

# Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

## Minutes - 2 February 2022

### Attendance

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

Cllr Rita Potter (Chair)  
Cllr Clare Simm  
Cllr Paul Sweet  
Cllr Chris Burden  
Cllr Adam Collinge (Vice-Chair)  
Cllr Stephanie Haynes  
Cllr Gillian Wildman

#### Co-opted Members

Wolverhampton Youth Council  
Cyril Randles Church of England – Diocese of Lichfield Representative

#### Members of the Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel in attendance via Teams

Cllr Mak Singh  
Cllr Val Evans  
Cllr Jaspreet Jaspal  
Cllr Qaiser Azeem

#### In Attendance

Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre, Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Work

#### Employees

Earl Piggott-Smith  
Emma Bennett  
Alison Hinds  
Rachel King  
Steven Larking  
Phil Leivers  
Darren Martindale  
Brenda Wile

Scrutiny Officer  
Executive Director of Families  
Deputy Director of Children's Social Care  
Head of Vulnerable Children  
Lead Commissioner for Children's Services  
Head of Education Excellence  
Service Manager – Vulnerable Learners  
Deputy Director of Education

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## 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. 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.

## 3 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from the following member(s) of the panel:

Cllr Asha Mattu

## 4 **Declarations of interest**

Emma Bennett, Executive Director of Families, declared a non-pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 10.

## 5 **Minutes of the previous meeting (13 October 2021)**

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

## 6 **Minutes of the meeting (6 January 2022)**

The panel agreed the following amendments to the draft minutes 6 January 2022

1. To note that due to a technical fault panel members taking part via Microsoft Teams and also the public were not able to hear or add to the discussion in the meeting room. A separate meeting was arranged for panel members to be briefed by the Deputy of Director of Education on the main points of the presentation.
2. The panel endorsed the procurement of preferred IT solution to enable collaborative electronic EHC plan process and the other proposed improvements to the wider IT platforms and the website.
3. The panel discussed the proposals for improving the planning and support of transitions both within statutory school age and from statutory school age to post-19 and post-25 and highlighted the importance of working in collaboration with all interested groups
4. The attendance list to be amended to show the Cllr Burden took part via Microsoft Teams.

That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 January 2022, subject to the agreed changes, be approved, as a correct record.

## 7 **Children's Residential Provision Review - pre-decision scrutiny**

The Chair invited Rachel King, Service Manager, to present the report to the panel.

The Service Manager advised the panel that the presentation will give an overview of the work done to develop options to create a new restorative practice, multi-agency children homes in Wolverhampton. The proposals will be presented to Cabinet Resources Panel on 23 February 2022 for discussion and approval of the draft recommendations.

The Service Manager outlined the background to the proposals. A residential review started in July 2021 led by the Children's Commissioning Team to initially look at the sufficiency of residential placements for children and young people with complex care needs.

The Service Manager added that there is a small cohort of vulnerable young people with very complex needs who the Council have not always been able to find suitable placements. The Council has a statutory duty to ensure that there are enough residential places to meet the needs of such young people. The service aims wherever possible to make sure that children are placed either with foster care or with connected family members before this option is considered. Residential placements in children's homes are regulated through the Ofsted inspection framework.

The Service Manager advised the panel that the number of children needing specialist support has reduced every year. The Service Manager added that in response to concerns about the findings from national reviews about the growth of private residential care home providers, the quality and cost of provision and the barriers to the new providers entering the market the Council decided to look at different options for meeting the needs of young people needing a residential placement.

The Service Manager advised the panel that a Residential Review Project Group was set up to develop the options detailed in the report.

The Service Manager outlined the merits of the different options proposed by the group as detailed in the report.

The group recommended that Option 5 (to continue using spot purchases and framework placements alongside the establishment of a new restorative practice, multi-agency home within the City) was the preferred option. The Service Manager commented that this option would help to build strong working relationships with key providers of external provision and support some internal provision.

The Service Manager advised the panel that the report will be presented to Cabinet Resources Panel on 23 February 2022 to approve the recommended option and the allocation of £35,000 to develop an overall business case. A further report would be presented to Cabinet Resources Panel in June 2022 for consideration and approval.

