

Strong Families, Children, and Young People Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 23 June 2022

Attendance

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

Cllr Rita Potter (Chair)
Cllr Paul Sweet
Cllr Qaiser Azeem
Cllr Adam Collinge (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Lovinyer Daley
Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre
Cllr Carol Hyatt
Cllr Andrew McNeil
Cllr Louise Miles
Cllr Lynne Moran

Co-opted Members (5)

Wolverhampton Youth Council

Employees

Earl Piggott-Smith
Julia Cleary
Emma Bennett
Alison Hinds
Rachel King

Scrutiny Officer
Systems and Scrutiny Manager
Executive Director of Families
Deputy Director of Children's Social Care
Head of Vulnerable Children

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

1 **Welcome and Introductions**

Cllr Rita Potter, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting and advised it was also being live streamed to the press and public. 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.

3 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from the following members of the panel:

Cyril Randles - Church of England – Diocese of Lichfield Representative

Cllr Stephanie Haynes

4 **Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest recorded.

5 **Children's Residential Provision - Phase 2 Business Case**

The Chair invited Alison Hinds, Deputy Director Social Care, and Rachel King, Head of Service Specialist Support, to present the report to the panel.

Rachel King, Head of Specialist Support, introduced the report and outlined the background to the plans approved by Council earlier in the year to develop two children's homes in the City.

The Head of Specialist Support advised that the report on the options being considered was presented to the panel February 2022 for comments. The panel supported the proposal and endorsed the preferred option to develop two children's homes in the City, which was then presented to Cabinet for approval.

The Head of Specialist advised that the homes would be developed to support young people with complex care needs. The homes would cater for up to two young people and offer high quality specialist provision in homely environment. The panel were asked to comment on the report before it is presented to Cabinet (Resources) Panel on 6 July 2022 to seek approval for funding to develop the proposals.

The Head of Specialist Support briefly outlined the background to the development of proposals detailed in the report and advised that the preferred option was based on the findings from a feasibility study undertaken during February and March 2022.

The Head of Specialist Support advised the panel that the report for Cabinet recommends using a corporate asset site for the first home and purchase a private property for the second home nearby. This arrangement would allow one manager to work across the two sites and offer the consistency of care needed. The panel were asked to support this plan.

The Head of Specialist Support referred the panel to the financial implications section of the report and advised that the total capital cost of bringing the two homes into operation would be about £1.1 million. The Head of Specialist Support gave further details about the costings of placements and stressed the focus of the plans is to offer high quality placement locally within Wolverhampton to help young people too maintain links with their wider family and educational support networks.

The Head of Specialist Support advised the panel that the Council will be bidding for capital funding from a Department of Education programme which has been set up to support local authorities to develop new children's homes on a 50: 50 match funding basis. A funding bid would be made later in the year. The criteria listed refers to supporting projects focused on young people with complex needs and the most vulnerable children. The Head of Specialist Support was confident that the bid would be successful based on the priority given to this criteria.

The panel were invited to comment on the report.

The panel welcomed and supported the proposals detailed in the report to provide local specialist provision.

The panel highlighted issues in the past in larger children's home, where the arrival of a young person could sometimes impact negatively on the educational and future of the existing children in the home. The panel commented on the need to progress the project with speed, while at the same time being cautious and minimising possible risks.

The panel discussed the merits of a single manager working across the two sites and suggested an updated report be presented to the panel, which may include details of locations of the sites selected for development.

Alison Hinds, Deputy Director Social Care, accepted the importance of appointing the right person for the role who could manage the two homes effectively and added that the previous requirement to have one manager per children home was changed by Government recently.

The panel queried if there were any financial revenue implications arising from the proposals for funding the scheme. Emma Bennett, Executive Director of Families, advised the panel that there were no further potential revenue costs arising from the project and that the cost of the new internal provision can be met from an existing budget.

The panel commented on the importance of engaging the public about the plans for the developing two children's homes in the City. The Executive Director of Families reassured the panel about the plans for stakeholder engagement when the sites have been identified.

The panel queried if a progress report could be presented to the panel in six months. The Executive Director of Families supported this idea. The panel discussed if there would be an opportunity in the future for the panel to consider the final options for the site before a final decision is made.

The Executive Director of Families advised the panel that would be consultation with the local Ward Councillors and the community when a decision has been made about the location of the proposed sites.

The panel queried the ages of the young people that would be considered for a place in the home and how young people could be involved in the design of the homes. The Head of Specialist Support advised the panel the age profile of young people is being finalised and suggested the age range would likely to be 13 to 14 years old. The Head of Specialist advised the panel the Statement of Purpose document is being developed and when sites have been identified then the service would be engaging with young people about the design and decorations. In addition, young people would be involved at the recruitment stage of the project.

The panel queried how long young people would be able to stay at the residential home. The Head of Specialist Support advised the panel this issue would be detailed in the Statement of Purpose document.

The approach would be to try to avoid the provision being blocked but there is acceptance based on experience that a young person may need time to address the

areas of trauma so a flexible approach would be adopted before discussion about the possibility of them moving onto other support.

The panel queried the number of looked after children being cared in for within the City and outside the city. The panel also queried the rationale for limiting the numbers to two children for each of the residential homes.

The Head of Specialist Support explained the rationale for limiting the number of places and added that the kind of residential provision needed is limited locally and the aim is to create a more homely environment that would better support children with the most complex needs.

The panel queried when the homes would be expected to be operational and if any work had been done to identify possible sites, particularly given the selection criteria as detailed in the report which would limit the potential areas.

