

Children's Select Committee

MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN'S SELECT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 6 JULY 2021 AT ONLINE MEETING - MICROSOFT TEAMS.

Present:

Dr Mike Thompson, Nikki Barnett, Sarah Busby, John Hawkins, Catriona Williamson, Cllr Helen Belcher, Cllr Mary Champion, Cllr Jon Hubbard (Chairman), Cllr Carole King, Cllr Jacqui Lay (Vice-Chairman), Cllr Kathryn Macdermid, Cllr Kelvin Nash, Cllr Antonio Piazza, Cllr Mike Sankey, Cllr James Sheppard, Cllr Caroline Thomas, Cllr Jo Trigg and Cllr Mark Verbinnen

Also Present:

Cllr Trevor Carbin, Cllr Laura Mayes, Cllr Dominic Muns and Cllr Suzanne Wickham

16 Apologies

No apologies were received for absence.

17 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 June 2021 were presented for consideration, and it was,

Resolved:

To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 8 June subject to an amendment to Section 5 correcting the spelling of Cllr Kathryn MacDermid's name, as well as a review of the attendance.

18 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

19 Chairman's Announcements

As Louise Lewis, Head of School Effectiveness, was due to present her final Ofsted update at the meeting, the Chairman took the opportunity to thank her for her hard work during her time reporting to the Committee.

The Chairman also referred the Committee to two agenda items set for the forthcoming Cabinet meeting on 13 July. Cabinet was set to consider an additional £0.903M part year investment in 2021-22, rising to a total £1.580M in 2022-23, allowing increased capacity within SEND and Inclusion Services.

There was expected to be an update on the progress made with the Silverwood School Build Programme.

Cllr Laura Mayes, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills, was present and confirmed that, rather than being held on 13 July, the item relating to Special Educational Needs and Inclusion Funding was now due to be debated at a special meeting of Cabinet on 21 July.

20 **Public Participation**

There was no public participation.

21 **Regular updates**

The Chairman announced a new approach to the way that the Committee would receive regular updates, so that going forward they would be included under a single agenda item. It was emphasised that, although the updates do not often require decisions by the Committee, members were still invited to indicate ahead of the meetings whether they had specific questions or would like to receive further information. Unless there was a specific question raised in advance of the meetings there would be no expectation that a presenting officer would attend. However, the Chairman was keen to stress that there would be opportunities for questions to be asked at meetings and if answers could not be given at that time they would be circulated after the meeting and included within the minutes.

21a Update from Wiltshire Youth Voice Representative

The Operational Lead for Child and Youth Voice was in attendance to provide a summary of recent activities of the Wiltshire Youth Union (WYU) and Children in Care Council (CiCC). She reported the recruitment of two new Expert by Experience Youth Consultants as part of a drive to assist the council with participation and to make services more inclusive for young people. The work of the new consultants included developing a greater awareness of different cultural needs and launching a new podcast called Fostering Positivity. She explained that the recruitment of more consultants was a priority given the continuing need to expand participation.

It was noted that CiCC meetings were now taking place face-to-face. One of the recent meetings involved an inspection of Aspire House, the council's emergency registered children's home. The home's manager was extremely pleased with the feedback and noted that lots of the observations would have been things that would have been missed by adults. The CiCC were also organising networking opportunities, including a trip to an activity centre to allow children to get together and share their experiences.

The officer explained that a priority for July and August was a mental health consultation comprising two key pieces of work. The first, undertaken by the Child and Youth Voice Team in collaboration with researchers from Bristol University, focused exclusively on Children in Care. The second was a

questionnaire, designed in partnership with young people, which was available to all young people in Wiltshire. It was noted that the findings of both pieces of work would be delivered during a Meet the Leader session in July. Going forward there were plans to give particular attention of the mental health needs of young carers.

The Chairman lost internet connection during the virtual presentation, at around 2:50pm, so the Vice-Chairman welcomed the report and invited questions from participants. During the discussion questions were raised about whether the Child and Youth Voice Team were working with the Child Friendly Trowbridge Team, a group working alongside Trowbridge Future and the Families and Children's Transformation (FACT) Programme. The officer explained that she was not aware of that team but was happy to provide assistance.

21b School Ofsted Judgements

The Head of School Effectiveness gave a brief overview of the Ofsted scoring system, explaining that a grade one was outstanding, two was good, three requires improvement and four meant that a school was inadequate or in special measures.

She reported that there had been 11 inspections since 4 May, all bar one of which had been Section 8 inspections. All of the Section 8 inspections had found that the schools were taking effective action. She also welcomed the results of the other, Section 5, inspection, which found that the school inspected was judged to be good.

The officer then provided an overview of the trends identified in the report. Key strengths included a good attitude and prioritised curriculum, with a focus on reading and phonics. An area of focus going forward was an evaluation of the impact of the curriculum on standards.