The panel were invited comment on the report and the proposal to recommend supporting Option 5 as detailed in the main report.

The panel thanked the presenter for the report and welcomed the focus on offering restorative practice to young people to help break the cycle of behaviour, which is often generational. The panel support combining Option 1 and Option 4 into Option 5 as it will maintain flexibility and provide a long-term solution to the issues highlighted in the report.

The Service Manager agreed that Option 5 will provide the flexibility needed and the blended approach was supported by the project group. The Service Manager added that several young people in care have experienced significant levels of trauma and a restorative approach can help to repair this damage and provide a good level of care.

The panel welcomed the comments from the Service Manager about the importance of building strong relationships with care providers. The panel highlighted the importance of offering a consistent level of quality of provision to a young person, regardless of where a young person is placed that meets their needs. The panel suggested it would be helpful to review progress of the preferred option, if supported, to see if the Council is achieving the best outcomes for children wherever they are placed.

The panel suggested that it would be helpful to see the detail of the business case for the proposal at a future date.

The panel queried if the timescale for the expected completion in June 2023 was realistic and expressed concern about the possible delays arising from the planning application process. The Service Manager confirmed that the aim is to have the scheme in operation within the 12 months while accepting that there was a risk of delay for reason given. The proposed feasibility study will provide more details about the options which will help inform the timetable for implementation. The Service Manager commented that the time taken to complete will be longer if a build option rather than leasing option for an existing building is agreed.

The panel queried the financial viability of a residential care home supporting only a maximum of two children and asked for more details about why the costs would be higher in this situation, also why this would still be economical. The Service Manager advised the panel that a key challenge in meeting the needs of young people with complex needs, is safely managing the level of risk with the home.

The Council is governed by the regulator Ofsted who want to make sure that when young people are being placed together in a setting together it can be done safely with the right staffing ratio. The Service Manager added that a larger facility with more beds will make it harder to run the home safely because of the risk of placing too many young people together who may not be compatible or a home that does not meet their needs.

The home will provide specialist support to young people who have experienced a significant amount of trauma and the focus will be on trauma recovery.

The Service Manager added that the preferred option while not the cheapest is the safest way for meeting the complex needs of young people in a multi-agency supported children's home setting within the City with the appropriate level of staffing.

The panel commented on the importance of consulting with local communities about the plan to develop a new residential home and the need for early engagement with them and respond to any concerns about the proposed location of a children's residential home. The panel highlighted the difficulties in the past where plans for children's residential homes has been proposed but not supported by residents. The panel commented that based on recent experience many of the concerns of residents were unfounded after some time. However, the public reaction may be different when a new build home is being proposed rather than a conversion to an existing building, which may attract more attention.

The Service Manager reassured the panel that residents will be consulted about the plans and the issue would be reviewed as part of one of workstreams for the agreed option.

The panel welcomed the report and endorsed the preference for Option5 (to continue using spot purchases and framework placements alongside the establishment of a new restorative practice, multi-agency home within the City).

Resolved:

1. The panel support Option 5 and the development of a full feasibility business case to create multi-agency children home(s) in the City.
2. Cabinet Resources to consider the comments of the panel on the options being considered to meet the needs of young people with complex care and support needs at the meeting on 23 February 2022.
3. The panel agreed to receive updates from the Service Manager on progress of the project after a full business case is submitted in June 2022 to Cabinet.
4. The Service Manager to share a copy of the final business case with the panel when published.

## 8 **Virtual School Head Annual Report 2021**

The Chair invited Darren Martindale, Service Manager, to present the report.

The Service Manager outlined the structure of the Virtual School Head Annual Report 2021 and explained that the presentation would focus on five key themes.

The Service Manager commented on the profile of children and young people in care or previously care covered by the report.

The Service Manager highlighted the educational achievements and the progress of children, young people in care and the efforts made by schools and the local authority and partners to support them. The Service Manager commented on the school Ofsted ratings attended by children and young people care and reported that 85 per cent of children are attending schools rated as either Good (69%) or Outstanding (16%) which is in line with what was expected and an improvement on the previous year's results. The Service Manager added that some of the schools are awaiting outcomes of inspections by Ofsted which could affect the results.

