

Strong Families, Children, and Young People Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 5 October 2022

Attendance

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

Cllr Rita Potter (Chair)
Cllr Paul Sweet
Cllr Qaiser Azeem
Cllr Stephanie Haynes
Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre
Cllr Carol Hyatt
Cllr Andrew McNeil
Cllr Louise Miles
Cllr Lynne Moran

Co-opted Members (5)

Wolverhampton Youth Council

Witnesses

Jackie Redding - Chief Executive

The Way Youth Zone

Employees

Earl Piggott-Smith
Emma Bennett
Alison Hinds
Andrew Wolverson

Scrutiny Officer
Executive Director of Families
Deputy Director of Children's Social Care
Deputy Director of Commissioning and
Transformation of Children's Services
Senior Governance Manager
Co-production and Youth Engagement
Manager

Martin Stevens
Alice Vickers

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.
- 2 Meeting procedures to be followed**
Cllr Potter explained the process to be followed during the meeting for asking questions.

3 Apologies

Apologies were received from the following members of the panel:

Cllr Adam Collinge
Cllr Ellis Turrell (substitute)
Cllr Lovinyer Daley
Cyril Randles

4 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest recorded.

5 Minutes of the previous meeting (13 July 2022)

That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 2022 be approved as a correct record.

6 SEND - Cross Party Scrutiny Review Group - Written Statement of Action - verbal update

The Chair invited Martin Stevens, Senior Governance Manager, to give a verbal update on the main discussion points from the recent SEND - Cross Party Scrutiny Review Group meeting.

The Senior Governance Manager commented that the group proposed a recommendation to this panel that the membership be increased by one Labour member. The Senior Governance Manager advised the panel that it had the authority to change the membership of the group.

The panel were invited to comment on the recommendation and vote on the matter.

The panel discussed the reasons for proposing a change to the membership of the group.

The majority members of the panel voted in favour of the proposal to increase the membership of the SEND - Cross Party Scrutiny Review Group by adding a Labour member. The panel agreed that the matter would be referred to the Labour group to nominate a Councillor.

The Senior Governance Manager advised the panel that the group also recommended that two co-opted panel members should be invited to join. Wolverhampton Youth Council agreed to discuss the matter and advise the panel if they would like to join the group.

Resolved:

1. The panel voted in favour of the proposal to increase the membership of the SEND - Cross Party Scrutiny Review Group by adding an additional Labour group member.
2. The panel agreed to invite co-opted panels members to consider nominating a representative to the group.

7 Youth and holiday offer in the City

The Chair invited Andrew Wolverson, Deputy Director of Commissioning and Transformation of Children Services, to present the report. The Deputy Director

introduced Jackie Redding, Chief Executive, The Way Youth Zone, to the meeting who would also be contributing to the presentation.

The Deputy Director gave an overview of the universal youth and holiday offer in the City provided by the Council and by other partners such as The Way.

The Deputy Director advised the panel that the Youth Engagement Strategy underpins the approach taken to developing the offer.

The Deputy Director commented on the three key themes of the Youth Engagement Strategy and gave details of progress and successes of the work done to engage with children and young people.

The Deputy Director highlighted the work of the Youth Engagement Participation Board. The members of the Board have allocated grants of £500,000 to local and voluntary organisations to deliver activities for children and young people during the school holidays.

The Deputy Director gave an overview of the activities and opportunities for children and young people during the summer holiday programme and commented on the successes when compared to the summer period of 2021.

The Deputy Director invited Jackie Redding to brief the panel about the work of The Way Wolverhampton Youth Zone during the school summer holidays. The Way is the flagship universal provision offer within Wolverhampton.

The Chief Executive advised the panel that she was appointed five months and commented on the range of activities offered to young people aged from 8 years to 25 years, if they have additional needs, at The Way. The Chief Executive commented on the philosophy of the centre which aims to create a fun, safe and welcoming place for children and young people. The youth workers at the centre encourage and support young people to try the different facilities available at the centre, ranging from football, rock climbing, cooking, and music lessons.

The Chief Executive commented on the increasing numbers of young people who attend the centre but cannot afford to pay the £1 entrance fee. The panel were reassured that young people would not be prevented from either using the centre facilities or having an evening meal in this situation.

The Chief Executive commented on the impact on families of the current cost of living pressures and how this affected the behaviour of young people who attend and highlighted increasing numbers wanting to learn home cooking skills as an example.

