

Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 22 November 2023

Attendance

Members of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Paul Sweet
Cllr Stephanie Haynes (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Lovinyer Daley
Cllr Carol Hyatt
Cllr Qaiser Azeem (Chair)
Cllr Jenny Cockayne
Cllr Jane Francis
Cllr Sally Green
Cllr Jeszemma Howl
Cllr Lamina Lloyd
Cllr Christopher Haynes

Co-opted Members (5)

Wolverhampton Youth Council
Cyril Randles

Church of England – Diocese of
Lichfield

In Attendance

Simon Sowerby

Families First for Children Pathfinder Team (DfE)

Employees

Alison Hinds
Rachel King
James Barlow
Amanda Sherrard
Brenda Wile
Emma Deakin
Earl Piggott-Smith

Director of Children's Services
Deputy Director for FFCP
Finance Business Partner
Corporate Analytics Manager
Deputy Director of Education
Project and Change Portfolio Manager
Scrutiny Officer

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

- 1 Welcome and Introductions**
Cllr Qaiser Azeem, 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**
The Chair explained the procedures to be followed for the meeting.

3 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from the following member of the panel:

Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre

4 **Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest recorded.

5 **Minutes of the previous meeting (4 October 2023) (report to follow)**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 4 October 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

6 **Families First for Children Pathfinder Programme (report to follow)**

The Chair invited Alison Hinds, Director of Children's Services, to introduce the report.

The Director advised the panel that report outlines the implementation plan for how the Families First for Children Pathfinder Programme (FFCP) will be delivered. The Council has been working with colleagues from DfE to develop the plan.

The Director invited Simon Sowerby, Families First for Children Pathfinder Team Leader, DfE, to give a briefing on the programme.

The Families First for Children Pathfinder Team Leader advised the panel the DfE contacted Wolverhampton, Lincolnshire and Dorset Councils to join first wave of local authorities to join the FFCP as part of a commitment by Government to implement reforms outlined in the DfE Stable Homes, Built on Love, published in February 2023.

The Families First for Children Pathfinder Team Leader advised the panel that the Pathfinder Programme followed an independent Government initiated review of children's social care and child protection in England. The Pathfinder Programme was officially launched in July 2023.

The FFCP aims to reform children's social care across England, working with a few select areas at the beginning to help understand and deliver the change programme. The Families First for Children Pathfinder Team Leader outlined the four main reform areas identified by the DfE which are listed below which will inform the service delivery model:

Family Help. Establish locally based multi-disciplinary Family Help teams that work collaboratively with partners to provide intensive, non-stigmatising and effective support that is tailored to the needs of children and families.

Child Protection. Establish a child protection response led by social workers with greater expertise and experience, working as part of a dedicated and skilled multiagency child protection team. The child protection lead practitioners will work alongside Family Help to protect children who are suffering or likely to suffer significant harm.

Family networks. Participating local areas will make greater use of family networks, with earlier use of family group decision-making throughout Family Help and child protection systems, facilitated by targeted funding to enable more children to live at home or support a transition into kinship care.

Safeguarding partners. Local statutory safeguarding partners will need to be fully bought into the pathfinder to deliver across the different reform strands. Exploration to changes to how safeguarding partners operate with clear roles and responsibilities for statutory safeguarding partners at both a strategic and operational level, and with an increased and possibly statutory role for education.

The central focus across all four areas is around early intervention with the aim of reducing future costs and challenges. The Families First for Children Pathfinder Team Leader commented that the DfE has produced minimum expectations to implement the reform programme but added that the DfE will be working with Wolverhampton to discuss and agree the details about how the programme can be designed and delivered. The Families First for Children Pathfinder Team Leader thanked colleagues in Wolverhampton for the hard work done to prepare for the delivery of the FFCP.

The DfE will continue with 'do, test, and learn' approach in the delivery phase of the programme.

There will be a second wave of local authorities joining the programme in March 2024.

The Families First for Children Pathfinder Team Leader advised the panel that Wolverhampton was selected because it is a local authority already delivering good quality children's service and a track record in terms of transformation, partnership working, and early intervention work. The DfE wanted to work with strong performing local authorities in the first phase.

The Families First for Children Pathfinder Team Leader advised that in the second wave a broader range of local authorities will be involved that are rated as 'requiring improvement', 'good' and 'outstanding'.

The Families First for Children Pathfinder Team Leader invited Rachel King, Deputy Director for FFCP, to add further comments.

