

Children's Select Committee

MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN'S SELECT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 12 MARCH 2024 AT COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNTY HALL, BYTHESEA ROAD, TROWBRIDGE, BA14 8JN.

Present:

Cllr Jon Hubbard, Cllr Jacqui Lay, Cllr Helen Belcher OBE, Cllr Jo Trigg, Cllr Carole King, Cllr Mark Verbinnen, Cllr Suzanne Wickham, Cllr Kathryn McDermid, John Hawkins

Also Present:

Cllr Laura Mayes, Cllr Peter Hutton, Cllr Dominic Muns, Jen Salter, Kathryn Davis, Amanda Butler, Netty Lee, Ben Stevens, Lucy Townsend

22 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from:

Cllr Mike Sankey
Cllr Kelvin Nash
Cllr Bridget Wayman
Dr Mike Thompson
Cllr Mary Champion

23 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

Resolved

To approve the minutes of previous meetings, held on 24 January 2024, as a true and correct record.

24 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

25 **Chairman's Announcements**

The committee was informed that the pre meeting briefing originally taking place before this meeting would be rescheduled for an online meeting.

26 **Public Participation**

There was no public participation.

27 **Canon's House**

The committee considered the attached report on the findings of the full Ofsted inspection of Canons House Children's Home carried out in November 2023. The report was briefly introduced and outlined the progress made to improve services following the two previous Ofsted inspections in February 2022 and June 2023. The full report can be found in the agenda.

Debate

The committee commended the report and the effort made between the inspections of Canon's House.

It was clarified that Councillors were still welcome to visit Canon's House, however inspections had been commissioned to a service provider who provide regular visits across the country and could compare Canon's House with similar providers.

Resolved:

To note the response to the Ofsted report.

28 **Special Guardianship Orders**

The committee considered the attached report, which provided background information on Special Guardianship Orders (SGO). This was specifically requested by the committee at its meeting on 21 September 2023.

- A Special Guardianship Order has several potentially positive effects:
- It gives a child the security of a long-term home.
- The child's birth parents retain shared parental responsibility.
- It gives the Special Guardian day-to-day control (jointly if there are several Special Guardians)

Unlike adoption, a Special Guardianship Order will not remove parental responsibility from the child's birth parents. This means that the Special Guardian would have responsibility for the day-to-day decisions as well as all the important decisions about the child or young person but would need to consult the birth parents at times where key decisions are being made such as changing their name, moving overseas or agreeing adoption.

Netty Lee briefly introduced the report, highlighting statistics within the report, and then welcomed questions.

Debate

As the debate opened, the following definitions were clarified for the committee:

Fostering – There are two different types of foster carers that can be approved, Local Authority and Family Members. Local Authority foster carers are approved and supported by the Council. Family members still require approval by the local authority, but it is recognised that they are relatives of the child.

Special Guardianship Orders – With SGOs, parental responsibility is given to the carer (without excluding birth parents), meaning assessments such as financial stability are carried out. There is a specific SGO support team to make assessments and support SGO carers.

Adoption – This is generally considered for children below the age of 8, where no family members have come forward that are considered suitable. It is considered a final step as children remaining within their families is preferred.

During the debate, it was clarified for the committee that private SGOs require 3 months' notice to be given to the Council before applying in court and are still subject to assessment by the Council.

Regarding adoption, it was highlighted as a last resort due to the complete severance of parental responsibility from the birth parents. SGOs are considered beforehand as it is recognised that birth parents, whilst unable to provide long term care, can still remain in contact with their children and their lives. SGOs do not legally remove parental responsibility from the birth parents but gives the Special Guardian “overriding” parental responsibility.

It was clarified that statistics available from adoption and fostering for scrutiny by the committee were not available from SGOs as the Council's involvement in that child ends when they are approved. Support is still offered by the local authority however the reduction in oversight from the Council is chosen by the family, approved by the local authority and endorsed by the court order. It would be considered inappropriate to continue involvement in light of this and statistics wouldn't provide any learning opportunity for the Council given the nature of SGOs providing private family life.

Resolved:

To note the report

29 **Education Performance Outcomes**

The committee considered the attached report which provided an overview of performance outcomes in assessments and/or examinations from ages 5 to 19 in the academic year 2022-2023.

Kathryn Davis and Amanda Butler introduced and read through the report.

Debate

The committee raised the issue that there was no “trend” data. It was clarified that this had been sorted and would be in reports going forward. A separate update was offered to update the committee on trend data.

It was made clear that efforts were being made to support the schools struggling with KS2 maths.

It was recognised that there are challenges with recruitment and retention nationally within education.

It was clarified that most primary schools were meeting expected standards in Year 6 and therefore secondary schools were not needing to “catch-up” students in Year 7.

It was clarified that the Wiltshire Learning Alliance does bring together schools to share learning and this does include Academies. There had been challenges with some schools both in standard and willingness to engage, however the WLA were fully aware of these schools.