The Chief Executive commented on the huge amount of work done to improve the food and catering offer at The Way and to encourage young people to think about healthy food choices.

The Chief Executive invited panel members to visit the centre to see the activities and meet the young people.

The Deputy Director commented on the plans for supporting and building links with uniformed organisations within the city. The work builds on a project developed by the Lord Lieutenant's office.

The Deputy Director commented on workforce developments and the work done with voluntary sector to offer young people different learning opportunities.

The panel were invited to comment on the report.

The panel congratulated the presenters on the success of the programme of holiday activities and the opportunities given to children and young people.

The panel queried the allocation of funding across the City and highlighted concerns that some wards in the City which had smaller areas of deprivation were not getting the level of support needed. The panel also queried the work being done to engage with community and voluntary organisations in these areas that could help deliver the aims of the programme.

The Deputy Director accepted the gaps in provision of holiday activities across the City and commented on the work being done with providers to improve the situation. The holiday programme is funded for three years but the funding is allocated on a yearly basis.

The Deputy Director added that work has begun on commissioning activities for the Christmas and February school holiday period and providers are being asked to consider extending their offer to other areas. The Deputy Director commented on the financial challenges facing providers in extending their services to other areas and the different options being considered to support this change, for example moving from grant to a commissioning basis.

The Deputy Director encouraged panel members to refer any local community organisations to the service if they wanted to bid for funding from the holiday activities programme. The Deputy Director commented on the support available to local groups to prepare bids and the benefits of getting them involved in delivering activities.

The Deputy Director commented on plans to provide support outside the main school holiday period in response to feedback from providers and that there were discussions to review changes to criteria used to fund places so that more children and young people can get involved.

The panel discussed the reference in the report to the numbers of young people involved in the summer programme activities this year when compared to the same period and asked for further details. The Deputy Director agreed to review how the information is presented in future reports.

The panel highlighted the issue of increasing levels of child poverty and the challenges facing parents who are finding it difficult to pay to use the facilities at The Way. The panel queried if information could be sent out to parents to explain that young people are welcome to attend even if they don't have the money to pay the entrance fee.

The Chief Executive The Way reaffirmed the position that young people wanting to use the facilities will not be refused entry if they could pay the entrance fee.

The panel commented on the importance of improving the local offer and queried if financial support could be given to community groups to help them provide activities to meet the needs of young people.

The Deputy Director acknowledged the range of activities offered by local community and church groups and advised the panel the Yo Wolverhampton website is being used to promote different activities and to give information to parents and young people about the offer. Wolverhampton Voluntary and Community Action has been funded by the Council to provide support and advice to existing local groups wanting to set up activities for children and young people.

The panel queried the concerns about gangs and use of drugs expressed by parents about The Way. The panel also queried the support available from workers at The Way to help vulnerable children that may attend.

The Chief Executive accepted there were concerns from some parents about the issues highlighted and outlined the range of measures taken to tackle them and to reinforce the message to young people about what is acceptable behaviour.

The Chief Executive advised the panel that The Way offers a mentoring support service as part of the universal offer and works with local partnerships to provide specialist support on issues such as sexual health and substance misuse, where needed. The Chief Executive reassured the panel that issues about cannabis use outside the building are not ignored by the staff and action is taken.

The panel queried that given increase in cost-of-living what action was being taken by The Way to help ensure that young people are not embarrassed to say that they are unable to pay the entrance fee and supported to use the facilities.

The Chief Executive further reassured the panel that The Way does not want the issue of the daily entrance fee to be an issue, whilst acknowledging the importance of explaining that the services provided have a value. The Chief Executive added that work is being done to update the website and there will be a section about the policy which makes clear that if someone cannot pay then this will not be a problem.

The panel queried when the changes would be made to the website. The Chief Executive advised the panel that a new content marketing manager has been appointed and updating the website would be a priority.

The panel queried if Government funding covered all the school holidays periods, the work being done increase the uptake of free school meals, and details of the number of children in receipt of free school meals who took part in the holiday activities programme as proportion of the total.

The Deputy Director advised the panel the programme is funded for 10 weeks which covers the school holiday period, but the Council has the flexibility to change the periods covered. The numbers of weeks covered was changed in response to comments from parents who did not want the two weeks of activities during the Christmas holiday period covered.

The Deputy Director advised the panel that there was about 16,000 young people eligible for free school meals in Wolverhampton. In addition, children, and young people on EHCP are also eligible to attend the holiday sessions. The Deputy

Director outlined action taken this year to encourage more eligible young people to take up the offer to attend holiday scheme activities.