The Deputy Director for FFCP advised the panel that she is leading the FFCP and would provide an update on progress since the programme went live in July 2023. In the next phase the work will move from design to delivery early in the new year. The Deputy Director for FFCP advised the panel that the DfE have set minimum expectations of what they expect to see as part of the reforms.

The Deputy Director for FFCP outlined the co-design work done with key stakeholders to look at how to reach the minimum expectations and to enhance services currently being delivered across Wolverhampton.

The Deputy Director for FFCP gave highlights of work being done to enhance existing support services across the city with examples of individual projects.

The panel were invited to comment on the report and verbal update.

A panel member queried how the success of the programme will be measured and an assessment about the scale of change needed to achieve this.

The Deputy Director for FFCP commented that in terms of measuring success there is already a good local performance framework to monitor this and in addition the DfE have appointed a consortium of evaluators to externally evaluate the progress of the programme.

There has already been an initial meeting with the evaluators who have provided sample feedback from families about the work being done to support them. The information will contribute to the overall evaluation of the impact of the service.

The Deputy Director for FFCP added that the service is in good position and the view of DfE is that Wolverhampton is good performing authority but acknowledge the challenges in delivering the required changes. There is acceptance of the need to capture evidence of softer success measures provided by feedback from engaging with families.

The Deputy Director for FFCP noted that in terms of the scale of challenge facing Wolverhampton but offered reassurance that the work will be building on its strengths about what is already working well, and each authority involved is developing different delivery plans which set out how they intend to meet minimum service requirements.

The Deputy Director for FFCP highlighted the success of the MASH team as an example of a service that is performing well and will remain unchanged because of FFCP. The Family Hub offer of a universal best start in life is being rolled out which will link to the offer of family help through FFCP.

The Deputy Director for FFCP added that the Council has some control over how the FFCP is implemented and that work is being done now to look at the timeline for delivery to ensure it is realistic.

A panel member commented on the importance of promoting resilience within families in the long term and not just the short term because of the work of FFCP and asked for details about any proposals in the model being developed to support this aim.

The Deputy Director for FFCP acknowledged the importance of building resilience in families and the commented that the hope is that by engaging with family networks that this will build longer term resilience. This work will be supported by the network of Family Hubs and the expectation is that the FFCP will align with existing work to build sustainable change.

A panel member queried what will be done to prevent a duplication of effort and to get the different elements of the service working together, while welcoming the ongoing transformation of the children's services and the work to introduce new services and enhance the existing offer to families and children.

The Deputy Director for FFCP reassured the panel that she will be part of the evaluation to make sure the offer is right, and that duplication is prevented. There is experience of working with different partner organisations in the introduction of the Eclipse system and a key part of this work focused on the importance of how information can be best shared more effectively across the partnership.

The Deputy Director for FFCP added that the FFCP will be looking at how services can be joined together and co-ordinated and the creation of a central contact point for families in an expanded MASH will hopefully reduce the risk of duplication.

A panel member queried if the planned changes would affect the current role and responsibilities of the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) in education settings.

The Deputy Director for FFCP advised the panel the educators are included as a fourth statutory partner in the safeguarding partnership arrangement working with the local authority, the police and health partners. The aim of the Governments reforms is to bring education providers formally in as a statutory partner.

The Deputy Director for FFCP added there are strong safeguarding arrangements and educators are already well engaged. There is specific education providers subgroup that is part of the safeguarding partnership, and the aim is that working at the strategic level they will contribute more effectively around issues such as priority setting, understanding where there are gaps in provision, and emerging needs across the city that impact on safeguarding work.

The Deputy Director for FFCP acknowledged the challenge of ensuring safeguarding as the numbers of registered education providers covers settings from childminders to post 16 provision is vast. In response to this challenge a strategic lead post has been created to be the voice for the whole education sector. The Deputy Director for FFCP reassured the panel that this role does not remove the safeguarding responsibility in education settings for individuals to discharge their duties.

A panel member queried if the inclusion of education providers as statutory partners would make it easier to share information where there are safeguarding concerns

The Deputy Director for FFCP confirmed that the arrangements would make it easier to share information with education providers. The Deputy Director for FFCP commented that there is already a strong working relationship with schools and information is shared appropriately. The issues of good governance and information sharing are key themes in the development of a model and communication will be enhanced as a result.

A panel member commented on the findings of the child safeguarding practice review panel which highlighted the need to work with fathers and male members. The proposals focus on the working with the whole family but there were no specific references in the report to working with fathers.

