

Children's Select Committee

MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN'S SELECT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 6 JUNE 2023 AT COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNTY HALL, BYTHESEA ROAD, TROWBRIDGE, BA14 8JN.

Present:

Cllr Jon Hubbard (Chairman), Cllr Jacqui Lay (Vice-Chairman), Cllr Kelvin Nash, Cllr Mary Champion, Cllr Carole King, Cllr Kathryn MacDermid, Cllr Mike Sankey, Cllr Jo Trigg, Cllr Mark Verbinnen, Cllr Bridget Wayman, and Dr Mike Thompson - Clifton Diocesan RC Representative

Also Present:

Cllr Laura Mayes, Cllr Trevor Carbin, Cllr Dominic Muns, Cllr Susanne Wickham, Cllr Iain Blair-Pilling, Lucy Townsend, Andrew Best, Clara Davis, Helean Hughes, Gary Binstead, Jen Salter, Sue Ellison, John Hawkins, Lucy-Anne Bryant, Julie Bielby, Max Hirst, and Matt Hitch

41 Election of Chairman 2023/24

Max Hirst, the Democratic Service Officer, opened the meeting and asked for nominations in order to elect a chairman for the forthcoming year.

Cllr Jacqui Lay proposed Cllr Jon Hubbard for Chairman.

Resolved:

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

42 Election of Vice-Chairman 2023/24

The elected Chairman, Cllr Jon Hubbard, asked for nominations to elect a Vice-Chairman for the forthcoming year and himself proposed Cllr Jacqui Lay.

Resolved:

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

43 Apologies

Apologies were received from:

Cllr Helen Belcher (OBE) with Cllr Trevor Carbin substituting.
Cllr Peter Hutton
Cllr Caroline Corbin

Cllr Jane Davies

The Committee thanked Cllr James Sheppard who was a member of this committee but has now taken on the role of chairman of the council and welcomed Cllr Bridget Wayman.

44 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 14 March 2023 were presented for consideration. After which, it was:

Resolved

To approve the minutes of the previous meeting, held on 14 March 2023, as a true and correct record.

45 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

46 **Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman asked the committee to join him in welcoming Max Hirst, the new Democratic Services Officer for the Children's Select Committee.

47 **Public Participation**

There was no public participation.

48 **Family Hub**

The committee considered a report on a new service to replace children's centres offering support for families 0-19 (25 with SEND), before it is presented to Cabinet on 13 June 2023. Gary Binstead, Head of Commissioning – Families and Children summarised the report.

It was stated that Cabinet would be asked to accept the following proposals:

1. Approve the commissioning of family hubs across Wiltshire from April 1st, 2024.
2. Approve that all services are commissioned externally through an open procurement, with a 5-year contract awarded to the successful provider, with the option to extend for up to a further 2 years.
3. Approve the Pathfinder project in Westbury and Warminster transferring into the new contract when it commences on 1st April 2024.
4. To delegate authority to approve and award a new contract, and take all necessary steps associated to the Corporate Director Resources and Deputy Chief Executive, and Corporate Director of People in consultation

with the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills

The Government had a manifesto pledge to champion family hubs, that offer support for families with children aged 0-19 (up to 25 with SEND). Six South West Local Authorities were awarded grant funding, but Wiltshire had not been selected for any additional funding to date. It was emphasised that a high level of consultation and detail was applied to the bid and thus were disappointed in this outcome.

However, Wiltshire Council had taken the decision to develop family hubs, redesigning existing services to improve access to Family Help and improve outcomes for children and families across the county. Wiltshire family hubs were intended to be operational from April 2024.

During debate, Cllr Iain Blair-Pilling expressed his delight as Cabinet Member for Public Health, Leisure, Libraries, FM and Operational Assets that Libraries and Leisure centres were being utilised to deliver the initiative.

Further to this, recognition was given by the committee to the library and leisure staff and clarification was given on upskilling staff and ensuring they are supported through training.

The Committee were also assured that enough resources were being focused on deprived areas and clarification was given as to why there had been a reduction in hospital visits, including what the key metrics are with regards to family hubs.

The following priorities of the model were also explained:

- Reducing the number of people needing to attend hospital.
- Increase in number of early support assessments.
- Lowering accidents and missed appointments.

It was clarified that the goals could be endless but that a focus was being made on these priorities.

The committee expressed its desire to receive a briefing after tendering, and a tentative date was set for the beginning of 2024.

Resolved:

To note the report

To receive a pre-meeting briefing presentation on the contract / proposed service, ideally jointly presented by the provider(s) + agenda item with details of the service (update on the hubs, recruitment of Navigators and Family Hub practitioners, etc.) including more information on the Westbury and Warminster pilot project (including measuring of success /

efficiency as evaluated by IPC, Oxford Brookes University), probably at the January 2024 meeting.

