

CHILDREN'S SELECT COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN'S SELECT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 8 JUNE 2021 AT ONLINE.

Present:

Cllr Helen Belcher, Cllr Mary Champion, Cllr Jon Hubbard, Cllr Carole King, Cllr Jacqui Lay, 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 Richard Clewer, Cllr Jane Davies, Cllr Johnny Kidney, Cllr Dominic Muns and Cllr Christopher Williams

1 **Apologies**

There were no apologies from Councillors for the meeting. Corporate Director of People Lucy Townsend, Director of Joint Commissioning Helen Jones and Chief Executive Terence Herbert did offer their apologies.

2 **Election of Chair 2021-22**

Resolved:

To elect Cllr Jon Hubbard as Chairman for the forthcoming year.

3 **Election of Vice-Chair 2021-22**

Resolved:

To elect Cllr Jacqui Lay as Vice-Chairman for the forthcoming year.

4 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 March 2021 were presented for consideration, and it was,

Resolved:

To approve and sign the minutes as a true and correct record.

5 **Declarations of Interest**

Declarations of interest were made by Cllr Mary Champion who declared that she was a foster carer. Cllr Katherine MacDermid declared that she worked for Virgin Care.

6 **Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman welcomed committee members to their first meeting since the election and encouraged them to raise issues that they would like to see on the agenda. He also mentioned the idea of using recorded online briefings to help provide additional support.

It was noted that there would not be a report on Department for Education (DfE) changes, which normally provides an update on developments relating to children's services, as recent updates have been linked to the Covid-19 pandemic.

7 **Public Participation**

There were no questions or statements submitted.

8 **Covid-19 Update**

The Committee was invited to consider the latest Covid-19 update provided to Cabinet on 1 June 2021 (and also considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on 25 May 2021).

Helean Hughes, Director Education and Skills, gave a verbal update on changes since the written update, noting that the overall number of Covid-19 cases had continued to decline. She praised the resilience of staff and provided detail on multi agency support targeted at improving the attendance of children. It was stated that the Holiday and Activity Fund was in place to ensure holiday club provision across the summer break. Post -16 education was also identified as an area of concern with the Careers Hub actively taking measures to ensure that children did not fall into a situation where they were not in education or training (NEET). Given that there had been two years without statutory assessment, she explained that work was being done with schools to offer moderation and ensure standardisation.

Director Families and Children, Martin Davis, also provided a verbal update praising the work of staff during the pandemic. Given the restrictions during lockdown, concern was expressed about the rise in potential number of domestic violence cases, especially given the less public setting of these offences. In addition, he expressed concern that there had been fewer referrals from schools and GPs leading to a reduction in the number of children subject to child protection plans. It was stated that the number of cases had started to rise as lockdown measures were lifted but that initiatives were being put in place to mitigate the impact of this increased demand, including working closely with the police. It was also reported that the Fostering Excellence Campaign

had set a target of increasing the number of in-house carers for children looked after by Wiltshire Council.

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

- Queries were submitted asking how best councillors could help support the work of the Council's teams, particularly given the strain currently placed on staff and the number of new Members on the Committee.
- The issue of staff wellbeing and retention were also raised. It was explained that therapeutic peer support was being provided and that contingency funding was available. It was noted that the turnover of Headteachers was lower than the previous year. The hybrid working model, with council staff working partly from home once Covid-19 restrictions had eased, was also discussed.
- The Council's Thrive Hub Programme, designed to support children's mental wellbeing, was still operating in schools, but the Single Point of Access (SPA) offer was not currently available. Discussions were underway with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAHMS) about the SPA programme in light of recent guidance from the DfE.
- In order to help children with underlying health conditions return to school, a multi-agency team was being brought together so that schools could raise concerns with the Education Welfare Service.
- The pressures in making additional places available to children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) created by Covid-19 were also noted.

Resolved:

- **To note the contents of the report as well as express appreciation for the dedication shown by officers during the pandemic.**

9 Performance Monitoring Report

Tamsin Stone, Head of Performance Outcomes and Quality Assurance for Children's and Adult Services, provided an update to enable the Committee to consider actions taken by the Council towards achieving an 'outstanding' Ofsted rating in Family and Children's Services. It was noted that the previous report in January 2021 lacked comparative data, so this was the first full report.

