without considering alternative options to address concerns they may have. The Cabinet Member commented on the parents who have successfully home educated their children, who have secured a place at University.

The panel agreed to note the report.

Resolved:

1. The panel comments on the response of the City of Wolverhampton Council to the consultation on children who are Electively Home Educated to be considered.
2. The panel remains concerned that the Government proposals do not provide a level of reassurance that children are receiving suitable education and support the issues highlighted in the consultation response drafted by City of Wolverhampton Council.
3. The panel support the Government's proposals as detailed in the report, however there are concerns about the financial implications of proposed duty on local authorities to provide support for home educating families and would welcome further clarification on this matter.
4. Panel members were encouraged to respond to the Government consultation document before it ends on 24 June 2019.

7

CYP Strategic Priorities and Improvement Plan (report to follow)

Louise Houghton, Principal Social Worker, presented the findings of the report and invited members to comment on the progress made towards achieving the priorities detailed in the Children and Young People Service Improvement Plan. The Principal

Social Worker also gave a summary of the 2019-20 priorities and strategic plans and invited members comments on the draft.

The Principal Social Worker advised the panel that significant progress have been made to deliver actions and milestones listed in the improvement plan but added that further work is needed to show evidence of impact and for other tasks listed, which have not yet been completed. The Principal Social Worker commented on the achievement in reducing demand on children services and reaping the benefits of investment in early intervention.

The Principal Social Worker commented on progress made in reducing social work turnover rates during the last six months, which has benefits for young children in care by providing stability which has helped to reduce the risk of breakdown in placement arrangements. The Principal Social Worker commented on the work being planned to give support to foster carers.

The panel commented that rate of progress and achievement is lower than expected and would like to see more specific examples of measures to assess the impact of the work being done. The Principal Social Worker explained that changes had been made to the content of future reports to be able to measure the impact of the work being done in improving the lives of children and families and delivering better outcomes.

The Director of Children's Services added that the new improvement plan will include performance measures and there was an acceptance that current measures are too focused on operational areas. The future improvement document will be more strategic and have less details of work being done at the operational level. The panel suggested that the report should be changed to include information as references refer to colour coded changes, but less helpful when it is printed in black and white. The Director of Children's Services agreed to consider adding extra information to allow members to assess progress towards improvement targets in a future report.

The panel agreed to note the report.

Resolved:

The panel comments on the report to be considered and changes made to the layout and content when an update report on Children and Young People Service Improvement Plan is presented at a future meeting.

8 **Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel Draft Work Programme 2019-20**

Earl Piggott-Smith, Scrutiny Officer, presented an update to the draft work programme. Panel members were invited comment on the draft and suggest other topics that could be added.

The Scrutiny Officer advised that a briefing meeting has been arranged for the Chair and Vice -Chair to discuss idea for topics that could be added to the work programme.

The panel agreed to add the issue of apprenticeships to the list of topics.

The Director for Children's Services suggested deferring the report Children and Young People Positive Engagement Strategy to date in October and adding an extra date to help manage the work programme.

The panel agreed to make the changes to the draft programme.

Resolved.

1. A new date in October 2019 to be added to the panel work programme.
2. The panel to be advised of the date when details have agreed with the Chair and Vice Chair of the panel.
3. The issue of apprenticeships to be added to the panel work programme as a future item.

9 Youth Justice Plan

Rachel King, Head of Service, introduced the draft report and outlined the main achievements and areas for further action during the previous 12 months. The Head of Service explained the background to the requirement to produce an annual report. The panel were advised that the plan and future priorities will be officially submitted to the Youth Justice Board by 5 August 2019 for approval.

The Head of Service commented on the main findings of the Youth Justice Plan 2019-20 and the performance against the three national indicators – the number of first-time entrants into the youth justice system, the number of people who reoffend after their first offence, and the number of people who receive a custodial sentence as opposed to a community service. The Head of Service advised that Wolverhampton Reoffending Live Tracker toolkit had been introduced in April 2018 to provide more up to date information and the results had shown a reduction in the levels of re-offending during the first 12 months.

The Head of Service commented on the areas of the service that will be given significant priority for action in the future. The Head of Service highlighted the disproportionate numbers of black Asian minority ethnic identified within the youth justice system and the activities planned to build self-confidence and support to work with young people in a trauma informed way. The service is trying to develop a diverse offer and embed a preventative approach when working with young people.

The panel welcomed the report. The panel queried the reason for not including more recent data showing the performance of the service against national indicators and also neighbouring authorities. The Head of Service acknowledged this issue and explained that the information is provided by the Youth Justice Board.

The introduction of the live tracker is an attempt to get more timely information. The use of the live tracker is not compulsory for the Youth Justice Board so not everyone is using the system. The panel discussed changes to the presentation of the data to show progress made towards meeting national performance measures.

The Head of Service agreed to look at options for presenting the data in response to concerns expressed. However, the format of the report is prescribed by the Youth Justice Board which limits the extent of any changes.

The Head of Service advised that the Youth Justice Board decide the family group of authorities against which performance of Wolverhampton should be compared with.

Resolved:

1. The Head of Service agreed to consider the panel comments about the presentation of charts showing performance against the key national indicators and provide information requested.
2. The panel agreed to note the report and welcome the progress made and improved performance against national indicators.

The meeting closed at 19:40.