

Children's Select Committee

MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN'S SELECT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 24 JANUARY 2024 AT COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNTY HALL, BYTHESEA ROAD, TROWBRIDGE, BA14 8JN.

Present:

Cllr Jacqui Lay, Cllr Carole King, Cllr Helen Belcher OBE, Cllr Jo Trigg, Cllr Mike Sankey, Cllr Kathryn McDermid, Cllr Mark Verbinnen, John Hawkins, Cllr Suzanne Wickham, Cllr Mary Champion, Cllr Bridget Wayman, Cllr Kelvin Nash

Also Present:

Cllr Laura Mayes, Lucy Townsend, Ben Stevens

1 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from:

Cllr Jon Hubbard
Dr Mike Thompson
Cllr Caroline Corbin

2 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

Resolved

To approve the minutes of previous meetings, held on 31 October 2023, and 7 December 2023, as a true and correct record.

3 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

4 **Chairman's Announcements**

The committee was reminded that there would be an informal meeting straight after to consider the budget.

5 **Public Participation**

There was no public participation.

6 **Regular updates**

6a Update from Wiltshire Youth Voice Representative

An update including a summary of recent activities of the Wiltshire Youth Union

(WYU) and Children in Care Council (CiCC).

Concern was raised about a case of potential discrimination, with it being clarified that discussions were ongoing to ascertain the specifics and was being treated with seriousness.

Other concerns were raised at how carers and those in care were being defined and labelled in public, with foster children not wishing to be labelled as such in front of classmates. It was clarified that discussions with children, teachers and other parties were ongoing to understand how those in the system wished to be addressed and referred to and ensure no one felt uncomfortable in public settings such as classrooms.

The written report was noted.

6b School Ofsted Judgements

An update including information regarding the most recent Ofsted Inspection reports, presenting an ongoing view of the effectiveness of schools as seen by Ofsted Inspection.

Officers were praised for recent OFSTED outcomes and the two remaining schools with “requires improvements” were noted as future targets for improvement.

It was noted that as the birth rate had dropped, schools were concerned over numbers for future cohorts.

Written report noted.

6c 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.

7 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.

It was clarified that those children who used “alternative provision” for education were still recorded in attendance data.

On a question about levels of “off rolling” and “homeschooling” it was clarified that there had been an increase in numbers since COVID which was reflected

nationally. It was not being considered as a major concern but was being monitored.

Reasons given for elective home education are monitored but among a variety of reasons, lifestyle choice was commonly given and therefore wasn't concerning.

It was clarified that there are different categories for absences and that reasons such as medical appointments/procedures were examples of perfectly acceptable reasons to be absent from school.

The written update was noted.

8 **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.

8a 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.

9 **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.

It was stated that the final draft had been to Cabinet with some changes and were highlighted in the report. It had yet to be signed off, but this was expected soon. A capital request had also been submitted to DfE.

The Committee again praised officers for a very clear and well laid out report.

The written update was noted.

10 **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.

Lucy Townsend, Corporate Director for People – Kathryn Davis has taken over as interim director for Education and Skills and an advert has been put out for a permanent appointment. Cate Mullin, Head of SEND has also left her role and Lisa Fryer has been appointed permanently to the role.

Calens House has been upgraded from requires improvement to Good.

Wiltshire Council had been reappointed as a sector led improvement partner by the DfE.

11 **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.

Laura Mayes, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills – Sitting on the LGAs young people's board, there was a very good presentation on SEND and what is going wrong with the system and how to transform it. This would be shared with Wiltshire Council's SEND team.

12 **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 were no updates.

13 **Family Hubs**

The committee received a presentation from officers on the council's evaluation of the Family Hub pilot projects. The committee had also asked for information to be provided on the council's plans to monitor both the delivery and success of the Family Hubs.

Overall statistics were extremely positive with overwhelming responses being "very satisfied", "very positive" and "extremely aware" of the pilot.

Early success factors included working with the family in the home and at school, networking and collaborating alongside other organisations and

feedback received has been positive and grateful for these elements of the scheme.

Challenges had been identified to be addressed including consistency, capacity and further communication.

It was clarified that 24 families were being worked with currently.

Resolved

- **For progress reports to be presented to the Standing Task Group or the chair and vice-chair of the Select Committee (whichever is most appropriate at the time) as follows:**
 - **mobilisation of the new contract (May/June)**
 - **development of Family Hubs (September)**
 - **evaluation of performance (December)**

- **For a report to be presented to the full committee on 15 January 2025 detailing the mobilisation of the new contract, development of Family Hubs by Spurgeons and evaluation of performance, dependant on the updates received by the Standing Task Group.**

14 School Health and Wellbeing survey

The committee considered a report which provided an update to the Children's Select Committee on action taken in response to the findings of Wiltshire's Children and Young People's Health and Wellbeing Survey 2021, which outlined plans for future health and wellbeing related surveys.

In September 2023, schools, and partners from across the system working directly or indirectly with children, young people and families were asked to complete a short, anonymous questionnaire to feedback on their awareness of the Children and Young People's Health and Wellbeing survey reports, and whether or how they used the findings. There were two questionnaires:

- 1) For school staff - to which there were 33 responses from 28 schools, and
- 2) For anyone else delivering or commissioning services for children and young people in Wiltshire – to which there were 147 responses available for analysis.

The responses provided a useful insight, school staff all reported using the reports generated by the health and wellbeing survey and indicated that the different styles of report were useful.

There were some who were less aware and therefore the need to improve communication was made clear.

It was clarified that 77 schools were involved, of which only 17 were secondary. A range of methods had been used to promote the survey to schools and their governors through governors' briefings.

