

Children's Select Committee

MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN'S SELECT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 21 SEPTEMBER 2023 AT COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNTY HALL, BYTHESEA ROAD, TROWBRIDGE, BA14 8JN.

Present:

Cllr Jon Hubbard (Chair), Cllr Jacqui Lay (Vice-Chair), Cllr Mark Verbinnen, Cllr Carole King, Cllr Kelvin Nash, Cllr Bridget Wayman, Cllr Allison Bucknell, Cllr Helen Belcher OBE, Cllr Kathryn Macdermid, Cllr Tony Jackson, Cllr Jo Trigg, Cllr Dominic Muns

Also Present:

Margaret Firth, Agnes Turnpenny, Kathryn Davis, Cllr Laura Mayes, Richard Hanks, Julie Bielby, Max Hirst

80 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from:

Cllr Mary Champion
Cllr Christopher Williams
Cllr Mike Sankey
Cllr Jane Davies
Cllr Jo Trigg
Cllr Peter Hutton

Dr Mike Thompson
Cate Mullen
Lesley Lowe
Terence Herbert
John Hawkins
Jen Salter

81 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

Resolved

To approve the minutes of the previous meeting, held on 6 June 2023, as a true and correct record.

82 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

83 **Chairman's Announcements**

The following announcements were made through the chair:

Cllr John Hubbard was recently appointed Deputy Chairman of LGA Children and Young People's Board.

84 **Public Participation**

There was no public participation.

85 **Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Strategy**

The Committee received an update on the Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Strategy.

The Chair reiterated that as explained in the agenda supplement the Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Strategy covers all ages and therefore comes under the remit of both the Health and Children Select Committees. This report had been considered by Health Select Committee on 5 September and they resolved to carry out a joint rapid scrutiny, taking into account the findings of the 2018 CAMHS task group.

The Councillors had all been invited to access the recordings of the Health Select Committee for the officers' introduction of this report (2h26 in) as it did not seem efficient to ask officers to attend two separate meetings to present the same report.

The Chair stated that as a committee they had been holding back on starting a "Mental health for children and young people" task group, due to finding the right timing amongst other initiatives and programmes.

Resolved:

To agree to a joint rapid scrutiny with the Health Select Committee to review the Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Strategy, to take place in November/December 2023.

86 **Outcome of the SEND LGA Peer Review**

The Committee received a report from Richard Hanks on the outcome of the LGA Peer Review of Wiltshire Council's SEND Strategy.

The full report, with all its findings and recommendations, can be found in the agenda pack.

The peer team's preparation process, which included reviewing a range of documents and information, to ensure they were familiar with the Local Area Partnership including Council, ICB and health partners, strengths and the challenges they are facing. They heard from over 110 people, including

children, young people, parents, lead members, local authority senior leadership team, chief nurse of the ICB, senior health partners, front-line practitioners and managers and partners. The team also reviewed a small sample of EHCPs.

Richard Hanks referred to specific key findings:

- The strategic leadership for SEND is visible and developing.
- Parents and carers are well engaged through an active and well-established parent carer forum, which is a key strategic partner participating at board level.
- There is a clear strategic awareness of the need for continuous improvement with agreed joint actions. However, some of these actions now need to be taken forward at pace with each of the three elements – education, health, and care – demonstrating their impact.

The Key Recommendations were noted:

- Find your “conductor/s” and balance the education, health, and care elements of SEND.
- Be bold in articulating your story and drive forward ambitions already identified with pace.
- Embrace schools and settings and bring them on your journey.
- Coproduce a local area outcomes framework to further align commissioning activity.
- Create a workforce strategy for the whole system and across all settings.

Debate

The followings clarifications and points were made:

- The committee expressed concern at a lack of concrete timescale, referring specifically to where the report spoke about taking actions at pace.
- A “data dashboard” was being planned and a full timescale would be brought back to the Committee at a future meeting.
- A recommendation to ensure greater clarity on who has the overarching view of SEND across education, health and care had been accepted and was being approached as a joint arrangement between Lucy Townsend, Corporate Director – People and Jill May, Chief Nurse of the Integrated Care Board (ICB).

- The committee felt the report was good to read, but with many “however(s)” throughout which ought to be separated to compare with recommendations.
- Recommendation 6.3 was highlighted by the committee, with the need to ensure all of Wiltshire was being looked after. Concern was expressed that Southwest Wiltshire has no secondary schools and go to school in Dorset.