It was explained that the far greater use of data in recent years had enabled the Council to highlight instances of where results did not fall within expected parameters. A traffic light system (red, amber, green) was in place to help identify areas of concern. Overall, the Council was seen to be in a strong position, comparing favourably on most benchmarking indicators, with relatively few red cases. However, to move from a good to outstanding position, it was noted that a laser focus was required on the red areas. Areas of concern identified were:

- The number of referrals within 12 months of a previous referral.
- The growing demand for family key workers in relation to the number of support cases open.
- A reduction in the number of cases coming forward during Covid-19 meeting 'Child in Need' criteria, those in need of local authority services to maintain a reasonable standard of health, prevent further harm or are disabled. It was noted that numbers were starting to creep up as lockdown measures were eased.
- The percentage of assessments completed within 10 days was off target due to the increasing range and complexity of cases coming through.
- An increase in the number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan with fewer cases being closed.
- The low number of children looked after (CLA) with a small percentage of children placed in residential care homes, hostels and schools.
- The recording of CLA annual health checks.

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

- The Committee praised the usefulness of the traffic light (RAG rating) system and noted that red scores were exception reporting identifying areas which needed attention but were not necessarily evidence that something had gone wrong.
- Concerns were expressed at the lack of young people on child protection plans and the number of potentially hidden cases. It was noted that auditing had been undertaken and found that the correct decisions were being made. It was also explained that certain types of cases, such as neglect, take longer to come through. The hypothesis that preventative measures taken to reduce the number of cases being referred may also have had an impact.
- Discussion about the presentation of the data and the expected changes to the data as a result of new initiatives took place. It was announced that a more user-friendly software package was being adopted.
- Given that the number of children looked after was below the anticipated range but the number in residential homes was above the anticipated range, it was asked if capacity would be available were the number of children looked after to increase to the expected level. Officers noted that they shared this concern and explained that the increased level of need associated with complex cases did make it hard to find suitable placements for some children, especially as the independent fostering agency marketplace had contracted. It was explained that work was ongoing to see what could be done to grow the number of fostering placements in order to avoid unnecessary residential placements in children's homes.

Resolved:

To delegate authority to Chairman and Vice-Chairman to meet with officers to:

- 1. explore the information available and the format in which it could best be presented to CSC in future.**
- 2. Set pre-meeting briefings on Performance Data.**

10 **Child and Youth Voice Team**

Sara James, Service Manager, Quality Outcomes for Children and Families, gave an update on the Child and Youth Voice Team, which launched in April 2021 following a move from the Commissioning Service.

Details were provided about various aspects of their work including the launch of the Youth Consultant Scheme designed to allow children to scrutinise the services, as well as the establishment of a Cultural Diversity Inclusion Task Force. It was reported that work has been undertaken to maximise the voice of young people in meetings of the Children in Care Council (CICC), such as the CICC ambassador scheme. Information was also provided about the launch of the Mind of My Own app, designed to make it easier for children to provide feedback, as well as a scheme to allow young people to meet senior leaders at the Council.

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

- Members welcomed the update about the new team and questioned what was being done on a local level to better engage young people. It was stated that the team were engaging with community youth groups, reaching out to Area Boards, schools and strengthening the Youth Union.
- The team's involvement in the Child Wellbeing Survey was also queried and the Committee were informed about efforts to speak to harder to reach children such as those not attending school. It was stated that as the prominence of the team grows, and networks are established, they will be in a better position to identify gaps where greater resources are needed.
- Members did express frustration that there had previously been excellent systems of engaging young people, but these had been scrapped and were now only being partially replaced. However, they were excited by the work of the team and were keen to look at ways that Scrutiny could support the team, particularly at a local level.

Resolved:

For the Committee to delegate authority to the Chairman and Vice-Chairman to determine further scrutiny activity (such as item to committee, rapid scrutiny or task group) based on the information the

Chairman and Vice-Chairman will receive in an in-depth briefing on the action plan.

