

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 13 October 2021

Attendance

Members of the Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Rita Potter (Chair)
Cllr Paul Sweet
Cllr Qaiser Azeem
Cllr Christopher Burden
Cllr Adam Collinge (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Wendy Dalton
Cllr Val Evans
Cllr Stephanie Haynes
Cllr Gillian Wildman

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

Cllr Qaiser Azeem
Cllr Paul Sweet

Co-opted Members (5)

Wolverhampton Youth Council

In Attendance

Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre, Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Work
Cllr Beverley Momenabadi, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

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 members of the panel:

Cllr Clare Simm
Cllr Christopher Burden

4 **Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest recorded.

5 **Minutes of the previous meeting (14 July 2021)**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 July 2021 be approved as a correct record.

6 **Feedback on the outcomes and lessons learnt from the Yo! Summer Festival programme**

Andrew Wolverson, Head of Service Children's Strategy and Partnership gave an overview of the Yo! Summer Festival Programme. The programme of activities follows on from previous programmes aimed families and young people in Wolverhampton. The Head of Service outlined the four objectives of the programme and gave an analysis of the data under each in terms of level of community engagement and the number of events.

The Head of Service commented that the Council is committed to providing activities and opportunities for children and young people and to create opportunities for local organisations to benefit from the funding available. The Head of Service added that over 18,000 young people and parents enjoyed activities during the programme.

The Head of Service commented on the community and leisure offer to vulnerable children and their families during the programme of activities. The Head of Service added that 5000 children took up the offer of six-week programme of activities which was co-ordinated and supported by members of Voice for Parents. The Voice for Parents co-ordinated the SEND offer for the programme and commissioned over 15 organisations.

The scheme was funded by DFE and aimed at children in receipt of free school meals to allow them to access an activity, which also included an offer of a meal. To avoid being stigmatised when attending events, a holiday activity card was issued and piloted to allow people to register for events. The Head of Service commented that the scheme worked well and was developed by ICT. The card was scanned 2,800 times during the programme. In total, 21 local organisations across the city were commissioned to deliver activities as part of the holiday programme.

The Head of Service commented on the efforts from across the Council to support the delivery of the summer programme, which cover over £700,000 to deliver.

The Head of Service commented on the extra wider support provided for disadvantaged families and children who were particularly affected by the impact of Covid pandemic. The project was funded by over £900,000 from the Government's Covid Support Grant. The Head of Service gave a breakdown of how the money was spent on different projects and activities between June 2021 and September 2021.

The Head of Service commented on the success of the Beat the Street scheme and that 3 out of 4 players who took part were from the most deprived communities.

The Head of Service commented on positive comments from children during the programme and an analysis of internet traffic when people have used the Yo! Programme website. There are plans to further develop the site to become the main source for information about sources of help and advice on different aspects of family life.

The Head of Service commented on plans to build on the success of the summer programme and outlined plans for the October 2021 half term school holiday. The service has received 20 applications from organisations to provide activities in the holiday and 17 have since been granted funding by members of YES Board who assessed them.

The Head of Service outlined plans for the service and highlighted plans to offer continued support for local foodbanks and community cafes. £250,000 has been allocated by the Council for the programme titled No Child Goes Hungry.

The Chair thanked the Head of Service for a positive report and specifically the work done to support deprived communities across the City. The members of the panel were invited to comment and ask questions on the presentation and report.

The panel queried if judging by the photographs of the events that the programme was aimed at the age range of five to 13 years for cost savings reasons and expressed concern about how needs of older young people were met during the holiday programme.

The Head of Service commented that the service has worked hard to offer a wide programme of activities across a range of age groups and added that many of the providers involved in the summer programme offered specific services and activities to a younger age profile. The Head of Service reassured the panel that providers have been asked to offer some activities for older children as part of the overall October half term school holiday programme and accepted that more work is needed to give secondary age children more activities.