Data around substance abuse was clarified as separating alcohol and tobacco from other substances.

Resolved

- **For the results of the Emotional Health Survey 2024, and proposals on actions to be taken, to be presented to the committee's Standing Task Group. At that same meeting the task group would also review the report that was received today, as it is assumed that a similar report would be produced for the 2024 Emotional Health Survey and the 2025 Health and Wellbeing survey, to ensure maximised use of the data and information gathered.**
- **In future it is proposed that this committee only receives the analysis reports, with links to the survey results. However, the committee would like to remain informed of the surveys taking place so that members can promote accordingly and encourage schools, alternative provision, home educators, etc. to take part.**

15 **Ofsted inspection outcome**

The committee considered the attached report detailing the key points of the outcome and findings of the Ofsted's inspection of Wiltshire Council's Children Services conducted in September 2023.

Since 2019's Ofsted inspection, service leaders had focused on strengthening existing services further and investing in new preventative services and teams. This has resulted in an improved quality and strength of services provided even as the level of need has risen.

Children benefitted from effective early support through the Integrated Front Door (IFD) that works with partner agencies to jointly assess and plan initial responses to referrals.

Once in the system, children received support in their health, education and social lives and appropriate and sensitive decisions were taken effectively.

Care leavers were supported in their roles well and given extensive training and pathway plans to ensure their own ambitions were supported and achieved.

Those in Social Work felt well led and supported by consistent and visible management, who in turn monitored performance and progress.

Two Ares for Improvement were identified as the effectiveness and quality of practise to support homeless 16- and 17-year-olds, and the quality and consistency of recording of supervision and frontline management oversight.

Resolved

- **The Committee congratulated the whole service for achieving outstanding,**
- **To receive the updated business plan at the March meeting**

16 **Dads Matter Too**

When the Committee considered the outcome of the review of the “Dad’s Matter Too” multi-agency project in September 2023, it resolved to receive an update in January 2024 on:

1. The partnership’s response to the learning and how this would be taken forward following consideration of the outcome of the review by the Families and Children’s Systems Assurance Group, Safeguarding Vulnerable People’s Partnership and the Under 1s Steering Group.
2. The evaluation of work with the Fatherhood Institute.

Following on from the evaluation, in May 2023, it was agreed that DMT would continue outside of the formal project for a further period of time so that the learning gained could be shared and embedded across the service. This would happen alongside the research project Improving Safeguarding through Audited Father Engagement (ISAFE) the service subsequently agreed to take part in, which seeks to improve engagement with fathers and father-figures. It aims to address the widespread difficulty faced by statutory social work services in routinely and systematically engaging, assessing, supporting, and challenging men in families. ISAFE has been developed as a proactive approach enabling local authorities to lay the foundations for confident, systematic father-inclusive practice throughout their social care provision (Foundations, DfE 2023).

The ISAFE presentation informed that of the 4 local authorities whose data had been examined to date, Wiltshire had the best starting point in terms of the % of fathers named on the child’s records; the % of fathers whose contact details were recorded on the system and the % of fathers invited to the initial and review child protection conferences.

Dads Matter Too has since continued with 2 full-time workers. In continuing the project, the geographical and age limitations in respect of the fathers was removed, opening up the provision to all of the SASS teams. As a result of adjusting the eligibility, the threshold for referrals was increased to families

whereby the child was subject to a child protection plan/pre-proceedings. Priority was also given to fathers who had experienced a previous child removal or who were themselves care experienced (this accounted for 33% of the fathers we worked with during the pilot).

The full report can be found in the agenda pack.

It was clarified that the project had ended and would become Business as Usual.

Resolved

- **To note the positive outcomes achieved by the Dads Matter Too intervention workers, future plans and interest from other Local Authorities.**
- **The Committee requested that an update on the embedding of Dads Matter Too be included, at an appropriate time, in the regular Director's update.**

17 Youth provision and area board youth funding task group executive response

On 21 September 2023, the Children's Select Committee endorsed the Final Report of the Task Group. The Executive Response was included in the agenda for consideration by the committee.

Officers stated that the response was detailed in the report which is attached to the agenda.

Resolved

- **To note the executive response to the Final Report of the Youth Provision and Area Board Youth Funding Task Group**
- **In July 2024 for task group members to receive an update on implementation of the actions as presented in the Executive Response, with a report to be presented to Children's Select Committee after September 2024 (latest date given for implementation).**
- **The Committee would like to review draft amendments to the area board funding criteria before it is published.**

18 Forward Work Programme and proposed activities

The committee was asked to note the attached documents showing the relevant items from the overview and scrutiny forward work programme and the latest version of the strategy list for the Children, Education and Skills directorate.

There was an omission on the agenda which was feedback from the standing task group on the School Traded Services Report.

The task group met with officers to review the report on 8th December. In summary they concluded the report was excellent. Most notably they appreciated the inclusion of a cost benefit analysis and the detailed format.

In terms of content, they felt it was good to see the directorate communicating with Stand Alone Trusts (SATS) and Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) and were encouraged by the out of county contracts and hoped they would continue. They noted too that that the service was exceeding expectations in support to newly qualified teachers, safeguarding and school improvements.

The group noted the potential for the safety valve programme to impact the work and income of the directorate.

Resolved

- **To establish a Task Group on Children and Young Peoples Mental Health services and developments**

19 **Date of Next Meeting**

The date of the next meeting is 12 March 2024.

20 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

21 **PART II**

The minutes from the previous meeting on 7 December 2023 were submitted as an accurate record.

(Duration of meeting: 10.30am – 13.05pm)

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