After clarification that children who live in Wiltshire but go to school in Dorset are not under SEND Wiltshire’s legal responsibilities, concern was raised as to who looks after these children who cross county borders for school and how issues that arise are resolved.

Resolved:

To receive an update on the actions coming out of the peer review at the next Childrens Select Committee meeting.

To receive a briefing for members to understand arrangements for children attending school out of their county of residence.

87 **Children Missing Out on Education**

Kathryn Davis briefly summarised the report on Wiltshire Council’s Strategy for children missing out on education. The full report can be found in the agenda pack.

Debate

The followings clarifications and points were made:

The committee expressed concern that the statistics showed a negative trend.

Clarification was given that although efforts are made to keep track of children who never enter education to begin with using tracking measures such as NHS records, this can be incredibly difficult and inevitably some fall through the cracks.

The committee asked for an update at a future meeting as to what actions beyond statutory measures are being taken.

Resolved:

To note the report

To receive a further update to follow the impact of the Council’s measures to reduce the incidents of children missing out on education.

To receive a briefing on the Council's approach to children and young people absent from school.

88 **Elective Home Education**

Kathryn Davis briefly summarised the report on Wiltshire Council's Strategy for supporting parents who choose to home educate their children. The full report can be found in the agenda pack.

Debate

The committee asked for further clarification on areas including the reasons given for home educating, why the statistics are on an upwards trend, what Wiltshire Council's exact responsibilities are to home educated children and the statistics for exam results of home educated children so that they may be compared to those in schools. It was therefore agreed that the chair would receive a briefing, with the potential to bring a further briefing and/or report to the committee in a future meeting.

Resolved:

To note the report

To receive a chair's briefing on elective home education.

89 **Task Group Report - Youth Provision and Area Board Youth Funding**

The Committee received a report on the findings and recommendations from the Youth Provision and Area Board Youth Funding Task Group.

Cllr Jo Trigg, Chair of the Youth Provision and Area Board Youth Funding Task Group briefly introduced the report and spoke through the conclusions and recommendations reached.

The full report can be found in the agenda pack.

Debate

Concern was raised by the committee at the underspend reported. Comments were made as to whether some of the Area Boards who had done well and spent well, could be from areas of Wiltshire that are easier to access rather than more rural areas.

Resolved

The committee endorses the recommendations of the report to be viewed by Cllr Laura Mayes as well as Cllr Ashley O'Neill for an executive response.

90 **Outcome of the review of the "Dads Matter Too" multi-agency project**

The Committee received a report on the outcome of the review into the multi-agency project "Dads Matter Too". A PowerPoint presentation was given by Agnes Turnpenny which is attached to the minutes.

The committee praised the report, and the scheme was given high praise for its work.

Resolved

To receive an update in January following consideration by Families and Children's Systems Assurance Group, Safeguarding Vulnerable People's Partnership and the Under 1s Steering Group of the partnership's response to the learning and how this will be taken forward.

To receive an update on the evaluation of work with the Fatherhood Institute (expected November 2023).

91 **Annual Adoption Report**

The Committee received the annual report from Wiltshire Council's Adoption Service. It is a statutory requirement that Wiltshire Council's Adoption Service provides a year-end report to the Council in relation to the child's journey to adoption. It describes the management arrangements, outcomes, priorities, and finances for the period 01 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.

The full report can be found in the agenda pack.

In this reporting period, 80 adopters were approved. The focus for Adoption West was to recruit adopters for older children, those with additional needs, children from black and minority ethnic communities and larger sibling groups.

Comparative performance for local authorities was via the National Adoption Scorecard which, for Wiltshire, showed that performance remained strong.

The three key scorecard measures each local authority Adoption Agency uses are as follows:

- A10: the average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family:

The estimated figure for 2022-23 was 491 days, up on the previous year at 369. The target was 300-380 days.

- A2: the average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family:

The estimated figure for 2022-23 was 162 days, a slight increase from 145 in 2021/22. The target was 140-160 days.

- A20: the average time between entering care and placement order:

The estimated figure for 2022-23 was 283, a minor increase from the 282 days in 2021/22. The target was 210–230 days.

These measures on the surface indicated a decline, however the Adoption Service was keen to stress that those children outside of target had been reviewed to ensure the reason for delays were reasonable, and to determine whether there were practice improvements required to increase timeliness. For all children outside of targets, all delays were purposeful and in the child's best interests, or outside of the Local Authorities control.

Debate

It was clarified that the drive for recruitment of adopters from BME communities was as part of the overall strategy and it was understood that due to the demographic of the Southwest it presented a challenge.

