

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 10 March 2021

Attendance

Members of the Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Beverley Momenabadi
Cllr Rita Potter (Chair)
Cllr Clare Simm
Cllr Udey Singh
Cllr Rashpal Kaur
Cllr Sohail Khan (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Paul Sweet
Cllr Jasbinder Dehar

Co-opted Members

Tom Careless
Janis Nanthchouang

Chair Wolverhampton Youth Council
Vice-Chair Wolverhampton Youth Council

In Attendance

Cllr Phil Page

Chair Health Scrutiny Panel

Witnesses

Mags Courts Manager

Children's Commissioning Manager,
Wolverhampton Clinical Commissioning
Group

Employees

Earl Piggott-Smith
Julia Cleary
Andrew Wolverson
Courtney Abbott

Scrutiny Officer
Systems and Scrutiny Manager
Head of Children's Strategy and Partnerships
Quality and Improvement Advanced
Practitioner for Children and Adults,
Director of Children's and Adult Services
Children's Innovation Lead
Partnership Manager Children's Services
Scrutiny Officer

Emma Bennett
Kush Patel
Denise Williams
Martin Stevens

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

- 1 **Welcome and Introductions**
Cllr Rita Potter, Chair, welcomed everyone to the virtual meeting and advised it was being live streamed to the press and public. Cllr Potter advised that she was not expecting any exempt or restricted items on the agenda. A recording of the meeting would be available for viewing on the Council's website at a future date.

2 **Meeting procedures to be followed**

Cllr Potter explained the protocol to be followed during the meeting for asking questions and reminded everyone that microphones should be muted and cameras off unless they have been invited to speak.

Earl Piggott-Smith, Scrutiny Officer, confirmed all attendees present at the meeting.

3 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from the following members of the panel:

Cllr Rupinderjit Kaur
Cyril Randles

4 **Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest recorded.

5 **Minutes of the previous meeting (5.1.21)**

The minutes to be corrected to include the following members of Wolverhampton Youth Council as attending:

Anna Tabner, Raveen Kaur and Keisha Riley

That the minutes of the meeting held on 5 January 2021 be approved, subject to the above correction, as a correct record.

6 **Matters arising**

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

7 **Minutes of the previous meeting (13.1.21)**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 January 2021 be approved as a correct record.

8 **Matters arising**

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

9 **Spotlight Review - Supporting the Health and Wellbeing of children and young people (report to follow)**

Andrew Wolverson, Head of Children's Strategy and Partnerships, introduced the presentation detailing the range of work being done to improve the health and mental wellbeing of children young people and their families. The Head of Children's Strategy outlined the specific aims of the presentation and the link to the overarching outcomes in the Council's 'Relighting Our City' strategy.

The Head of Children's Strategy commented on the importance of supporting the parents and adults within families as much as supporting the children and young people themselves. The Head of Children's Strategy listed the speakers who would be contributing to the presentation during the meeting. The importance of creating job opportunities for young people by supporting local businesses and stimulating our vibrant high streets and communities was highlighted.

Kush Patel, Children's Innovation Lead, briefed the panel on the highlights of the Youth Engagement Strategy (#YES) programme and the work undertaken during

2020. The Children's Innovation Lead commented on the next phase of the #YES programme and advised that future youth provision services to be commissioned would be based on three key themes, for example, delivering training on coproduction to key stakeholders.

The Children's Innovation Lead commented on the work done to get young people involved in the implementation, delivery and monitoring of services aimed at supporting them during the pandemic. There are 18 members of the Youth Engagement Board and the level of participation has increased among young people wanting to get more involved through the establishment of locality boards. Each of the locality groups have started working on their respective work plans. The Children's Innovation Lead commented on the current virtual offer and advised the panel that there had been 23,000 visits to the website and over 33,000 young people engaging with 100 activities online.

The Children's Innovation Lead advised the panel that the rollout of health and wellbeing sessions continues, the offer includes face to face sessions in schools and online sessions. The service will continue to develop opportunities to further support young people.

Denise Williams, Partnership Manager Children's Services, commented on the parenting support offer and briefed the panel on work during 2020 and the plans for developing the service in the future. The Partnership Manager advised the panel that the provision of parenting support is available across the City, but it is variable, and the current offer is not considered to be co-ordinated. In response to this issue work is being done through the Strengthening Families Together Board to deliver services from the different service providers in a more consistent way.

