Wiltshire Council

Children's Select Committee

20 September 2022

Task Group and Rapid Scrutiny Update

Purpose

To provide an update on any recent work from task groups and rapid scrutiny exercises linked to the Children's Select Committee (CSC), as well as information on any upcoming overview and scrutiny (OS) activities for the committee.

Updates from active Task Groups

1. Children's Select Committee – Standing Task Group

Supporting officer: Marie Gondlach

Membership

Cllr Helen Belcher
John Hawkins
Cllr Jon Hubbard (Chair)
Cllr Jacqui Lay
Cllr Caroline Thomas
Cllr Jo Trigg

Terms of Reference

At its 6 July 2021 meeting, the Children's Select Committee resolved to establish this Standing Task Group:

1. To undertake detailed reviews of the regular reports that come within the Children's Select Committee's remit and to bring updates to the Committee on its work;

2. To present any key issues, findings and recommendations to the Children's Select Committee, and / or other relevant committees, for discussion, endorsement or further scrutiny where appropriate;

3. To invite all members and substitutes of Children's Select Committee to its meetings, should they wish to attend and participate.

Recent activity

The Standing Task Group met on Monday 5 September to consider the Wiltshire Council Adoption Service: 2021-2022 Year End Report.

The main outcome from that meeting was an agreement to co-ordinate the different reports linked to adoption to be presented to Children's Select Committee to enable committee members to have a more holistic overview of adoption in Wiltshire. The Chair of the Adoption West Joint Scrutiny Panel, Cllr Jon Hubbard will liaise with officers involved with producing the above year end report to facilitate this.

When reviewing the report (to be considered by Cabinet on 27 September and to be received by the Children's Select Committee on 25 October – currently available here), the Standing Task Group made a number of suggestions to improve accessibility of the report and its meaning for the committee:

- Providing background information on the targets used (brief explanation of target setting);
- Considering different ways of presenting the data as numbers are low therefore outliers can significantly skewer the average data presented;
- Considering a different format for the report to avoid duplication between the executive summary and the body of the report as well as avoiding duplication with the Adoption West Annual Report (which can be an appendix to the report). It was suggested that there could be a cover report explaining the purpose of the three reports underpinning it: Wiltshire Council Adoption Service Year End Report, Adoption West annual report and the Adoption West Joint Scrutiny Panel annual report;
- Including the overall number of children in care in Wiltshire to give context to the numbers linked to adoption;
- Including data on placement and adoption breakdowns (pre and post adoption order) and on the number of families / children supported by Adoption West;
- Including a diagram showing the child's journey, which would clarify the split of responsibility between the local authority and Adoption West;
- Including Wiltshire Council's own recording / monitoring of performance and analysis of systemic issues (to further differentiate from the Adoption West report which presents a view of the region – not specifics about Wiltshire);
- Adding information / reasons for improvements – the information provided in the report was positive but the reasons for the good performance could be further detailed.

Although the Standing task group made a number of suggestions on the format of the report and some of its contents, it wished for the committee to note that the report did indicate that there were no issues or areas of concerns identified with regards to the adoption service.

The task group also identified a difference in allowances paid and was glad to hear that this was already being considered by the council.

2. Fostering Excellence Task Group

Supporting officer: Marie Gondlach

Membership

Cllr Liz Alstrom
Cllr Chuck Berry (Chair)
Cllr Ruth Hopkinson
Cllr Sam Pearce-Kearney
Cllr Mark Verbinnen

It should be noted that Cllr Jack Oatley was appointed to the task group but had to resign at the second meeting as he was no longer able to attend the scheduled meetings of the task group.

<u>Terms of Reference</u>

For the Fostering Excellence task group to:

1. review how the Fostering Excellence project has been / is / will be addressing the issues identified in the report presented to CSC on 10 March 2020:
    a. Increase initial enquiries and therefore assessments and approvals of Wiltshire Council foster carers;
    b. Improve the retention of Wiltshire approved foster carers;
    c. Increase the percentage of Wiltshire children in foster care cared for by Wiltshire Council foster carers (at the time 46%);
    d. Maintain high occupancy rates of Wiltshire approved foster carers (at the time 80%+).

2. identify how the effectiveness of the Fostering Excellence project will be measured and reported, and be satisfied that this is robust and delivering improvements whilst achieving the savings identified in the budget 2022-23;

3. identify how the benefits of being placed with Wiltshire Council foster carers (who are receiving enhanced training / support as part of Fostering Excellence) for children in care will be measured and reported, and be satisfied that this is robust;

4. identify best practice across the country for recruitment and retention of in-house foster carers.

<u>Recent activity</u>

The task group has not met since the last meeting of the committee.

Upcoming activities

The following rapid scrutiny exercises (RS) and task groups (TG) will have been advertised between publication of the agenda and the meeting of the committee (or shortly after):
-   Road map to excellence RS
-   The council's options in terms of setting its own MAT (multi academy trust) RS
-   Children and young people's mental health TG (will start after September meeting – agenda items linked)

- Youth provision and youth service funding TG
- Provision for post-16 TG

Proposals

1. **To note the update on task group and rapid scrutiny activities provided.**

Report authors:

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