The panel queried the reference in the presentation to budget of £1.4 million used to fund the summer programme and wanted clarification in the report of £700,000 from the DFE for holiday activities and £900,000 funding from the Covid Support Grant meant that £200,000 was unspent from the total of £1.6 million.

The Head of Service confirmed that £1.4 million of the budget had been spent on the summer activities programme. Emma Bennett, Executive Director for Families, added that money from Covid Support Grant is a ring-fenced fund that was specifically targeted at those families, individual households in financial hardship or fuel poverty. The grant fund was also used to cover the cost of providing meals alongside the holiday activities programme and supporting the work of the foodbanks and community cafes.

The panel queried the future sustainability of the programme at a time of increasing need for services in the community. The panel were advised that an extra £2.6 million grant of Government funding to support the work had recently been awarded from the Household Support Fund, which was previously called the Covid Support Grant. The money must be spent by the end of March 2022.

The Executive Director added that there was no commitment from Government to continue funding this work after March 2022. However, there are discussions within the Council about developing a strategy to continue supporting residents in financial hardship. The Executive Director of Families reassured the panel of the Council's commitment to providing support activities, such as targeted and detached youth work in the future.

The panel queried the lack of information in the report about the range of activities offered analysed by ward and asked for more details.

The Head of Service commented on the difficulties in getting an accurate data from all providers on the young people they have worked with during the summer programme and reassured the panel that work is ongoing to collate details about other activities across the City to get a more accurate picture. The Head of Service stated that he was confident that there was a good range of activities across the wards delivered as part of the summer programme.

The Head of Service encouraged Cllrs to get involved in developing the programme of activities for the October school holiday and suggested that ward funds could be used to support children and families in their area. In addition, Cllrs were encouraged to refer local groups known to them to contact the service so they can be added to the programme to get publicity and to apply for funds available to support their activities.

The Head of Service commented that the service is working with providers to get a better spread of activities across the City. Cllr Beverley Momenabadi, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, endorsed the plea from the Head of Service about Cllrs getting involved in the programme of activities by encouraging organisations known to them to contact the service so families and children can get better access to support and leisure activities across the whole City.

The panel queried the levels of participation by young people and families in the activities estimated to be below 50 percent on average and the sale of tickets to events linked to the Relight Festival and asked what more could be done to increase numbers of people attending.

The Head of Service commented that a lot of work was done to increase the participation levels in recognition of the low numbers attending large scale events which may have been due to concerns among families about Covid 19.

The uncertainty about the restrictions due to Covid 19 meant that the service had to plan events both for a virtual programme and a face-to-face programme depending on the situation at the time, which was a challenge. The Head of Service added that the service has learnt from this experience and the issues highlighted will be considered when planning future events.

The panel queried the profile of the people who took part in the Beat the Streets initiative and the reasons for the data showing an under representation of males and if there were any specific plans to get more males involved in the future. The Head of Service commented that the Beat the Streets initiative is part of an overall strategy from colleagues in public health to get communities more fit and active, and to offer

activities that may be attractive to males. The service will be looking at different ideas for improving participation and to increase take up levels among specific groups.

The panel queried if the Council was committed to continue working with members of Voice for Parents in the future when planning events and activities. The Head of Service confirmed that the Voice for Parents is a strategic partner and will continue to be involved in the co-production and co-ordination of the programme of activities in the future.

The panel discussed the opportunity to still use ward funds as the understanding that the deadline was 30 September 2021. The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People advised the panel that it was still possible to make a funding application.

The panel expressed concern of reports from parents complaining about using the Yo programme website and in some situations being timed out when trying to access information. The panel suggested changes were needed to make it more user friendly for the public.

The Head of Service advised the panel that work had been done to improve the website and welcomed feedback from members of any specific areas that are not working well, which will help to address the concerns raised and make the service better in the future.

The Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Work commented on a response to an earlier question about the involvement of Voice for Parents in planning activities and events in the summer holiday programme. The Cabinet Member advised the panel that there are fortnightly meetings with members of the group to provide them with the opportunity to share concerns directly and in developing the SEND offer during the summer programme of activities. The panel thanked the Cabinet member for the comments.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People advised the panel that there was still time for panel members to contact the service about local providers within their ward that can be added to the programme for half term holiday activities programme. The panel were advised to contact the Cabinet Member to discuss the matter further.

The panel thanked the Head of Service for the presentation. The panel asked for the panel comments on the report to be considered in the development of future holiday activities programme.

Resolved:

- The panel agreed to note the report.
- The Head of Service to consider the comments of panel about the findings from the review of the Yo! Summer Festival programme.
- The Head of Service to update the panel on progress of future activities aimed at supporting vulnerable children and families.

Cllr Dr Mike Hardacre, Cabinet Member Education and Skills, gave a brief introduction to the report which gives details about the Ofsted/CQC inspection of the Local Area special education needs and disabilities (SEND) support and provision.

The Cabinet Member commented on the change in approach to the inspection of SEND services by over the years and the focus is now on having a dialogue with the local authority about any issues highlighted during their visit. The Cabinet Member advised the panel that the Council was being assessed against the current inspection framework. A new SEND assessment framework will be issued in April 2022. The framework has been informed by the lessons learnt and experience of how the current framework works.

The findings from the inspection completed in September 2021 will report on areas that the Council is doing well and areas for improvement. The SEND report findings will be published in the early 2022 and the Council will have the opportunity to comment on the draft before publication.

The Chair invited Brenda Wile, Deputy Director of Education, to give the detailed presentation to the panel on progress made provide services for children, young people with special education needs and disabilities (SEND). The Deputy Director advised the panel that the update on SEND provision would cover the SEND leisure offer provided during the Easter and summer programmes, an update on the Ofsted/CQC inspection of the Local Area SEND support and provision, and comments from Councillors who visited Green Park School recently.

The Deputy Director of Education added that representatives from Voice for Parents who contributed to the development of the SEND holiday provision will also be sharing their experiences.

The Deputy Director of Education stated that the vision of the SEND policy was that families with children with special educational needs and disabilities have good quality, ordinary life and are supported to achieve their full potential. The stated vision for SEND links to the priorities in the Relighting Our City plan to support people who need us most and create more opportunities for young people.

The Deputy Director of Education gave further details about the vision and priorities of the SEND strategy and the background to how it was developed and would be used to support the provision of services in the future. The Deputy Director of Education outlined the planned key actions for 2021 – 2022 for implementing the strategy and explained how the service will be focused on moving the service forward. The plan will be reviewed when the new SEND framework is published. The Deputy Director invited Sarah Barker, Voice for Parents, to brief the panel about their role in the development of the Easter activity sensory and wellbeing pack 2021.

Sarah Barker, Chair Voice for Parents, advised the panel that an application was made to the Council earlier in the year to fund the development of a sensory pack for families, who felt isolated and wanting opportunities for their children. At the same time Voice for Parents did a survey to find out what local families thought about the leisure offer for children, young people with SEND. The information from the survey will help to inform the wider offer in the future.

Sarah Baker, Voice for Parents, added that the activities had a positive impact of children and young people taking part, some of the children took part in horse riding,

travelling on a narrow boat for the first time. Sarah Baker commented on positive benefits for families being able to meet other families in the same situation in terms of making new friends and getting support. Sarah Baker highlighted the positive impact on the siblings of children with SEND being able to meet other children and to take part in different leisure activities during the summer holidays.

Jayne Evans, Voice for Parents, commented on the SEND offer to older children during the summer programme and welcomed the fact that they attended events. Jayne Evans, Voice for Parents, added that there is a recognition within the group that families struggle to find suitable activities. Jayne Evans, Voice for Parents, commented on the activities planned for the October half term holiday for families with SEND needs.