The committee discussed what parents and local groups could do to engage children in subjects such as maths with the support of the Council.

Resolved:

To note the report

To set up a rapid scrutiny to understand in more depth the Year 6 performance figures, trends and outliers

To receive a further report on trend details

To receive an update report on the Wiltshire Learning Alliance

30 **Business Plan Update**

The committee considered the attached report outlining progress made between May 2023 and January 2024 on the activities for Families and Children and Education and Skills services as stated in the Council Business Plan.

Jen Salter and Kathryn Davis introduced and summarised the report.

Debate

It was clarified that the report was not an exhaustive list of everything being delivered by Families and Children and Education and Skills services but the main priorities.

It was clarified that the assessment tool for homeless 16 & 17-year-olds in Wiltshire had been refreshed, following feedback from external sources.

It was clarified that significant assessment on the skills and knowledge of commissioned organisations' workforces is carried out in the tendering process where bidders must provide evidence to demonstrate their suitability.

It was clarified that the Affordable Schools Strategy was already receiving strong and positive engagement from schools' leaders and families, even if it hasn't yet translated into performance outcomes.

It was clarified that 63 schools currently had accreditation as "Healthy Schools" as part of the programme and more in line to receive that accreditation in the near future.

Resolved:

To note the update

To receive a briefing on the work of Family Health practitioners

31 **Regular updates**

31a Update from Wiltshire Youth Voice Representative

The committee commended the report and the progress made in participation and awareness of Wiltshire Youth Voice.

The written report was noted.

31b School Ofsted Judgements

There was no update on this item as there had been no further School Ofsted judgements since those presented to the committee on 24 January 2024.

31c DfE Changes - Update from Department for Education

An update on developments relating to children's services arising from the Department for Education.

The written report was noted.

32 **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 applied from September 2022.

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

The written report was noted.

33 **Schools Forum**

The committee received a very brief update highlighting key items from the last meeting of Schools Forum, to enable the Children's Select Committee to be informed in a timely manner of the work undertaken by the Schools Forum through the year.

Full agendas and minutes for the Schools Forum can be accessed here [Schools Forum | Wiltshire Council](#)

The written update was noted.

33a Corporate Parenting Panel

The committee received a very brief update highlighting key items from the last meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel, to enable the Children's Select Committee members, as Corporate Parents, to be informed in a timely manner of the work undertaken by the Corporate Parenting Panel through the year.

The written update was noted.

33b Safety Valve update

As agreed by the committee at its extraordinary meeting on 7 December 2023, the committee received a regular update from officers on the development of the Safety Valve project, as well as input from the overview and scrutiny representative.

There was no significant update to be made due to current confidentiality, however it was made clear that progress had been made in line with what was expected.

The committee wanted to make clear its appreciation of all the hard work that had been put in so far by officers.

The written report was noted.

34 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 and was not covered elsewhere in the meeting.

Jen Salter, Director of Families and Children, stated that the Youth Justice inspection had been completed and its findings would be shared when the report was received. It was also noted that Wiltshire Council's application for Families First wave 2 funding had not been successful.

Kathryn Davis, Interim Director of Education and Skills, stated that there had been changes to the DfE attendance guidance, which would come into effect in August 2024. Work would be carried out within the team to prepare for these

changes and support schools. There was also news that Wiltshire Council had been successful in its application to open a new Alternative Provision Free School.

Lucy Townsend, Corporate Director of People, stated that Wiltshire Council will remain a partner of the DfE in SEND education.

35 **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 in the meeting.

Cllr Laura Mayes updated that the Annual Social Care Conference had taken place in Devizes and was a success for all social workers. The DfE had also made a visit to understand Wiltshire Council's work as an outstanding authority.

Cllr Suzanne Wickham updated the committee on two new visits she had made to AP Schools and the success children were having during sessions.

36 **Chair's update**

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

There was no significant update from the chair.

36a **Overview and Scrutiny Activities Updates**

The committee received updates from active Task Groups, Rapid Scrutiny exercises and the committee's board representatives. A report by the Senior Scrutiny Officers which provided an update on Task Group activity since the last meeting is attached.

There has been no task group activity since the last committee meeting.

37 **Forward Work Programme**

The committee was asked to note the attached documents showing the relevant items from the overview and scrutiny forward work programme.

The Forward Work Programme was noted.

38 **Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of Children's Select Committee is on 6 June 2024.

39 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

40 **Glossary**

(Duration of meeting: 11.00am – 13.30pm)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Max Hirst max.hirst@wiltshire.gov.uk of Democratic Services, direct line 01225718215, e-mail max.hirst@wiltshire.gov.uk

Press enquiries to Communications, direct line 01225 713114 or email communications@wiltshire.gov.uk

(Duration of meeting: Times Not Specified)

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