The Service Manager commented that one percent of children and young people are in schools rated by Ofsted as being 'Inadequate' and explained the reasons for this could be that either the rating of the school was changed following an inspection, or a judgement was made that at the time it would not be in the child's best interest to move them to a different school.

The Service Manager reassured the panel that every effort is made to ensure that children and young people are attending the best educational provision that is available to them.

The Service Manager explained that it is a statutory requirement of local authorities to have an update Personal Education Plans (PEP) for children and young people in care. The Service Manager gave a breakdown of the PEP completion rates at the end of June 2021. The Service Manager advised the panel that an estimated 80 per cent of children and young people in care have an up-to-date completed PEP based on the monthly analysis of the figures.

The Service Manager commented on the findings based on an audit of 235 PEP plans which reported that 84 percent had SMART targets, an increase of three per cent compared to the figures for 2020. There are ongoing efforts to make sure that all children have a quality PEP. The Service Manager commented that attendance at schools for children in care overall remain high and the aim is to see a slow incremental improvement every year.

The Service Manager commented on the work done to monitor attendance by Virtual Schools team by all children and young people, with half-termly reports being checked, and action taken where issues have been highlighted. The Service Manager commented about the concerns about the level of persistent absence (pupils with less than 90% attendance) after schools re-opened on 8 March 2022.

The Service Manager commented on the challenges presented by Covid 19 and the range of work being done to promote good school attendance. The figures nationally for school attendance report similar results as Wolverhampton, which showed an increase in non-attendance rates in the first two years of the pandemic, before levelling off.

The Service Manager commented on the issue of school inclusion rates and reported that there had no permanent exclusions for children in care during the academic year and the service is working hard to avoid children being excluded. The Service Manager added that there had been no permanent exclusions in either of the previous two academic years and that this very positive as children in care are three times more likely than their peers to be excluded.

The Service Manager briefed the panel on GSCE and post 16 attainment results. The Service Manager highlighted details of the percentage of pupils achieving grade 4 and above and grade 5 in core subjects at GSCE in 2021 and added that primary school validated results were not available for Covid related reasons. The Service Manager advised the panel that there had been an improvement in number of the children and young people in care achieving grade 4 and above, and that the figure of 30 per cent is the highest since 2014. The Service Manager commented that the change to teacher graded assessment rather than exams may partly explain the improved results. The service is working hard to ensure that children and young people are as prepared as possible for summer exams which are expected to replace teacher assessments.

The Service Manager commented on the post 16 educational achievements to children and young people and reported good progress. The Service Manager also reported the best results among the 40 young people who were in further education and the highlighted the success at University level with three care leavers graduating with degrees and two were awarded a first and a first-class honours degree. The Service Manager praised the achievement of the young people and the progress made at post 16 level.

The Service Manager advised the panel that DfE issued details of funding and non-statutory guidance in June 2021 which extended the responsibility of the Virtual School Head to include all children with a social worker or who ever had a social worker. This change has been welcomed and is expected to benefit more vulnerable children and young people. The Service Manager advised that the details for this group will be included in the next annual Virtual Head report.

The panel were invited to comment on the report. The Chair thanked the presenter for the report.

The panel welcomed the progress and educational achievements detailed in the report and commented on the importance of efforts to improve outcomes for children and young people in care. The panel praised the progress of young people in care going to University and suggested that more young people in Wolverhampton should encouraged to consider this option and highlighted the important role of Wolverhampton University.

The Service Manager thanked the panel for the comments and added that the Council has been working with the University through the Aspire Project where 30 young people receive support through the virtual school and the results have been positive.

The panel queried the reasons for the change in the grade for age related expectation for cohort groups for children in Year 9 for English (57%) which then increased to 100% for children in Year 10, who were predicted to achieve a Grade 4 or above at GSCE. The Service Manager commented that the change may be due to the small number of the children and the impact that small changes in results can have on the overall results. The Service Manager reassured the panel there were no concerns about this issue and that the performance of young people is closely monitored.

The panel welcomed the successful educational results for children and young people at post 16 but queried the reasons why only 40 young people achieved one more qualification and specifically the reason why 16 young people in year 12 and 13 were not in education, employment, or training in 2021.