49 **Business plan and action plan update**

The Committee was updated on the business planning process for the council, the link to the activity of families & children and the use of the current Business Plan as a structure on which to plan the activity of children, families and education services. Planned Activities and Updates can be found in full in the report attached to the agenda.

Cllr Laura Mayes, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Skills, first commended the report for providing a good summary of all the work happening in Children's Services.

During debate, the committee were informed that:

About 60 schools are engaged in the premium partner network. The priorities of Children's Services include attendance, closing the gap between disadvantaged learners, and leadership and management. Parents who get at least their second or third choice of school is around 99 percent.

A response is to follow as to where the CIF (Condition Improvement Fund) fund for improving buildings for academies is being utilised as Wiltshire Council and the Southwest have had very little success with bids. Feedback is to be jointly provided with the ICB (Integrated Care Board) as to what stage the Emotional and Mental Health strategy is in regard to being published. Consideration could be given to training younger individuals in First Aid, especially around mental health.

Resolved

Accept recommendation to note the report and make use of the information contained to help focus future deep scrutiny activity.

The committee requested that the Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Strategy, the review of the CAMHS contract, Early Years Strategy, be presented to the committee when appropriate. Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Strategy presented to the committee, including feedback on workshop held on Friday 9 June. Prior to this the draft strategy would be presented to the CSC Standing Task Group.

To consider the outcome of the recent review of the Support and Safeguarding service at our July meeting which may include outcomes of the "Dads matter too" multi agency project (if not this will be considered at the next available meeting).

Healthy Schools programme – online briefing.

For the outcome of the extensive review of the CAMHS contract to be presented to this committee (end of 2023 / early 2024).

To receive an update on the business plan and action plan in 6 months (16 January 2024).

50 **Child poverty**

The committee considered the attached report providing an update on Child Poverty in Wiltshire, including the national policy background, the data picture in Wiltshire within a national context, and the activities of the Council.

In the report, the committee was reminded that:

A child is considered to be growing up in poverty if they live in a household whose income is below 60% of the average (median) income for that year. This is called 'relative poverty'. Data on relative child poverty is available both before (BHC) and after housing costs (AHC) are taken into account.

The threshold for *absolute* poverty is set at 60% of the average (median) net household income in 2010/11 (as adjusted for inflation). This threshold does not fluctuate over time.

Lucy Townsend, Corporate Director for People gave a verbal update.

There has been a slight increase in relative child poverty after housing costs from 19.1% to 20.9%. Therefore, meaning Wiltshire is lower than the South West and National figures.

Statistics surrounding free school meals was provided showing a rise in children eligible through low income, although it was stated that it doesn't directly reflect child poverty figures as the criteria for free school meals is different.

The committee was reminded that The Child Poverty Act 2010, which set targets for the reduction of the percentage of children in poverty, was subsequently removed through The Welfare Reform and Work Act of 2016.

However, the reducing child poverty strategy in Wiltshire, and its objectives were reiterated and reports were still related to each of these:

Objective 1 – Provide effective support to vulnerable families with 0-5 year olds

Objective 2 – Narrowing the Educational Attainment Gap

Objective 3 – Develop an inclusive economy that will enable equality of economic opportunity for all

Objective 4 – Provide locally-focused support based on a thorough understanding of needs

Objective 5 – Promote engagement with the Child Poverty Strategy and related implementation plan

Wiltshire is currently ranked 190 out of 201 upper-tier authorities by a measure of the percentage of workless households, and ranked 181 out of 201 by a measure of the percentage of children in workless households.

The Improving Lives: Helping Workless Families initiative was reiterated along with its ambitions, which set out proposals to:

- Launch the next phase of the Troubled Families Programme, which placed a greater emphasis on helping parents with complex needs into work.
- A new programme to reduce parental conflict.
- Enhance the role of Jobcentre Plus to identify and meet complex needs.
- Provide greater support to help those with drug and alcohol dependencies.

With regards to activities happening around the agenda, it was noted The Household Support Fund has been allocated over £5 million. This fund has been used to support children on free school meals during the school holidays. Although a broad fund it has been focused on energy bills and food costs.

It was reported that unfortunately the company that provides the FUEL camps has gone into administration.

During debate, clarification was given that Wiltshire's areas of deprivation were significantly influenced by child poverty statistics and similar also to free school meals but is not exactly the same as the criteria varies slightly. Further explanation would be provided at a future date regarding the exact threshold of median income to be considered in child poverty. A point was made that it's crucial that FUEL's vital work continues. A chair briefing on the situational developments of FUEL was requested.

The question as to whether an overarching strategy would assist was debated. It was stated that everything we are doing in Wiltshire is to give children the best start in life through different strategies and that whether another overarching one would help is uncertain.