The Vice-Chairman reiterated the Chairman's earlier comments thanking Louise Lewis for her work in keeping the Committee updated.

21c DfE Changes - Update from Department for Education

Lucy Townsend, Corporate Director of People, referred the Committee to the information included in the agenda pack and took the opportunity to provide further detail about funding specifically allocated to Wiltshire. It was reported that:

- £1,348,000 had been allocated to improve school buildings.
- £127,000 to allow Virtual School Heads to support Children Looked-After and care leavers.
- £72,000 towards wellbeing for education recovery.
- Additional funding was to go directly to schools for the expansion of tutoring, although the overall figure for Wiltshire was still being calculated.

It was also noted that environment education packs had now been distributed to all of Wiltshire's schools.

During the discussion questions were submitted in relation to the impact of the government's plan to improve opportunity through the development of Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs). Officers noted that, due to a lack of legislation, the focus of the council was on creating good schools but that conversations had been underway with schools about the implications of the government's strategy. The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills advocated a measured approach and reiterated that the council was available to support and guide, but not direct schools.

Further questions were received in relation to whether the £127,000 would fully fund the Virtual School Head Support programme. Officers noted that the council already funds Virtual Heads and decisions about how best to use the additional funding would be taken at a later date. They explained that they would be happy to bring and update about the funding to a future meeting.

22 **Supporting Families**

The Vice-Chairman invited the Committee to consider a report presenting the work undertaken to meet the outcomes of the Supporting Families (previously Troubled Families) Programme.

Lucy-Anne Bryant, Commissioning Programme Lead, provided a brief outline of the history of the programme noting that it arose as part of effort to streamline support to better coordinate the response to three indicators: unemployment, criminal behaviour, and poor school attendance. Over time the programme widened the original three criteria to six. She noted that the programme had been very successful, meaning that additional funding was granted to extend it in 2020-21. Funding had also been made available to extend the programme for a further year and the council was working with over 2000 families that meet the criteria. She then added that Wiltshire has a payment by results target to successfully support 347 families through to 2022.

Head of Commissioning for Families and Children Gary Binstead, noted that successful outcomes have been achieved for over 2,800 families throughout the life of the programme, referring the Committee to the table in Part 8 of the report, which showed outcomes by different indicators. It was noted that the programme would bring in over £876,000 were the council to meet its target for this year including over £250,000 payment by results funding.

During the course of the discussion the following points were made:

- Queries were raised about the figures included in the table in Section 7 of the report. Officers noted that they were only part way through the year. They also explained that families assisted by the programme met between two and six indicators each, which was why there were a larger number of indicators in the table in Section 8.

- Officers reported that the Wiltshire figures compared favourably to national figures. However, members sought reassurance about the sustainability of the programme, enquiring about what was being done to monitor outcomes for families over a longer time period. Officers clarified that their figures were checked by the South West Audit Partnership and that spot checks were carried out by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), which included the feedback provided over a longer timeframe. Where negative outcomes were delivered reviews had been undertaken in collaboration with partner services, such as the police, to consider what could have been done earlier to achieve a different outcome.
- It was explained that employment officers had returned for only two days per week as they were employed by the Department for Work and Pensions, who were not able to make them available full time due to their own requirements.
- In response to questions about the funding of the programme, it was noted that attachment fees of £1,000 were allocated every time a family joined the programme. However, due to Covid-19, attachment fees had now been replaced by service transformation funding.
- Given the success of the programme it was asked whether it could be extended to help a larger number of families. Officers noted that they were currently working with over 2000 families but that they were only able to claim funding for 347, as that was the figure allocated by the government. Although they were only able to claim for 347 families, they were able to achieve success for a far greater number and that service transformation funding was in place to ensure that the needs of the additional families were being met.
- Members raised concerns about families slipping through the net if they failed to meet the minimum of two indicators or did not engage with the programme. It was explained that participation was a matter of parental choice but that families would still receive services from the Support and Safeguarding Service.
- Officers offered to provide a further update to the Committee at a future meeting.

Around 3:25pm the Chairman re-joined the virtual meeting when he was able to restore his internet connection.

Resolved:

1) To note the report.

2) For a further report to be presented to the Standing Task Group after Wiltshire Council provides next year's progress to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

23 Evaluation of the Youth Consultant role

The Head of Commissioning for Families and Children explained that in 2019 Wiltshire Council commissioned Community First to employ seven youth consultants. During this pilot project the consultants supported a range of services commissioned by the council and spoke to different groups of young people, including in schools and youth centres, about their experiences. The officer felt that this was particularly beneficial, as feedback provided by the

consultants had helped to develop the council's services. He identified changes to the council's SEND strategy and issues at youth clubs as examples of where feedback had led to improvements.