Emma Bennett, Executive Director of Families, responded that there were no specific reasons for the issue highlighted and added that these were young people with complex needs, and some would have a background of experiencing trauma, which presents a challenge when trying to engage with them and to consider possible education, employment, or training opportunities.

The Executive Director of Families added that the Council is continuing to work with young people aged 16 and above to offer the support needed. The panel discussed the impact of the pandemic on the number of work experience and apprenticeship opportunities available.

The panel commented on the positive educational achievements for young people in care and queried the impact on future exam grade performance when results will be based on exams rather than teacher assessments.

The Service Manager agreed with the view that the expectation is that GSCE exams pass rates are likely to be lower than the current figure of 30 per cent to about 16 per cent with the change in the method of assessment. The Service Manager advised the panel that the service is working with young people to prepare them for exams and offer a range of support for example, one to one tuition.

The panel wanted to formally put on record their congratulations to education achievement of all the children and young people in care.

Resolved:

1. The panel agreed to note the report and record their congratulations on the educational achievements of children and young people in care.
2. The panel comments on the draft Virtual School Head Annual Report 2021 to be considered by Cabinet.

## 9 **Annual Report on Schools' Education Performance**

The Chair invited Councillor Dr Mike Hardacre, Cabinet for Education, Skills and Work, to make some introductory comments on the report.

The Cabinet Member advised the panel that because of the changes made to the exam assessment arrangements it will not be possible to compare current educational performance with previous years.

The Cabinet Member commented on the extent of the disruption to children's educational because of the pandemic and added that this should be considered when future reports on educational performance are presented to the panel.

The Cabinet Member commented on the important role of school governing as they are responsible for the vision and strategic direction of the school, the proper and effective use of the school's financial resources among other responsibilities. The Cabinet Member highlighted the limited ability of the local authority to intervene where there are concerns about the performance of academies and this should be noted when commenting on the report findings.

The Chair invited Brenda Wile, Deputy Director of Education, to present the detailed report to the panel. The Deputy Director of Education commented that the performance of schools in 2020 and 2021 should be seen in the context of the impact of measures introduced in response to Covid 19 during this period.

The Deputy Director of Education commented on the different periods when schools were either closed or pupils attending had to meet specific criteria during the pandemic and advised the panel that they were only reopened fully in March 2021. The majority of pupils were either educated at home or taught remotely prior to this period.

The Deputy Director of Education commented that the number of Covid 19 cases in school remain high and is most prevalent amongst young people, which has significantly impacted on their education, during the last few weeks.

There are signs however that the situation is improving but some schools have reintroduced remote learning for some groups where there was insufficient staff available either because they tested positive or were isolating.

The Deputy Director of Education praised the response of teachers and schools in providing remote learning opportunities and commented on how well children embraced and adapted to different ways of learning. The Deputy Director of Education commented on how some children have benefited from the experience of remote learning and added that this will help them become more flexible learners in the future. The learning from providing remote teaching during the pandemic will also enable schools to offer support for children who cannot attend school due to health or other reasons.

The Deputy Director of Education advised the panel that the DfE suspended all public examinations and assessments for the 2019/2020 academic year, and last year, replaced GCSE and A levels with teacher assessed grades. The Deputy Director of Education advised the panel that safeguarding inspections were maintained if concerns were raised.

The Deputy Director of Education advised the panel that the report does not contain individual school level results as the information legally can only be published if they have been validated and with the agreement of the school.

The Deputy Director of Education added that all schools were visited during the autumn period and there were discussions between school leaders and members of the school improvement or education excellence team. The panel were reassured that there was rigorous scrutiny of teacher assessments. The Deputy Director of Education gave an overview of how Wolverhampton schools performed against the West Midlands and England averages, in terms of the GCSE results and advised the panel that there was a slight improvement on the results from previous years.

The Deputy Director of Education commented on the post 16 education results and in response to concerns a wholesale review of post 16 provision across the city is planned. The Deputy Director of Education suggested the review may conclude that there is a need to offer young people a broader range of A Level subjects, but accepted this provision demands a high level of teaching commitment but was confident that this could be done. The review will also include reviewing the college offer. The Deputy Director of Education advised the panel that the plan is to bring together a group of headteachers to work together to review post 16 provision across the City with the aim of preparing young people to be employed in the jobs that are expected to be available in the future.