The Deputy Director thanked the speakers for their support in co-ordinating the summer holiday programme of activities.

The Deputy Director outlined the timetable of the SEND Local Area Inspection since they received the telephone call on 13 September 2021. The Council received unofficial feedback from the inspectors on 24 September 2021. A letter of findings is expected at the end of October 2021. The inspectors looked at the quality of SEND provision for the provision for children, young people and how well the Council had implemented the reforms from 2014. The inspectors gathered evidence from key colleagues across the partnership and from families using different consultation methods to find out how they felt their children needs had been identified and met.

The Deputy Director gave a summary of some of the unofficial feedback from the inspectors on the final day of their visit.

The panel thanked the Deputy Director for the presentation and welcomed the support offered to families with children or young people with SEND and added that the service is making a huge difference to them.

The panel queried the provision of leisure activities for SEND children outside of the holiday periods, which had been highlighted as an issue during the inspection. The panel also queried the difficulties reported by some families in getting access to the sensory support services and that Brickkiln Community Centre and Sensory Room site is still closed.

The panel wanted more opportunities for parents to attend in the week, due to the cost of using the facilities at the weekend.

The Deputy Director commented that immediate changes were made to the provision of this service at Brickkiln Community Centre and Sensory Room in response to some feedback from parents of young people about opening times offered. The Deputy Director advised the panel that service accepted the feedback and in response there is now provision of sensory support at The Way and the Centre for Children. The Deputy Director agreed to update the panel on the current situation as regards Brickkiln Street when known.

Andrew Wolverson, Head of Service, added that the new sensory room opened at The Way on 19 October 2021.

The Head of Service accepted that some parents felt that the current offer for young people was not appropriate and suggested that Carla Priddon, Chief Executive, The Way, would be happy to attend a future meeting to brief members on the offer.

The Head of Service added that some young people from Brickkiln Street are now attending The Way, however the number of COVID 19 restrictions has meant numbers who can access the facility is limited. The sensory room at Brickkiln Street would be required to be made Covid 19 secure before it can re-open properly. The Head of Service reassured the panel that this situation would be kept under constant review and the facility will be reopened as soon as possible, and parents will be informed.

The Deputy Director advised the panel that in terms of out of holiday SEND provision for young people it is expected that as providers get back to normal the situation is expected to improve. The Deputy Director added that the Council is committed to offering services at the weekend however the requirement to comply with Covid 19 will limit progress. The current high number of Covid 19 cases in the City is a cause of concern and schools are being asked to limit large groups gathering and to wear masks in communal areas.

The Executive Director added that feedback from families has highlighted the concern from families that the universal SEND offer is not enough. The panel were reassured that the continued work with members of Voice for Parents is an indication of the Council's commitment to develop and broaden the universal SEND offer.

The panel commented on difficulties reported by parents when booking sessions at The Children's Village Strengthening Families Hub and would like to see improvements to address these concerns. The Deputy Director of Education accepted there were concerns from parents about the service and the website was not most user-friendly system. The current system is old and there are plans to replace it with a system which is more accessible and easier for parents. The Deputy of Director advised the panel that the review is being led by Head of Service who will be commissioning the new system.

The panel commented on the positive impact of children and young people without disabilities who volunteered to help during the summer programme and suggested other young people may also be interested.

The Deputy Director of Education endorsed the comment about the work of volunteers who supported the delivery of activities to young people during the summer programme. The Deputy Director of Education accepted the need to provide young people 16-18 with SEND with more activities for this age group. The Chair thanked the presenters for their presentation.

The Chair invited Cllrs Adam Collinge, Wendy Dalton and Stephanie Haynes who visited Green Park School to give feedback to the panel.

The group who attended the school wanted to firstly express they're thanks to the staff and pupils who were so friendly and welcoming during the tour. The group also wanted to praise the children they met who were both a credit to the school and their families.

