

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 27 November 2019

Attendance

Members of the Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Beverley Momenabadi
Cllr Rita Potter (Chair)
Cllr Udey Singh
Cllr Rashpal Kaur
Cllr Sohail Khan (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Paul Sweet
Cllr Paula Brookfield
Wolverhampton Youth Council

In Attendance

Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre

Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

Employees

Earl Piggott-Smith
Dawn Williams
Andrew Wolverson
James Barlow
Bill Hague

Scrutiny Officer
Head of Service Safeguarding
Head of Service, People
Finance Business Partner
Head of School Organisations

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 John Rowley
Cllr Rupinderjit Kaur
- 2 **Declarations of interest**
There were no declarations of interest recorded.
- 3 **Minutes of the previous meeting (25 September 2019)**
That the minutes of the meeting held on 25 September 2019 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.
- 4 **Matters arising**
There were no matters arising from the minutes.

5 Cabinet Member Briefing - Cllr Michael Hardacre

Cllr Michael Hardacre, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, presented his paper. The paper was drafted in response to questions submitted by panel. The panel were invited to comment on the responses and also to raise any matters of clarification.

The panel invited the Cabinet Member to comment on the relationship between the Council and academies. The Cabinet Member responded that the good progress has been made to build positive working relationships with academies and the Council continues to work constructively with all schools in Wolverhampton. Bill Hague, Head of School Organisation, added that the Council has no direct control over academies and that partnership working was considered to be essential for achieving educational success. The Head of School Organisation commented on the range of work done to build good working relationships with schools, for example, an annual conversation takes place with individual Academy Trusts to share information and to review progress in the city. In addition, some Academy Trusts are purchasing school improvement support services from the Local Authority. The Cabinet Member wanted to formally acknowledge the success and national recognition of the school improvement offer service that is managed by the Head of School Improvement.

The panel queried the work done to monitor compliance by local schools with the DfE School Admissions Code and the success rate of parents when applying to their preferred school. The Cabinet Member explained that there is a general misunderstanding that parents have a choice of schools, when the legislation refers to parents expressing a preference. The Cabinet Member added that ideally he would have wanted to see 100% of parents getting their first preference as detailed in the report, but welcomes the current figures showing the majority being successful in getting their first preference.

The situation around the provision of additional school places is complicated by current legislation which states that any new school must be either an academy or free school. The Head of School Organisation explained the challenges this creates in trying to increase the number of school places to respond to the expected growth the school age population. The Head of School Organisation commented on the success in increasing extra provision at minimal costs at some schools, but this is expected to be more difficult in the future. There is expected to be an increase in demand for secondary school places in 2021.

The Head of School Organisation outlined the statutory responsibilities of the Council to check that schools are following the DfE School Admissions Code and can refer the matter to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator if there are concerns. The Council has not needed to make a referral since 2004. The Head of School Organisation added that a number of academies had adopted the admission arrangements prepared by the Council. In addition, the continued co-ordination of in-year admissions and subsequent pupil tracking processes have led to a 50% reduction in the number cases of children missing education.

The panel commented that the Council cannot compel schools to increase the number of places to meet demand and the difficulties in getting funding to build extra schools as part of any expansion programme. The panel supported plans to increase the provision of resource bases in schools to meet the need for specialist provision.

The Head of School Organisation commented on the increase in the number of children with educational health care plans and the view that some children with a disability can thrive in a mainstream school without the need for specialist educational provision.

The panel queried feedback received from the public to the Proposed All Age Travel Assistance Policy consultation. The panel were advised that the consultation ends on 29.11.19 and Chair encouraged panel members to complete on the online consultation form. The panel shared a range of views of the current provision and the challenge to provide specialist provision in more schools to reduce the need for long travel journeys.

The panel wanted reassurance that the responses to the proposals in the consultation will be properly taken into consideration before a decision is made. The Cabinet Member for Education and Skills explained the background to the proposals and advised the panel that any changes would not happen till September 2021 and offered a reassurance that all comments would be considered. The Cabinet Member outlined the public consultation events and the work done to encourage interested groups to share their views about the proposed changes. The panel were encouraged take part in the consultation. Andrew Wolverson commented on the importance of encouraging children to be independent travel where it is possible and helping to prepare them for adult life, when level of support offered will change.