The Deputy Director of Education briefed the panel about the main findings of Ofsted judgements as of January 2022 and reported that 95.85 per cent of Wolverhampton schools were judged to be either Good or Outstanding and no schools were rated as Inadequate.

The Deputy Director of Education gave details of the range of strategies used to support schools. The education excellence team visit schools at least once a year as part of a service level agreement, which may also include providing extra support. The level of support offered is proportionate to the need of the school.

The Deputy Director of Education briefed the panel about recent changes to the school improvement expenditure grant which will end from the start of financial year 2023-2024.

To allow schools to adjust the change the grant will be reduced to fifty per cent of the current amount on a per school basis in 2022-2023. The Deputy Director of Education added that a consultation with maintained schools is planned on the changes.

The Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Work commented on the issues caused by late notification by Government of the decision to reduce the current grant by £80,000 before a meeting with members of the Schools Forum.

The Cabinet Member supported increased choice for young people at post 16 to pursue their preferred interests and highlighted the importance of quality provision.

The panel expressed concern that the use of average attainment score per pupil may overlook areas requiring attention and support. The Deputy Director of Education agreed with the concern of the panel and offered reassurance that work is planned to get more details from schools to help develop better measures of educational attainment and an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of pupils.

The panel welcomed the performance of young people at Key Stage 4 and wanted to record their congratulations on the results for Wolverhampton achieving better scores compared to West Midlands and England averages.

The panel queried the reasons for reduction in the proportion of pupils achieving grades 9 – 5 pass in english and maths compared with the results for England and the West Midlands average and the lower scores English Baccaureate (EBacc).

The Deputy Director of Education advised that the results are based on information collected over the of the autumn term and in-depth analysis has not been done to understand the reasons for the lower scores for english and maths. The Deputy Director of Education offered to attend a future meeting of the panel to give a more detailed explanation of the results in response to the concerns raised.

The Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Work thanked the panel for the comments about the report and offered his thanks and congratulations to teachers, schools, parents, and young people about how they managed the disruption to the education sector caused by the pandemic.

The panel thanked the presenters for the report.

Resolved:

1. The panel agreed to endorse the report detailing progress made to improve the educational performance of schools in Wolverhampton.
2. The panel wanted to formally place on record their congratulations to everyone involved in achieving the results detailed in the report.

**10 Member visit to The Way 14.9.21 - update**

The Chair invited Cllr Collinge to give the panel an update on the visit to The Way in October 2021.

Cllr Collinge referred to the notes from the visit and advised the panel that the presentation would provide an update on issues highlighted at the time. Cllr Collinge recommending panel members should take the opportunity to visit The Way to see the facilities and meet the young people.

Cllr Collinge commented on the range of facilities and the current offer to children and young people and highlighted the services offered to children and young people with special needs. Cllr Collinge briefed the panel on the range issues discussed with the Chief Executive of The Way, for example, the gap in provision for young people aged 13 to 14 years and the different figures for usage of the site based on an analysis of postcode as areas of concern. Cllr Collinge welcomed the response to the Chief Executive and the changes made to address these and other issues.

Cllr Collinge commented on the safety concerns of some parents travelling to The Way and wanting to have access to local facilities where possible. Cllr Collinge commented on the opportunities for partnership and outreach work to build on the services offered by The Way.

The panel thanked Cllr Collinge for the presentation.

The panel queried the postcode data which suggested higher numbers of young people were willing to travel The Way in post codes WV11 and WV10 compared to areas closer to the site but with lower numbers attending. The panel suggested that the reasons for this should be investigated further. The panel suggested the review should also include membership compared to levels of attendance.

The panel discussed the possible impact of Covid -19 on future attendance numbers

The panel commented that the venue also hosts work coaches from the Job Centre and members of Wolves at Work and the positive feedback from young people to have a neutral space to talk about employment opportunities.

Resolved:

The panel agreed to note the presentation.

**11 Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel 2021-2022 Draft Workplan**

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

The Scrutiny Officer briefed the panel on the agenda for the next meeting. The meeting would focus on safeguarding issues. The panel were invited to comment on the draft report.

Resolved:

The panel agreed to note the report.