The Deputy Director for FFCP advised the panel that the report is at the high strategic level and details will be worked out as the programme moves to the implementation stage. The important role of fathers and absent fathers have been a key priority for several years. A male support worker has recently been recruited within the Family Hub to specifically engage with males and fathers more effectively with the aim of involving them at the earliest opportunity.

A panel member queried if the programme was flexible enough to respond to increased levels of demand and pressures from families as it develops.

The Deputy Director for FFCP advised the panel that an increase in demand was not anticipated because of the wider transformation work in children services which has helped to manage demand effectively. This has been achieved by the provision of support to families at an earlier stage and taking a multi-agency approach.

The Deputy Director for FFCP commented that the hope is because of the work of the FFCP that wrap around care and help to families can be provided more effectively.

The threshold for providing care and offering support will be remain the same and the focus will be on delivering services in a different way to families.

The Chair invited The Families First for Children Pathfinder Team Leader, to make any final comments on the discussion about the plans set out in the report.

The First for Children Pathfinder Team Leader referred to the point about the scale of change involved and commented that Wolverhampton is already doing a lot of the proposed work already. In addition, Wolverhampton was selected for a visit by colleagues from the Independent Review of Childrens Social Care because of the work done on introduction of the strengthening family hubs and the co-location of services which informed the recommendations in its report.

The Families First for Children Pathfinder Team Leader commented that during a visit to Wolverhampton he was impressed by the way services have been transformed and delivered.

A panel member queried if the programme was successful what would happen regards projects after March 2025 when the funding is planned to end. Families First for Children Pathfinder Team Leader commented that the position of the DfE is that the programme is based on influencing and informing Government funding in the current spending review which ends in 2025.

The Families First for Children Pathfinder Team Leader added that the only way to secure extra funding is to make a successful bid to the Treasury and that will be done in 2024. The importance of monitoring and providing evidence of success from the programme and other research will help strengthen the case for continued funding.

The Director of Children's Services added that in the worst-case scenario and there was no further funding after March 2025 then the learning from the programme will be used to influence future practice in Wolverhampton. The funding from the programme has enabled Wolverhampton to help think about how to meet the minimum expectations of the DfE as outlined in the report.

A panel member congratulated everyone involved in developing the programme and the presenters on the willingness to get involved in the programme at a time when many local authorities are focused on responding to the day-to-day challenges of meeting their responsibilities for delivering children services and the opportunities for supporting families in Wolverhampton.

The Chair supported the plan to share progress reports during the implementation phase of the FFCP with the panel.

The panel thanked the presenters for the report.

Resolved:

1. The Director of Children's Services to share progress reports during the implementation phase of the FFCP with the panel.
2. The Deputy Director for the FFCP to note the panel comments on the report detailing progress of the implementation plan.

Budget and Performance Update

The Chair invited Alison Hinds, Director of Children's Services, to introduce the report.

The Director advised the panel the presentation would cover include budget and performance information specifically in relation to children services. The Director invited James Barlow, Finance Business Partner, to present the draft budget 2024-2025 and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

A copy of the presentation is attached.

The panel were invited to comment on the draft budget presentation.

A panel member asked whether budget efficiencies referred to in the presentation totalling £6.8 million had been identified.

Amanda Sherrard, Corporate Analytics Manager, advised the panel that in year efficiencies of £6.2 million (2023-2024) have been identified of which £4.2 million are one-off savings. The efficiency savings for children services related to internal residential home as there are plans to open new residential homes. As a result of delay in the opening date this has provided savings. In addition, there is generally staffing underspend in children services due to the natural turnover which has led to a delay before new people start and this has contributed to further efficiency savings.

The Corporate Analytics Manager presented the performance data.

A copy of the presentation is attached.

The panel were invited to comment and ask questions on the budget and performance report.

A panel member queried the reasons for the decrease in number of first-time entrants to the Youth Justice Service linked to the changes in the national reporting methodology and asked for further details.

The Corporate Analytics Manager advised the panel that the numbers of first-time entrants have remained static, but it is reported differently which suggest that there has been increase percentage wise, but the actual numbers are similar.

A panel member congratulated the service on the improved performance in getting Education, Health Care Plans issued within 20 weeks and queried the reasons for this.

Brenda Wile, Deputy Director of Education, commented that the improvements are due to the focus on making systems and processes work better to support children and their families with SEND. The Deputy Director highlighted the recruitment of a new team, including a service manager as key to the improvements in performance.

The Deputy Director advised the panel that the Council had the final monitoring meeting with Ofsted to discuss the actions in the SEND WSOA and the verbal feedback was very positive about the progress made.