During the course of the discussion the following points were made:

- Members praised the report as a big step forward and welcomed the use of youth consultants given the valuable nature of the work that was being done. However, they felt that the report would benefit from more tangible examples of where feedback had led to specific improvements.
- Concern was raised that members did not have regular enough contact with young people and that ways to increase this should be considered when thinking about the future of the programme. Officers took the comments onboard but stressed the need for them to be guided by the wishes of young people when arranging meetings. They stated that they would undertake further discussions with young people to see if they would like further meetings in addition to the Meet the Leader Sessions.
- Members also expressed reservations about whether the consultation focussed too heavily on children that the council was working with directly, such as those with specific requirements, and therefore risked losing connection with a wider cross section of young people. Officers agreed about the importance of reaching out to all young people and that they needed to do more to evidence how they were engaging with them. They pointed to the Youth Union and Youth Parliament as forums available to all young people.

Resolved:

1) To note the report.

2) For the Chairman and Vice-Chairman to meet with the executive in order to consider ways of maximising engagement with a wider cohort of young people.

24 **Adoption West Joint Scrutiny Panel - annual report**

The Chairman introduced the report and noted that the Committee considered the draft annual report at its 2 March 2021 meeting and agreed to receive the finalised report after the May 2021 elections.

During the discussion questions were raised about what Adoption West was doing to address the shortfall in the number of adopters of older children. A board member of Adoption West noted that, although the shortfall was smaller than the national average, a revision to the recruitment strategy was due to be presented to the board in September.

Given the number of relatively new members of the Committee, the Adoption West board member then went on to provide a brief overview of the regional Adoption Agency, explaining that Wiltshire worked with five other local authorities, as well as voluntary groups, to deliver an adoption service. The longer-term goal was to place nine out of 10 Wiltshire children locally.

The Chairman noted that he was also currently serving as the Chairman of the Scrutiny Panel for Adoption West and that, if he were to be re-elected at their next meeting on 14 July, a second Wiltshire member would be required to replace the outgoing member, Cllr Suzanne Wickham. The Chairman encouraged any member interested in joining the panel to contact the Senior Scrutiny Officer, or himself, to discuss the role.

Cllr Caroline Thomas had to leave the meeting during the discussion at around 4pm.

Resolved:

To note the contents of the report.

25 **Forward Work Programme**

The Chairman invited members to make suggestions about what they believed should be on the Forward Work Programme.

Building upon the discussion of areas of good practice at the previous meeting, the Chairman outlined changes to the Committee's working model aimed at improving efficiency and ensuring that each agenda item was given sufficient time to allow for proper scrutiny. It was suggested that a standing working group should be set up to consider the regular reports that are presented to the Committee. The report summary would then be presented to the full Committee in order to reduce the need for lengthy discussion and allow more time to scrutinise other important items.

During the discussion members welcomed the idea of a working group and stated that they would appreciate more information about the dates of when reports were expected to be published. Greater clarity was also sought about the composition of the Working Group. The Chairman explained that as some reports did not always get published at the same time each year but that it was important to keep track to ensure that they were not missed. He stated that there would be roughly between three and five standing members of the Working Group and that the agendas for the Working Group's meetings would be circulated to all members. He also stressed that all members would be welcome to attend meetings of the Working Group and examine the full reports. Questions could also be submitted in advance by all committee members for the Working Group to explore.

The conversation then turned towards the Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report. The Senior Scrutiny Officer reported that it would not be possible for the full Committee to consider the final report before it went to Full Council. The Chairman suggested that a draft form of the report come to the Committee at their next meeting on 7 September. Feedback could then be passed on to the Corporate Parenting Panel for consideration ahead of them signing off their final report. As the Committee would not meet again before the final report was presented to Full Council, he suggested that he and the Vice-Chairman, or the Working Group, if it had been set up, could review the final report ahead of Full

Council. During the discussion no objections were raised to the process outlined by the Chairman.

Resolved:

- 1) To establish a standing task group to consider the regular reports that are presented to the Committee.**
- 2) For a summary of the findings of the task group to be brought to the full Committee.**
- 3) For the agendas of the task group's meetings to be circulated to all members to allow them the opportunity to attend their meetings.**
- 4) For the Committee to consider the Draft Report of the Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report so that their recommendations could be presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel ahead of their meeting on 28 September 2021.**
- 5) To delegate authority to the Chairman and Vice-Chairman, or the Standing Task Group, if it had been set up, to scrutinise the final Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report before it was presented to Full Council on 19 October 2021.**

26 **Date of Next Meeting**

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Tuesday 7 September 2021. The Chairman also noted proposed changes to the times and dates of future meetings in November and January.

27 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

(Duration of meeting: 2.35 - 4.20 pm)

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