The group were impressed by the range of facilities on offer and the level of positive engagement by children in the lessons they observed and with each other, which

was inspiring to see. The group outlined the details about the school catchment area and the outdoor education facilities on offer. There are plans to further develop the outdoor spaces to provide more interactive learning and play spaces suitable for children with a range of needs.

The group were advised the school is focused on meeting the needs of children and young people with profound SEND. The school caters for children aged from early years to the age of 18 years. The school stayed open during the national lockdowns and continued to provide transport for children, in contrast to other similar school's where transport service was suspended. The staff worked hard to protect children and vulnerable staff during the period and reported that only five Covid 19 cases were directly linked to the school. The group welcomed the way that classes were organised based on need rather than age.

The group was advised that the school works closely with colleagues at The Gem Centre when assessing the needs of a child. There was concern about difficulties in children from the school accessing dental services. The level of attendance by pupils has been good since the start of September.

The group commented on discussions during the visit which highlighted issues caused by the current allocation policy and the extent to which the school can best meet the needs of a specific child, whose needs may have changed since they were last assessed. The staffing and resourcing situation at the school was also affected by major changes in the profile of needs of children from one year to next, which added to the challenge of creating educational clusters of children with similar needs.

The situation was further complicated by the delays in completing Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), which can take up 20 weeks, during which time a child's needs may have changed from the date of the original assessment.

The group advised the panel that the school was original designed to cater for 100 pupils. There are now 145 children attending the school which presents a challenge due to limited storage space available for equipment that is needed to support a child.

The group explained that several storage spaces areas in the school have been converted to either classrooms or informal breakout areas to meet the increased pupils' numbers.

The group commented on the issue of the career options for young people leaving the school highlighted during the visit and need to offer suitable employment and training opportunities, which are limited. The school wanted support from the Council to help young people during the period of transition from school to work.

The panel discussed the allocation policy and the specific issue raised by the group.

The EHC planning and assessment process should take no more than 20 weeks from the date of the request until the plan is issued. There was acceptance by the pane of the challenges facing the different partner agencies which has led to delays in completing assessments.

The Cabinet Member commented the Council is committed to completing assessments within the agreed target time and was this is seen as a priority for the service. However, the achievement of the target was as stated previously reliant both

on other agencies involved completing their work and the constraints of the school calendar.

The group discussed whether the demand for places at Green Park School by parents was an indication of the quality of mainstream provision to meet the needs of children with SEND. The Executive Director of Families commented that recent visit by inspectors had highlighted the excellent quality of special school provision but identified there were some areas of provision across the City needing improvement.

The Executive Director of Families added there was further work to demonstrate to families with SEND children that mainstream school provision can be as good an experience for children with disabilities as that offered by special schools and reported that good progress was being made.

The panel welcomed the report and thanked the presenters.

Resolved:

The panel agreed to receive detailed findings of the SEND local area inspection to a future meeting for consideration and comment.

8 **Transforming Children Services programme, vision and annual report 2020-2021**

The Chair invited Emma Cleary, Programme Manager, to present the annual Transforming Children's Services report for 2020 – 2021 to the panel. The Programme Manager explained that this was the first report on the work done to deliver a range of services improvements which has led to better outcomes for the children and young people across the city. The Programme Manager explained that the programme evolved five years ago from several projects ongoing across the directorate at the time. The programme has been live since 2016.

The Programme Manager advised the panel that when it was decided to join the directorates of children and education in 2019 under a single portfolio holder and Director it was decided to take the opportunity to refresh the programme and ensure that all the priorities were aligned through the transformation plans. The Programme Manager advised the panel that in July 2020, the Transforming Children's Services Programme (TCSP) Board collectively agreed to reflect on key achievements from the last five years and refresh the programme to ensure that transformation going forward represents the integrated priorities of Children's Services and Education.