The Head of Specialist Support advised the panel that the service is working with colleagues in corporate assets about possible locations to make sure that the sites are close enough for one manager to manage.

The panel queried when the homes would likely to be open. The Executive Director of Families highlighted the importance of getting the right sites and the approach would be informed by the experience of managing children's homes in the past. The Executive Director of Families suggested that the homes would hope to have been identified in early 2023. The timeline for opening the homes will also be influenced by the time taken to get Ofsted registration and it is hoped that the homes will be ready in Spring 2023.

The panel agreed to support the recommendations detailed in the report. The panel discussed the role of the panel in reviewing progress and receiving updates from the project steering group.

The panel welcomed the assurances given that the panel about informing the panel about progress of the plans and there would be public consultation when a potential site has been identified.

The panel agreed to receive an update on progress in six months' time.

Resolved:

1. The panel support the recommendations in the report to develop two children's homes in the Wolverhampton to meet the needs of young people with complex care needs.
2. The Executive Director of Families to present a progress report to the panel in January 2023.

6 Cross Party Scrutiny Review - Written Statement of Action (WSOA)

The Chair invited Emma Bennett, Executive Director of Families, to present the report.

The Executive Director briefed the panel on the decision by Council on 1 December 2021 to establish a review group relating to the issues detailed in the SEND Written Statement of Action (WSOA).

The Executive Director advised the panel that Council agreed that a report should be presented to the first meeting of Strong Families, Children and Young People Scrutiny with proposals to establish a cross party scrutiny review group. The report details the remit, terms of reference, frequency of meetings, membership, and governance arrangements.

The Executive Director advised the panel that a draft of the WSOA was presented to the panel earlier in the year for comments before it was approved by Cabinet and later signed off by Ofsted.

The Council and partner agencies have been given 18 months to address the issues highlighted in the WSOA. There was a discussion at the time about the benefit of a subgroup of Councillors with the role of monitoring progress against the actions detailed in the WSOA. The report presented to the panel follows on from that discussion about how this idea could be taken forward.

The Executive Director invited Julia Cleary, Scrutiny and Systems Manager, to present further details of the plans for setting up a Cross Party Scrutiny Review Group. The Scrutiny and Systems Manager outlined the remit, frequency of meetings and reporting arrangements and the process for appointing members.

The Scrutiny and Systems Manager added that where possible the meetings of the group would be held in public, unless there was a good reason for not doing so. The aim is that meetings will start in September 2022 and the work would be expected to be completed within six months. However, there is scope to extend the timeline, for example if more time was needed to take evidence from a specific group.

The Scrutiny and Systems Manager commented that following this meeting there would be discussions with the respective political group leaders and the Chair and Vice Chair to nominate five members from the panel to be appointed to the review group. The Scrutiny and Systems Manager added that the report suggests that there would be three nominations from the majority group and two nominations from the opposition group, with the possibility of two members being co-opted from Youth Council.

The panel was invited to comment on the report and the recommendations.

The panel queried the plans for engaging with the public about the ideas for development of the site and suggested that members of Hi5, who are young people

with educational needs and disabilities, should be involved. The Executive Director supported this idea and added that the group had already been identified as one that should be asked to be involved in the project.

The panel discussed the membership of the group alternatives to the proposed arrangements.

The panel suggested that the work of the working group should focus on the six areas detailed in the WSOA to add value to the process.

The panel agreed to support the report recommendations.

Resolved:

The panel agreed to accept the remit, terms of reference, and frequency of meetings as detailed in the report to establish a Cross Party Scrutiny Review Group – SEND WSOA.

7 **Scrutiny Work Plan**

The Chair invited the Earl Piggott-Smith, Scrutiny Officer, to present the report.

The Scrutiny Officer advised the panel of suggested items for the work programme for 2022 – 23. The panel were asked to suggest topics and timings when issues could be presented. The Scrutiny Officer invited Cllr Collinge to comment on the draft.

Cllr Collinge referred to the panel to the future agenda item on St John's Ambulance scheduled for 5 October 2022. Cllr Collinge proposed a motion be made to the next meeting Council to formally congratulate the organisation in recognition of the important work that they do to support young people. Cllr Collinge praised the valuable work of St John Ambulance and also wanted to acknowledge St John Ambulance Cadets in their centenary year.

The panel discussed the proposal and supported the recommendation to be made to Council.

The Chair invited panel members to suggest items for the panel work programme.

The panel discussed a recent press release that reported 88% of Wolverhampton schools with a current Ofsted judgement were rated as being Good or Outstanding and welcomed this achievement. The panel asked for more details about the situation where a school would not be subject to an Ofsted judgement. The Executive Director of Families advised that other schools may have been inspected under the previous framework and rated as inadequate and have since changed to an academy status, but which has not yet been re-inspected.

The Executive Director of Families agreed to consider the issues raised and add a note to make this clearer and suggested that the issue could be covered in more

detail when the Education Excellence Annual Report is presented to the panel at the meeting in February 2023.

The panel discussed possible topics for the work programme and reorganising the agenda to make it more manageable and allow time for proper scrutiny of the reports presented.

The panel discussed the severe impact of Covid on the education of children and that it was important to consider this when validated GCSE and A Level exam results are published in the year.

The panel discussed the education exam reports and suggested that it could be presented in January or March 2023. The panel discussed other possible changes to the draft work programme.

The Chair encouraged panel members to consider other items for the panel work programme.

Resolved:

1. The panel agreed to note the draft work programme.
2. The panel supported a proposal to submit a motion to Council to congratulate St John's Ambulance Cadets on their centenary.

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