A task and finish group has been set up to review provision across the City and members of the group will be consulting with families to help shape service delivery in the future. The group will be developing materials to ensure a more consistent approach that supports the current offer.

The Partnership Manager commented on the work being done to promote parenting across the city. A parenting coordinator role was created in February 2020 to support this work and is part of the Strengthening Families Service. The parenting coordinator will also provide support, advice, and guidance to Strengthening Families workers, Parent Champions, and the voluntary sector.

The Partnership Manager commented on the impact on changes to the parenting support offer in response to Covid. The service developed a virtual offer for families who were experiencing difficulties in parenting or who contacted the MASH team for support. In addition, a four-week online e learning programme for parents was developed to provide more targeted approach as an alternative to parents having to spend hours online.

If a parent needs support after completing the course they can contact the service and ask to be referred to the Family Learning Champion. The service will also accept referrals made by other professionals and also self-referrals. The service has received very good feedback from parents and there has been a very low dropout rate.

Mags Courts, Children's Commissioning Manager, Wolverhampton Clinical Commissioning Group, briefed the panel on the work done to offer children and young people needing specialist emotional and mental wellbeing support during the pandemic. The number of referrals to the Single Point of Access service remained fairly static during the first lockdown. This process determines where the case should be referred to.

The number of referrals has increased since September 2020. There has been reduction in capacity of the service to meet this demand due to social distancing rules and also a reluctance from schools on occasions to allow other health professionals to access the building.

The Children's Commissioning Manager advised the panel that Base 25 were originally commissioned to do 120 referrals and achieve a 90 contacts month. However, during some months Base 25 were getting 350 referrals. The number of referrals has declined since this peak of activity, but this has started to increase recently. The capacity of the service has been reduced due to staff being ill during the pandemic and the situation was further complicated by the reluctance of people who were following Government health advice to shield to meet in person.

The Children's Commissioning Manager advised that remote meetings using Zoom has been used as an alternative. However, there were concerns from some parents who did not want the young person being online or the financial ability to access services digitally.

The Children's Commissioning Manager detailed the range of work being done to increase young people's access to mental health support services in the future. There has been an increase in number of referrals relating to eating disorders during the pandemic and also an increase in the number of young people who have been referred to the service late.

In some of these situations an admission into hospital has been only option. However, the service is working hard with young people and their families to avoid hospital admission.

The Children's Commissioning Manager advised the panel that in response to increase in the number of eating disorder referrals a new service has been introduced to provide rapid early intervention in response to a first reported episode. The service is also aimed at helping young people who have a short history of eating disorders and there are plans to expand the offer across Wolverhampton. The service is also working hard to ensure that no young person with a recognised learning disability or autism is admitted to a mental health unit. There has been a reduction in the number of people who have been admitted during the year which has been a success.

The Children's Commissioning Manager briefed the panel on the development of the Link Programme which has been developed to ensure that the Wolverhampton offer is clear.

The programme will aim to develop a network of support for teachers who are managing families with complex problems, including children and young people with emotional mental health and wellbeing issues.

The Children's Commissioning Manager detailed other planned service changes to meet the needs of children and young people.

The panel welcomed Cllr Phil Page, Chair Health Scrutiny Panel, to the meeting and invited him to comment on the presentation. Cllr Page expressed concern about the limited coverage of the pilot mental health support scheme being delivered in sixteen schools and the high level of need. The Government funded scheme is due to end in 2021.

Cllr Page queried the work done to raise awareness of the scheme to young people and their families and the difficulties experienced by people who either did not have the devices or internet access to make use online support resources. Cllr Page also suggested the need for Base 25 to offer more outreach services to support young people.

The Children's Commissioning Manager responded that in addition to the pilot scheme there are a number of other initiatives supporting young people, for example HeadStart and work being done to build mental health capacity within schools. This is part of an overall plan to offer targeted support to all young people across the City.

The Head of Children's Strategy commented on the issue of the children without access to digital devices and how Councillors were using their Ward funds to buy laptops and equipment to support schools and also to provide access to online support services. There was acceptance of the importance to young people wanting face to face support rather than online.