Resolved:

Note and endorse the report for consideration by Cabinet on 10 October 2023.

That this report is still included when the committee receives the annual report from Adoption West and from the Joint Scrutiny Committee so that there is a “full circle” overview of adoption performance for the Committee.

92 **Overview and Scrutiny Activities Updates**

The Committee received updates from active Task Groups, Rapid Scrutiny exercises and the committee's board representatives.

The committee was invited by the chair to endorse the appointment of Cllr Carole King to the Standing Task Group.

The Standing Task Group had met on 20 September 2023 to consider the corporate parenting strategy. Overall, it was felt it was an accessible, well-presented document.

The recommendations put forward:

- To make sure that any acronyms are explained, possibly using a glossary.
- That a reference is made in the strategy to the process for monitoring KPIs and/or a link to the corporate parenting scorecard.
- That the membership of the corporate parent panel should include an independent person with care experience.

93 **Regular updates**

93a Update from Wiltshire Youth Voice Representative

This update included a summary of recent activities of the Wiltshire Youth Union (WYU) and Children in Care Council (CiCC).

The written report was noted.

93b School Ofsted Judgements

This update included information regarding the most recent Ofsted Inspection reports and presented an ongoing view of the effectiveness of schools as seen by Ofsted Inspection.

Following a question about schools in deficit, the following answer was subsequently produced to be included in the minutes:

The net surplus balances for the financial year 2022/23 are £12.2 million with 104 schools holding surplus balances of £14.4 million and 12 schools (11 primary and 1 secondary) in deficit to a value of £2.2 million. This equates to around 10% of schools in deficit. All the schools have challenge and support from the school finance team and have plans to bring them back into balance.

The written report was noted.

93c DfE Changes - Update from Department for Education

The Committee was updated on developments relating to children's services arising from the Department for Education.

The written report was noted.

94 **Working together to improve school attendance**

The DfE published new non-statutory guidance in May 2022 to help schools, trusts, governing bodies and local authorities maintain high levels of school attendance. The guidance applies from September 2022.

This regular update is an opportunity for the committee to be aware of the latest requirements, as set out in the guidance.

The written update was noted.

95 **Schools Forum**

This agenda item had no update due to no Schools Forum meeting taking place since the last Childrens Select Committee meeting.

95a Corporate Parenting Panel

This agenda item had no update due to no Corporate Parenting Panel meeting taking place since the last Childrens Select Committee meeting.

96 **Directors' update**

The Committee received a verbal update from Directors highlighting any key issues (current or emerging), successes or milestones in their respective areas since the last meeting of the committee, which did not require a full agenda item.

Richard Hanks, Director Education and Skills, spoke briefly on the Safety Valve Programme, which supports local authorities with the pressures of a high needs block spend. Wiltshire Council had been invited to take part and this had been accepted. It was stated that they looked forward to the support the programme could offer.

There was also an update on schools affected by the recent national issues with RAAC concrete, with Richard clarifying that Wiltshire Council was only responsible for the schools that were under voluntary control, such as foundation and community schools. Support and inspections had been offered to assist schools. It was stated that so far no schools in Wiltshire had been identified as needing any construction work.

97 **Cabinet Member and Portfolio Holders' update**

The Committee received a verbal update from the Cabinet Member and / or Portfolio Holders highlighting any news, successes, or milestones in their respective areas since the last meeting of the committee, which did not require a full agenda item and was not covered elsewhere on this agenda.

Cllr Suzanne Wickham wished to celebrate the Dyslexic Friendly Schools Programme, which had just finished its first two-year programme and Wiltshire now had 12 schools qualified which is more than the rest of UK combined (21 all together).

Another 15 schools had already signed up to be part of the next two-year programme which had just started.

Cllr Wickham also visited Wiltshire Wildlife Trust Alternative Provision and urged others to visit by contacting Kate Field at KateF@wiltshirewildlife.org, 01225 782627.

98 **Chair's update**

The Committee received a verbal update from the chair on work undertaken and news since the last meeting that did not require a full agenda item and was suitable to discuss under Chairman's Announcements, where no debate is allowed.

There were no significant updates.

99 **Forward Work Programme**

The Forward Work Programme was noted as being attached to the agenda.

100 **Date of Next Meeting**

The date of the next meeting of the Childrens Select Committee is 31 October 2023.

101 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

102 **Glossary**

(Duration of meeting: 10.30 – 13:50)

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