The Programme Manager outlined the key achievements of the programme during the period April 2020 to March 2021 and of the young people involved and advised the panel that many of the projects in the programme have ended with successful outcomes. The Programme Manager advised the panel that when asked in a survey young people commented on their highlights of being working with service, for example, the opportunity to make new friends and gain confidence over the past five years.

The Programme Manager outlined the key strategic policy drivers for the programme and listed the outcomes linked to each of them. The service is working with members of Transforming Children Services Board to make sure that our programme is aligned to the diverse needs of children and young people. The Programme Manager

commented on the responses from young members when asked to share views about what 'good support' looks like.

The Programme Manager commented that the TCSP Programme will have children, young people, and families at the heart of all its activity and it will be developing ambitious and innovative programme that will improve outcomes for children and young people in Wolverhampton, generating the opportunity equitably and inclusively. The Programme Manager outlined further details of the vision for the programme. The Programme Manager shared a short audio clip of an interview with a young person to share their experiences of the support they had received.

The Programme Manager gave further details of the programme outcomes and the linked key measures that will be used to assess progress. The Programme Manager commented on the priorities moving forward and the importance of celebrating successes and keeping stakeholders informed. The decision to bring the annual report to the panel is example of this.

The Programme Manager commented that the service is learning from the experience of Covid 19, and the key priority is to ensure that where there are changing priorities they are incorporated into the programme. The focus of future work will be adding value and capacity to current statutory provision and maintaining representation from frontline workers.

The Programme Manager invited panel members comments and questions about the annual report and presentation.

The Chair thanked the presenter for the report.

The panel queried the limited references to the impact of Covid 19 on the delivery of programme of activities and services during the pandemic and asked for more details. The Programme Manager commented that the main task for the TCSP programme was to keep it aligned to priorities of the Relighting our City plan, which details the response to Covid 19 and the recovery plans for the City. The programme is learning from the impact of Covid 19 and recognising changes in priorities and understanding the impact on local communities. The Programme Manager added the service will be working alongside members of the Board.

Andrew Wolverson, Head of Service, offered reassurance that all the projects in the programme were able to adapt to the impact of Covid 19, and gave an example of The House Project which started just before the pandemic and the changes made to comply with the restrictions at the time. A flexible approach was taken to the delivery of projects. The Programme Manager advised the panel that the TCSP Board were able to monitor programmes to make sure that they were still delivering what was needed throughout the pandemic.

The panel queried the significance of the increase in Early Help Assessments during in 2019-20 compared to 2020-21 in the report, and if the trend suggests that more work is needed to tackle deprivation levels in the City.

The Executive Director for Families commented that the increase in the number of assessments could be seen in different ways and compared the situation to the reporting of domestic violence cases where you would not want to see an increase in

the numbers, but an increase will tell you that it is an issue. The Executive Director for Families added the service would want to see an increase in request for early help as more families would be supported at a lower level of intervention and in the future less families would need to be supported through statutory plans such as Children in Need or Child Protection. The Executive Director ended by commenting that the more people ask for help and to support at that lower level, the better it would be for the families concerned.

The panel discussed the opportunities as programmes funding ends to consider other support to meet the needs of children and young people and working with schools, training providers etc. The Executive Director for Families supported the focus on this area in responding the issues of skills gap and youth unemployment. The Executive Director for Families commented on the desire among local authorities across the country for longer term Government funding commitment to replace current programmes where funding is ending.

The panel thanked the presenter for the report. The Chair asked for personal congratulations to shared everyone involved with the programme.

Resolved:

The panel agreed to note the report and the progress.

9 **Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel 2021-2022 Draft Work programme**

Earl Piggott-Smith, Scrutiny Officer, presented the report. The Scrutiny Officer advised the panel that there were other opportunities for the panel to add other items to the work programme and to meet informally with lead officers and site visits to discuss issues.

The Scrutiny Officer advised the panel that an extra date will be added to the work programme to consider the findings from the SEND Area Inspection.

Resolved:

The panel agreed the proposed changes to the draft work programme report.