The Head of Children's Strategy advised the panel the HeadStart programme is a test and learn scheme which has been applied to other schools.

The panel were advised that Base 25 do offer face to face meetings if a young person does not have access to a computer or has difficulty accessing the online services. In this situation, meetings with young people have taken place in parks or other safe spaces and also some sessions have taken place using Zoom. The feedback from some young people suggests this method has helped to reduce levels of anxiety.

The Head of Children's Strategy advised the panel that there are plans for a new contract with Base 25. The contract will start in April 2021. The new contract will include extending the current service to offer support to parents and families of the young person referred to the service.

A communication plan is being developed which will include videos for professionals and for parents to promote awareness of the scheme. The information will also be promoted through the social media channels and in publicity sent to local schools to explain how the new service will operate. A new website is also being developed to make it much easier for people to find information about the range of support services available.

The Children's Commissioning Manager commented on the mental health support teams in schools and acknowledged the limits of the service and outlined the plans to improve the service.

The panel asked for more details about the new FREED model developed to support young people with eating disorders. The Children's Commissioning Manager agreed to send the panel members more detailed information about the scheme. The scheme will offer specialised evidence-based treatment and support tailored to meet the needs of young people.

The Children's Commissioning Manager commented on concerns from parents when their child with an eating disorder becomes 18 and moves automatically into the adult service and the difficulties some experience. The Children's Commissioning Manager reassured the panel of the work being done to develop and transform early intervention services which are suitable for young adults with a mental health psychosis.

The panel discussed ideas to counter negative press reports about the behaviour of young people in spreading Covid 19. The Head of Children's Strategy agreed to discuss the idea with colleague in the communications team in promoting #YES campaign and the positive work of young people. A young people's communications group has been established.

The Head of Children's Strategy agreed to raise the issue at the next meeting of the group. Emma Bennett, Director of Children's and Adult Services, welcomed the comments and ideas in the response to the presentation and agreed to discuss them further with colleagues in the communications team.

The Director of Children's and Adult Services responded to the comments about digital poverty and advised the panel during the pandemic over 1000, laptops, Chromebooks, tablets, Wi Fi vouchers, chairs, routers were distributed to support the education of children and young people. The Director added that it was important to note issues around digital inclusion and devices has not gone away despite the return of pupils to school.

The Director praised Councillors who have used their allocated Ward Fund to pay for school equipment to support remote teaching. The Council has used funding from the national DfE scheme to buy devices and kit to connect to the internet for children and young people. In addition, an online lending scheme has been introduced which is supported by partners in the voluntary sector who supply devices to children and young people and individuals. The Council has also launched an ICT recycling scheme whereby individuals, businesses, members of the public can donate new or broken equipment which can be repaired by a company. The equipment can then be given free to children and young people in the City.

The panel queried what more could be done to involve young people in developing the Youth Engagement Strategy (#YES) and the level of involvement in developing the branding of the scheme. The Director of Children's and Adult Services detailed the work done to engage and actively involve young people in developing and commissioning of services. In addition, young people have a budget to commission services. The co-production of material is a key part of the work being done and young people are encouraged to challenge decisions made.

The panel welcomed the presentation and thanked the presenters.

Resolved:

1. The panel agreed to note the presentation.
2. The Children's Commissioning Manager to share details of the FREED model aimed at supporting young people with eating disorders.

10 **Children's Workforce Health Check 2020**

Courtney Abbott, Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner, introduced the report and presentation on the findings of the Children's Social Work Workforce Health Check for 2020. The panel were invited to comment on proposed actions to improve the health of the social work workforce.

The Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner advised the panel that the presentation is similar in content to the previous Social Work report. There is no requirement to do an annual survey, but it was agreed last year to include the views of the general workforce as it was considered to be important. The survey uses similar questions to that used with social workers. In total 119 survey responses were received.

The Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner gave details of main findings from the survey.

The panel were invited to comment on the findings. The panel discussed concerns highlighted in the survey about workload issues and how social work workforce was managing. The Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner commented on the expectation that with training and the use of Eclipse and other tools will reduce admin workloads.

The panel queried the reasons for the low response to the survey. The Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner responded that a possible reason for the low response rate could be linked to survey fatigue, as there were a number of other surveys being done at the time.