The date and time of the briefing will be set based on the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and relevant officers' availability but members of the Committee will be welcome to attend as well.

For an evaluation of Youth Consultants to be made available to the committee.

11 School Ofsted Judgements

Louise Lewis, Head of School Effectiveness, notified the Committee that Ofsted inspections had been suspended during part of the pandemic, but online inspections had been phased back in from January 2021, albeit without formal judgements. The focus of inspections was the delivery of remote education and supporting vulnerable pupils. It was reported that face to face Section 8 inspections had resumed from the summer term.

Although it was difficult to identify trends due to the nature of the inspections, a key strength identified was that schools were still focusing on improvement. It was found that schools were very curriculum focussed and had a particular focus on phonics, even within secondary schools.

Resolved:

To note the update.

12 Adoption West Joint Scrutiny Panel - annual report

Due to time pressure it was decided to defer this item until the next meeting on 6 July so that it could be given proper consideration.

Resolved:

To defer to the next meeting.

13 Overview and Scrutiny work priorities and approach: Recommendations from the 2017-21 council

A Review of Overview and Scrutiny (OS) 2017-2021 was undertaken at the end of the previous council and the outcomes were presented to OS Management Committee on 9 March 2021.

OS Management Committee used the information from the review to establish work priorities and OS approach at its meeting on 25 May 2021. The recommendations from that meeting were attached to the meeting agenda and discussed at the Committee.

Concerns were raised about the name and remit of the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAHMS) task group, as previous reports were seen as lacking information on wider mental health provision for young people. Members noted that CAHMS should be seen as a last resort and support was required before that stage.

Members suggested that Children and Young People's Mental Health Task Group would be a more appropriate name for the task group and have the benefit of being able to look at the early help available.

There was a brief discussion about the benefits of starting up a Whole Life Pathway task group. The role of young carers was also identified as an important area of focus and it was suggested that a virtual briefing on the subject could be arranged before a discussion on taking forward scrutiny activity.

Resolved:

- 1. To note this council's agreed core values for its OS function.**
- 2. To note OS's key strengths and development areas as highlighted by the previous council and Management Committee's resolution to include these in any review of OS's approach and effectiveness in the new council.**
- 3. To note the forward work programme (*Appendix 1*) agreed by Management Committee, delegating authority to the Chair and Vice-chair to develop this further (including the timing of activities), with proposals brought back to committee.**
- 4. To support early discussion between the Chair and Vice-Chair with cabinet members, portfolio-holders and directors to gain a more informed understanding about executive priorities, with outcomes reported back to committee.**
- 5. To note this committee's task group/panel structure at the conclusion of the previous Management Committee as follows:**
 - Adoption West Joint Scrutiny Panel**
 - Children & Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) Task Group**
- 6. To approve continuation of the above task groups/panels and memberships, and to authorise the Chair and Vice-Chair to name councillors to fill vacancies on these and other ad hoc activities following an opportunity for expressions of interest from all non-executive councillors.**
- 7. To delegate authority to Chair/Vice-Chair to agree with their counterparts in the Health Select Committee a date to commence the work of the joint Whole**

Life Pathway task group, as approved in March 2020 and endorsed by the Management Committee in May 2021;

8. To agree the areas of good practice (*Appendix 2*) the Committee wishes to implement and delegate authority to Chair/Vice-Chair to develop and dovetail these with the forward work programme.

- Pre-meeting briefings
- Joined up working (including joint training and information sessions)
- Embedding the voice of children and young people in the work of the Committee.
- Working group for annual reports

9. Rename the CAMHS task group to “Children and Young People’s Mental Health” and review its terms of reference before it starts its work to ensure a more holistic approach. Delegate to Chair and Vice-Chair to meet with the Health Select Committee Chair and Vice-Chair to set the terms of reference.

10. Arrange the Young Carers Chair’s briefing with all members (and especially members of Children’s Select Committee)

14 **Date of Next Meeting**

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 6 July 2021.

15 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

PART II

None

(Duration of meeting: 2.30 - 5.10 pm)

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