The final written report has not been published. The Deputy Director thanked colleagues for their hard work.

A panel member queried if missing updates on statistical data referred in the presentation could be shared at a future data when available. The Corporate Analytics Manager advised the panel that there was a recent release of statistical data and when the analysis has been done the updated information will be shared as requested.

Resolved:

1. The Director of Children's Services to note the panel comments on Draft Budget 2024-2025 and Medium-Term Financial Strategy.
2. The panel comments on the Draft Budget 2024-2025 and Medium-Term Financial Strategy to be included in the response to Scrutiny Board for consolidation and onward response to Cabinet.
3. The Corporate Analytics Manager to share updated performance data when available with the panel.

8

Transforming Children's Services Programme 2022 - 2023 Annual Report

The Chair invited Emma Deakin, Project and Change Portfolio Manager, to present report.

The Project and Change Portfolio Manager advised the panel that the Transforming Children's Services Programme (TCSP) 2022 - 2023 Annual Report was the third report to be presented to the panel.

The Project and Change Portfolio Manager gave a presentation of the main findings of the annual report and outlined the background to the development of the programme, key achievements, and progress of projects in the programme.

A copy of the presentation is attached.

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

A panel member queried if the £3.7million funding for Start for Life Transformation Programme would overlap with projects funded by the FFCP that could create potential savings.

The Director of Children's Services commented that both programmes are funded by the DfE which overlap with the services offered by the Family Hub. There are close similarities between the two programmes and there is work being done to ensure that children and children and families can access services offered at the very earliest opportunity through their local Family Hub network.

The Director commented the FFCP would offer more targeted early intervention help than would be offered under the children in need model but both programmes will be working closely together. The grant funding from the DfE specifies how it can be used and the Council must report on how funds are used but there are opportunities to use funding from these sources to support workforce development.

A panel member queried if there were any plans in the programme to increase the capacity for mental health services for our young people beyond the digital mental offer highlighted in the report.

The Director of Children's Services commented that the service has a better understanding about the emotional health and wellbeing needs of children in the city. This has been informed by the behaviour surveys and the needs assessment commissioned by colleagues in Public Health which has helped identify gaps in support. The Director reassured the panel about the work of the mental health support teams in schools to meet emotional needs of children. In addition, there is

also work being done to support families as part of the broader offer and to engage with other providers and professionals.

The Deputy Director of Education added that in addition to the online mental health support offer the education psychology team work extensively with young people through statutory work and commissioned work.

The Deputy Director of Education highlighted the example of the school non-attendance pathway work to support children. The scheme was developed during the Covid 19 pandemic where children could not attend school daily, and some had additional mental health vulnerabilities. The Deputy Director commented that nationally that school attendance rates have not returned to pre-pandemic levels, and this is a challenge locally and nationally. The Deputy Director added that the situation locally is improving but added that there are some children for whatever reason, who lack the confidence and who need more specialist support.

In addition, the Council is working colleagues in the Black Country Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust to strengthen the emotional support offer which is delivered by the Integrated Care Board. The digital offer is the first place for families to access for help but there is extensive back up offer of face-to-face emotional support where needed.

A panel member queried the trigger level for the involvement of specialist support such as education psychologist due to a concern that a high threshold would mean children struggling with anxiety or depression would not get the early support needed.

The Deputy Director of Education advised the panel that the school or a GP can make a referral to the educational psychologist service without the need to complete an education, health and care (EHC) plan. The Deputy Director acknowledged the high level of need for mental health support and reassured the plans that when families raise an issue then an assessment will be done quickly. The Deputy Director advised the panel that there is also a lot of information available online and this is supported by the local offer to families who can be signposted to community and voluntary sector groups.

A panel member asked for an update on the plans for the development of a local Social Workers in School (SWIS) project offer when the current national scheme ends in two years and the timing and expected learning from the planned bi-annual health check.

The Director of Children's Services commented that DfE funding for the SWIS ended in July 2023 and nationally the evaluation was not as positive in areas as it was in Wolverhampton. The Director commented on the positive benefits of the scheme locally such as enabling conversations to take place much earlier about how the service can support families with the lowest level of intervention needed to support them. The Director commented on how the learning from the SWIS project will be used to improve current practice and outlined plans for replicating its success in the future.

The Project and Change Portfolio Manager advised the panel that the aim of the health check is less about how we deliver projects but more about the level of compliance with the way projects are run and meeting audit requirements. The checks moved from annually to bi-annually to reflect the lifecycle of the different

projects which was difficult to report on progress when there may be little change to report on.