The Cabinet Member agreed to bring a report of the findings and recommendations to a future meeting of the panel for pre-decision scrutiny.

Resolved:

1. The panel welcomed the report and thanked the presenters for their contributions.
2. The panel agreed to add the findings of the Proposed All Age Travel Assistance Policy consultation to a future agenda for pre-decision scrutiny.

6 **Draft Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2020-2021 to 2023-2024**

James Barlow, Finance Business Partner, introduced the report and outlined changes to the format in response to feedback. The Panel were invited to comment on the Draft Budget and Medium-term Financial Strategy and the specific proposals within the remit of the Panel. The Panel highlighted the need to have information specifically related to destinations for post sixteen-year olds. The Finance Business Partner agreed to note the comment and consider the level of detail when producing future reports.

The Finance Business Partner outlined an analysis of the budget for children and young people services. The majority of the spend in education was funded by the Dedicated Schools Grant which is a ringfenced for specific activities. It was reported that 24% (£56.9 million) of net revenue expenditure budget was for services for children and young people. The Panel made the following comments on the specific budget proposals.

The Head of Service - People, added that a significant amount of the budget expenditure was on service transformation work. Wolverhampton was performing much better when compared to regional and national trends.

The Head of Service explained in the budget proposal for Transforming Children's Services that £500,000 of the predicted budgeted spend would no longer be required due to range of activities that was expected to reduce demand on children services. The Head of Service People gave an example of the longer-term benefits of early investment in speech and language services for children which would reduce demand for more specialist services in the future. The Head of School Organisation commented on the planned consultations about funding options that would be discussed at the Schools Forum.

The Panel queried the options being considered for Towers Outdoor Activity Centre. The Head of School Organisation advised the Panel that no decision had been made about the possible options for the future of the service.

The Panel discussed the importance of investment in speech and language therapy services for children.

Resolved:

1. The Panel comments on the Draft Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2020-21 to 2023-24 and the draft budget proposals relevant to the remit of the panel to be included in the response to Scrutiny Board for consideration.
2. A final response to be finalised by the Chair and Vice Chair.

7 **Wolverhampton Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements**
Dawn Williams, Head of Safeguarding, gave a presentation detailing reasons for making changes to the safeguarding arrangements for children and adults. The Head of Safeguarding outlined the current structure of the Safeguarding Board, changes introduced by national guidance and the new governance arrangements for the newly established Wolverhampton Safeguarding Together (WST). The Head of Safeguarding outlined details of the membership of WST and the specific aims of the group. The Head of Safeguarding commented on the importance of learning from child death reviews and improving everyday practice. A focus of the proposed changes is providing appropriate challenge to services about the extent to which they are making a real difference to improving safeguarding arrangements.

The Head of Safeguarding commented on the additional external scrutiny arrangements. The panel queried the sharing of information from meetings about safeguarding matters and sought reassurance that frontline would be kept updated. The Head of Safeguarding accepted the importance of sharing information and also the challenges created under the previous arrangements with frequent changes in representatives who attended meetings of the Safeguarding Board. A smaller group of key people at the executive level is expected to improve the situation.

The panel queried the training given to staff at Wolverhampton Homes on using the ECLIPSE Multi-Agency Safeguarding software system and plans for providing training for new staff.

The panel commented on the success of the promotional video created by Youth Council and whether it could be shared with younger school children done with members of the B-Safe Team.

The Head of Safeguarding commented that the video would not be appropriate to younger children and ideas would be considered that would reach children aged 8-9 years old.

The Head of Safeguarding commented that the new Independent Scrutineer role would be paid for about 15 days' work annually. The job description for the role has been drafted and would be advertised shortly. The panel discussed the issue of raising the importance of safeguarding issues among community and faith groups. The Head of Safeguarding suggested the idea of introducing an accreditation system to encourage people to attend events and improve their knowledge of the issue.

Resolved:

The panel welcomed the report and agreed to note the proposals for strengthening safeguarding arrangements in Wolverhampton.

8 **Wolverhampton Safeguarding Board Annual Report 2018 - 2019 (information only)**

The panel agreed to note the report.

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

Earl Piggott-Smith, Scrutiny Officer, presented the report and invited panel members to comment and add topics that fall within its remit.

Resolved:

The panel work programme to be updated to reflect issues discussed during the meeting.

The meeting ended at 19:45