The start of the survey also coincided with start of the second lockdown. The findings from the survey will be discussed the workforce and during the visits questions about how to get better engagement to encourage more people to complete the survey form.

The panel queried the work being done to respond to the issues of where people have commented on the workload management issues. The Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner commented on the importance of the current monthly supervision meetings with an employee's line manager to raise any concerns about case workload issues. The panel queried if workload issues would create a situation where a worker was unable to take annual leave.

The Andrew Wolverson, Head of Children's Strategy and Partnerships responded that the Council's position is that managers should be as flexible as possible, to allow people to take leave as booked, whilst acknowledging that social work is not 9-5 job and there may be occasions when leave granting booked leave may not be possible.

Andrew Wolverson, Head of Children's Strategy and Partnerships was confident that everybody was able to take their leave entitlement during the year, while accepting that in certain situations it was not possible to take leave as booked. The service will continue to work with managers to ensure the wellbeing of employees.

The Director of Children's and Adults Services supported the comments and detailed the extra support such as counselling which has been offered in the past where there has been a particularly complex or upsetting incident involving the death of a child. In this situation the Council has commissioned or offered to commission or procured specific counselling support services.

The Director of Children's and Adults Services commented on the range of welfare support available as part of the overall employee wellbeing offer.

The panel welcomed the report and thanked the presenter.

Resolved:

1. The panel agreed to note the findings of the Children's Services Social Workforce Health Check for 2020.
2. The panel agreed to endorse the proposed actions to improve the health of the social care workforce.
3. The panel comments on the findings to be considered in future reports.

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2020 Children's Social Work Health Check

Courtney Abbott, Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner, introduced the report and gave a presentation on the findings of the Children's Social Work Health Check for 2020. The panel were invited to comment on proposed actions to improve the health of the social work workforce.

The Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner advised the panel that the Social Work Health Check is done annually as part of the self-assessment work. There is a focus on getting a better understanding of both the quality of social work practice and the conditions in which social work is being delivered. The information from the survey informs the Council's workforce development planning and supports the continuous improvement of social and children's social work. The survey took place between the 2 November 2020 and 14 December 2020. The start of the survey occurred at the same time as the second lockdown which may have affected responses. In total 115 responses were received.

The Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner commented on the main headline findings from the survey.

The panel queried the figure of 45 per cent of social workers reported stress levels and work done to identify the causes and the impact this was having on the quality of service. The Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner responded that while stress levels have increased the level of stress related sickness has reduced. This year the figure was 5.2 per cent compare to 6.7 per cent reported last year and 11 per cent in 2018.

All social workers are aware of sources of help if they are experiencing work related stress and they can also discuss any concerns at their monthly supervision sessions.

The panel queried the finding in the main report which stated that in 2020 full time workers worked 9.6 hours over their contracted hours, which is higher than the figure when compared to previous years. The issue of extra admin work was given as a cause behind the increase. The panel discussed the impact of the introduction of Eclipse case recording system in reducing workloads. The Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner advised the panel that the Eclipse system introduced in September 2020 is expected to reduce time practitioners spend on completing paperwork as they get more used to using the new system.

The Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner gave an overview of the work done to prepare and also involve frontline workers in the development of the system before going live. A practice lead supports provides ongoing support and guidance to practitioners. In addition, there is an Eclipse user group, who are champions working across Children's Services, who get feedback from teams weekly. The feedback has been used to implement changes to the system.

Emma Bennett, Director of Children's and Adults Services, reassured the panel that she was confident that frontline worker would feel able to report any concerns to either their line manager or someone else that could offer support if needed. There is a commitment from members of the senior management team to be visible to frontline workers and provide different opportunities to raise any issues of concern.

The panel wanted reassurance that social workers felt able to report any concerns about equality and diversity issues.

The Director of Children's and Adults Services responded that the Council has introduced an online safe space portal for people to report any such concerns in confidence.

The service is available to all Council employees. An issue can also be raised with the Line Manager first or another manager if they do not feel comfortable to do so. In addition, there are race equalities champion within social work services where a person can go to for advice and support around specific issues.

Resolved:

1. The panel agreed to note the findings of the Children's Social Work Health Check for 2020.
2. The panel agreed to endorse the proposed actions to improve the health of the social care workforce.
3. The panel comments on the findings to be considered in future reports.