The panel discussed the numbers of young people attending holiday activity sessions and the opportunity to attend as many different activities as they wanted from range of local providers in the area.

The panel queried the support available to young people with smoking or substance abuse issues and the work being done to encourage them to get specialist help if needed. The Chief Executive of The Way reassured the panel about the current support on offer to young people.

The panel discussed the possibility of visiting The Way and having a meeting at the venue.

The panel suggested to the Chief Executive about using the Yo website to engage with young people about developing facilities and to listen to their views on the current offer.

The panel discussed ideas for encouraging other local providers to submit bids to holiday activities fund and for organisations to deliver services at The Way.

The panel thanked the presenters for the report. The panel congratulated the presenters on the success of the summer holiday activities programme in reaching so many children and young people.

Resolved:

1. The panel agreed to note the findings in the presentation.
2. The panel comments on the presentation to be actioned where appropriate.

8

Transforming Children's Services Programme 2021-22 Annual Report

The Chair invited Andrew Wolverson, Deputy Director, to present the report. The Deputy Director advised the transformation for Children's Services is a five- year programme and the report covers the first two years of the programme.

The Deputy Director advised the panel of changes made to the layout of the report.

The Deputy Director advised the panel that the report Transforming Children's Service Programme (TCSP) details the key achievements, progress against outcomes and priorities for the next reporting year. The TCSP consists of a collection of projects which are intended to achieve the programme outcomes as outlined in the report.

The Deputy Director commented on the changes made to the governance and oversight of the programme and details of the successes. The recognition by Ofsted about the work of the programme and its contribution to improving outcomes for children and young people was highlighted.

The Deputy Director commented on how the programme has been influenced by young people and shared feedback received when they were asked about what they wanted from the transformation programme.

The Deputy Director commented on the strategic drivers for the programme which have been updated and the vision for the future of the service.

The Deputy Director briefed the panel on the key highlights and the future priorities from the TCSP Annual Report 2021-2022.

The panel were invited to comment on the report and presentation.

The panel queried the vision of the programme and the likely impact of current financial challenges facing the wider economy in the future.

The Deputy Director reassured the panel that the transformation programme looks at different ways of doing things, which is expected to lead to efficiencies in the future. In addition, projects are piloted to check that will have the desired outcomes before they become part of 'business as usual' practices. The Deputy Director advised the panel in response to concerns about future funding for the programme that there are ongoing conversations with strategic partners organisations around joint funding arrangements.

Emma Bennett, Executive Director of Families, commented that the programme is aimed at reducing the demand for specialist support services and the savings have been used to fund other work that supports families. The Executive Director of Families commented on the positive impact of the programme.

The Executive Director commented that any cuts in the level of local authority funding would place non statutory work such as a transformation programme at risk as the focus would be in this situation would be to protect services working directly with families.

The panel discussed the ending of the HeadStart programme and queried what would replace it. The Deputy Director advised the panel that Headstart was a test and learn programme which had now ended and outlined other initiatives which have been developed. The Deputy Director highlighted the funding for mental health support services to build on the legacy of the programme, for example Base 25, Mental Health First Aid training delivered in all schools.

The panel discussed the structure of the report and suggested changes be made to make clearer and easier to follow and provide a level of reassurance about the impact of the programme. The Deputy Director welcomed the comments of the panel and agreed to consider providing further information to address the points raised when presenting a future report.

The panel thanked the presenters again for the report and success in improving outcomes for children and young people.

Resolved:

1. The panel comments on the report to be noted and actioned where appropriate.
2. The panel support the recommendations detailed in the report.

9 **Strong Families, Children and Young People - Draft Scrutiny Work Programme 2022- 2023**

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

The Scrutiny Officer advised the panel of future agenda items detailed in the work programme report. The Scrutiny Officer advised the panel that the work programme will be updated to include actions agreed earlier in the meeting.

The Scrutiny Officer invited the panel to comment on the draft work programme and to suggest future agenda items.

The panel discussed the issue of school admission appeals and it was agreed that the issue should be added to panel work programme for March 2023. The wanted details about the process as there were concerns about inconsistency in the decision-making process and the support offered to parents during the appeal.

The Executive Director supported the proposal.

The panel thanked the presenter for the report.

Resolved:

1. The panel agreed to note the report.
2. The topic of school admission appeals to be added to the panel work programme for March 2023.