

Wiltshire Council

Children's Select Committee

2 March 2021

Review of the work of the Children's Select Committee 2017-2021

Purpose

1. To highlight key aspects of the work undertaken by the Select Committee during 2017-2021 and recommend topics as legacy items to the Management Committee for possible inclusion in a new overview and scrutiny work programme after the elections in May 2021.

Background

2. An opportunity for Overview and Scrutiny (OS) to look back on its activity during the outgoing council is an important part of its learning and improvement journey. It allows councillors to:
 - a) Review the key pieces of OS work undertaken over the past four years;
 - b) Agree recommendations to OS under the next council in terms of work priorities;
 - c) Agree recommendations to OS under the next council in terms of its approach (identifying strengths to retain and improvements to implement).
3. The legacy process allows members to consider OS's successes and challenges during the past four years, including the key scrutiny reviews and their impact on the council's agreed priorities. With the benefit of this experience it can then submit suggestions for OS under the 2021-2025 council to consider maximising the impact of the work it will undertake.

Key Activities and Achievements

4. Appendix 1 is a list of some of the Children's Select Committee's key activities and achievements during 2017-21 which demonstrates the contribution it has made to decision-making, policy development and good governance of the Council.
5. It should be noted that the public, formal activity of the Select Committee was suspended between March 2020 and January 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic

Ongoing work

6. Appendix 2 is a list of activities and reviews which the Select Committee considers important to include as ongoing pieces of work in any new overview and scrutiny work programme. Every effort has been made to bring reviews to a conclusion in time for the end of the current Council but clearly some things remain ongoing due to the significance or long-term nature of the topic.
7. In considering which areas to recommend for future work, the Committee is asked to be mindful that the Management Committee will need to leave space and capacity for those leading the function after the election to develop their own work programme based on issues resulting from public views expressed during the election period and following early engagement with any new Executive. However, the suspension of most OS work between March 2020 and the time of writing this report, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, does mean that the list in Appendix 2 is longer than usual.

Good practice

8. The Committee would like to recognise the value of the pre-meeting briefing sessions (usually held in the hour before a committee meeting), to provide useful information members but for which no formal resolutions are needed (therefore would not be appropriate as agenda items). The pre-meeting briefings enable members to develop their knowledge and understanding of Children's Services, which underpins the work of the committee. The Committee would recommend that pre-meeting briefings carry on being provided.
9. These briefings have been limited to six a year to take place immediately before the Committee meetings, this was to avoid additional travelling for committee members. The availability of virtual meetings, which all committee members have successfully accessed during the Covid-19 pandemic, offer potential opportunities, including:
 - holding more than 6 information briefings a year;
 - holding the information briefings on different days to committee meetings;
 - opening the information briefings to all councillors.
10. To ensure that a balance is achieved between providing information that is useful for councillors, and underpins the work of the committee, and the

demands on officers' time it is proposed that the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Children's Select Committee meet with the Cabinet Member and Director to review the list of proposed information briefings (Appendix 2) and determine the number of briefings to be held and when, and topics to prioritise.

11. The Committee would encourage further developing joined up working with other committees, boards or panels of the council to ensure that no issues, or areas for improvement, are missed, this could include:
 - Corporate Parenting Panel;
 - Schools Forum;
 - Health Select Committee;
 - Safeguarding Vulnerable People Partnership (SVPP);
 - FACT programme boards;
 - SEND Local Area Board,
 - Wiltshire Council's Health and Wellbeing Board.

12. Suggestions on ways to develop joined-up working by the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Children's Select Committee could include:
 - Communication between the respective chairs when an agenda for Children's Select Committee is being prepared;
 - Annual meetings with the respective chairs when the Children's Select Committee is setting its priorities for the year ahead (meetings should also be held with Wiltshire Council's Directors and Executive members at the same time);
 - Communication with the Chair and Vice-Chair of Schools Forum ahead of the committee considering the budget (usually January / February).

13. The Chair and Vice-Chair should also continue to ensure that the voices of children and young people in Wiltshire are embedded in the work of the committee. This can be done through regular updates from the Youth Voice team and from direct engagement (may be facilitated by the Youth Voice team) with the young people who form the Wiltshire Youth Union (including Children in Care Council (CiCC), Members of the Youth Parliament (MYP's), and the Care Leavers Forum) to ensure that the committee is aware of WYU's priorities and areas of focus. Direct engagement may take place at the time the committee is setting its work priorities for the year ahead.

14. Paragraphs 8 to 13 above have been reflected in Appendix 2 where appropriate.

15. It could also be beneficial to consider joint training and information sessions between the committee and the bodies listed in paragraph 11 when appropriate, to maximise the use of officers' time as well as strengthening working relationships.

Next Steps

16. The Management Committee meets on 9 March 2021 and will receive the reports from the three select committees. It will also consider a similar report based on its activities primarily in the corporate arena. The members of the Management Committee will give their views on what should be included in a final legacy report which will be written by Scrutiny officers in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair. Following the elections this will then be made available to the new Management Committee, appointed by Council.

Recommendations

17. To approve Appendix 1 as a list of the Children's Select Committee's key activities and achievements during 2017-21.
18. To approve Appendix 2 to recommend to the Management Committee as topics requiring further work in the new Council, including reasons.
19. To approve the following good practice (paragraphs 8 to 15 refer):
 - Information briefings;
 - strengthening joined-up working;
 - embedding the voice of young people in the work of the committee;
 - shared training.
20. To note the next steps described in paragraph 17.

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Appendix 1 – Key activities and achievements for the Children's Select Committee (2017-21)

Appendix 2 - Recommended ongoing Overview and Scrutiny (OS) work under the new Council (and suggested format)