A panel member asked for more details about the Future Steps Project and specifically what the support offered to would involve, and how it would be delivered and plans for achieving the stated aims.

Rachel King, Deputy Director for FFCP, advised the panel that a lot of preparation work has been done over the last two years to shape what the team and service would look like. The issues highlighted has also been part of this work when considering what the team needs to look like and what kind of support and services should be offered to women and their partners.

The Deputy Director for FFCP the added that there will be a distinct offer including psychological and therapeutic support in recognition of the trauma and the loss experienced when a child is removed. The approach has been informed by learning from other local authorities that have a similar support offer. The level of support is expected to be intense with the project working with families for a period of up to 12 months with a focus on improving their outcomes as adults.

The Deputy Director for FFCP added that the offer is not about improving parenting capacity, but this may by happen as a result. The project will be focused on supporting adults with their mental and wellbeing issues. The Deputy Director for FFCP suggested that the report on progress of the project could be presented to a future meeting of the panel.

A panel member queried the take up of services offered by Family Hubs Transformation project by families from diverse backgrounds and asked for a comment on any barriers experienced to them taking up the offer.

The Director of Children's Services advised the panel that the service is working closely with colleagues in performance to better understand the diversity of each locality. The information will be used to ensure services are targeted towards the particular and diverse needs of the different areas in the city. There will be a separate database for each area with its own performance information to help check that the right services are being provided to the local community the hub supports.

The Director added that Wolverhampton is part of a research programme which started before Family Hubs was set up to help understand accessibility issues, particularly for families whose first language is not English. The programme is aimed at thinking about how these families can access the same services but delivered in a different way through family hub programme.

The Director highlighted the example of parenting programmes being offered in Gujarati and Polish in family hubs and that the feedback has been very positive. The overall aim to help the service better understand the diverse needs of the communities it serves.

The Director commented that the service is also keen to think about creating the environment to enable families with SEND children to take up the offer from Family Hubs by making it more accessible to them.

A panel member asked the priorities for 2023 – 2024 to be assessed in terms of their likely difficulty in achieving them and to state which is likely to be the most difficult to be achieved.

Emma Deakin, Project and Change Portfolio Manager, advised that the priorities have been agreed in collaboration with members of the Transformation Board and there was an acceptance that will be a challenge to achieve.

The Project and Change Portfolio Manager commented on challenge of managing a transformation programme with different and competing priorities and at the same time trying to respond locally to changes in the Governments national agenda.

The Project and Change Portfolio Manager reassured the panel that the governance arrangements for the programme are well established but accepted that when new initiatives are announced that this will require a lot of hard work. The TSCP Board members have a shared goal and will work out the best way to deliver the priorities of the programme and respond to the challenges based on a collaborative discussion.

The Deputy Director for Education added that the diagram on page 100 gives brief headlines of the projects that will be the priorities for 2023 - 2024. The Deputy Director highlighted the Wolves at Work Programme as a priority for the Council in getting people into good quality jobs and enhancing career opportunities.

There is recognition of the need to use the expertise from delivering the TCSP to increase the impact of such projects by working in a similar transformational way. The significant increase in the number of EHC plans completed was given as an example of this approach which has used project leads to monitor progress and provide robust challenge in discussions when deciding what needs to be done to meet the City's priorities.

The Director of Children's Services thanked the panel for the comments and the questions.

The Chair thanked the presenters for the report and suggested that if there were any further questions then they should be sent to the Director of Children's Services and the responses shared with the panel.

Resolved:

1. The panel comments on the TCSP 2022-2023 Annual report to be noted.
2. The panel agreed to note the achievements and successes for this reporting year against the programme outcomes.

9 **Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel - Draft Work programme 2023 - 2024**

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

The Scrutiny Officer advised the panel of items scheduled on the work programme and were invited to comment and to suggest any specific issues that they would like report authors to include. The panel were invited to suggest further items to the panel work programme.

A panel member asked for an update on plans for the proposed visit to the new children's residential care homes and to Family Hubs. The Director of Children's Services advised the panel that the service was happy to arrange visit to the Family Hubs.

The Director added that the residential children's homes are being set up and the first home is expected to open in April 2024 and suggested a visit six months after this date.

Resolved:

1. The panel agreed to note the report.
2. The Director of Children's Services to advise the panel on proposed date for a visit to Family Hubs.
3. The Director of Children's Services to arrange a proposed date in October 2024 for a visit to new children's residential care home.