Resolved:

To note the report.

To ask the Executive to consider having a Reducing Child Poverty strategy to ensure this remains at the forefront of councillors' minds.

To receive a Chair's briefing on the revised provision of the FUEL programme.

51 **Executive Response to the Final Report of the High Needs Block (HNB) Funding Rapid Scrutiny**

The committee received a response from the Cabinet Member to the Final Report of the High Needs Block Funding Rapid Scrutiny.

After receiving the report and moving into debate, the committee was reminded that it had been given a recommendation in the report to carry out a further Scrutiny of Local Authorities who have low High Needs Block.

It was pointed out that information that was due to be placed on the councillor's hub as per recommendation 4 had not yet been actioned.

The finance lead would be in post by July 2023 as expected by recommendation 7.

Resolved

To nominate Cllr Jo Trigg as the committee's representative on the council's governance body linked with the "Delivering better value (DBV) in SEND" DfE-led programme name Jo Trigg as an overview and scrutiny member on the council's governance body.

To arrange a meeting for the chair, vice-chair, lead of the Rapid Scrutiny and relevant officers to determine the best approach for looking into local authorities who do not have a HNB deficit. This was proposed as an additional rapid scrutiny but will also be addressed by the DBV board, therefore consideration will be given to the most efficient approach.

To note the response.

52

Regular updates

52a Update from Wiltshire Youth Voice Representative

An update was received by the committee including a summary of recent activities of the Wiltshire Youth Union (WYU) and Children in Care Council (CiCC).

The Chairman, Cllr Jon Hubbard, asked the committee to join him in congratulating Cameron Draisey from the council's Child and Youth Voice Team who received a Frontline Award at a ceremony held in London on Wednesday 17 May.

52b School Ofsted Judgements

An update was presented to the committee from Andrew Best, Head of School Effectiveness, which included information regarding the most recent Ofsted Inspection reports, presenting an ongoing view of the effectiveness of schools as seen by Ofsted Inspection.

It was clarified that reflection was ongoing and support was being offered to schools after the death of Head teacher Ruth Perry. Andrew emphasised that he felt the vast majority of inspections were fair and robust but there had been a slight change in tone/approach since Ruth's death.

Concern was raised at lowering numbers of Good and Outstanding grades.

52c DfE Changes - Update from Department for Education

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

53 Working together to improve school attendance

The committee considered new non-statutory guidance published by the DfE in May 2022 to help schools, trusts, governing bodies, and local authorities maintain high levels of school attendance. The guidance applies 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.

A point was raised about Secondary school attendance at 91% and the need to focus on it. It was clarified that there were serious concerns about it and the issue and reasons for it were shared nationally and Wiltshire haven't been viewed by DfE advisor as high risk.

Resolved

Committee to receive outcome of the work being undertaken with regards to low attendance (91%), in the meantime for the regular update to include a breakdown of the reasons for children not attending school and trends, especially for persistent absences for at least one session a week, to have a better understanding of the challenges.

54 Schools Forum

There had been no meeting of Schools Forum since this committee's last meeting.

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

54a 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.

Councillors were reminded of an opportunity to attend drop-in sessions, as Corporate Parents, to find out more about the work at Canons House.

55 Directors' update

The committee received a verbal update from Directors highlighting key issues (current or emerging), successes or milestones in their respective areas since the last meeting of the committee.

From Helean Hughes, Director for Education and Skills, the committee was notified that she will now be sharing with a co-director of Education and Skills Richard Hanks. An EHCP briefing on its timeliness was completed and has risen to 45.8%. The case backlog has dropped significantly from 389 to 253. Ben Stevens has also joined the team as Sustainability Strategic Lead. It was also clarified that the SLA is still yet to be signed by some schools, but progress is being made.

From Jen Salter, Director for Families and Children, it was announced that a report from the Institute of Public Care from Oxford Brooks University would be coming to the committee at the next meeting and would praise the council's prevention work. Wiltshire's role as a DfE sector led improvement partner was also mentioned and how they were helping other LA's. The charity Front Line has approached Wiltshire to run an event about supporting social worker.

From Lucy Townsend, Corporate Director for People, it was stated that there had been a request from head of policy of Stable Homes Built on Love to visit Wiltshire, which is an opportunity to showcase work. Regionally it's being decided whether to put in a Southwest bid to be part of a regional care cooperative. There has been lots of activity with the Health Agenda since the ICB's establishment last July so an update to the committee was proposed. Cabinet has made a decision regarding Public Health Nursing and it is being readied to tender. Community Health will be presenting to the Health Select Committee so the Childrens Select Committee may wish to add representatives to that meeting. There is a team coming from the LGA to inquire at the impact and effectiveness of the local area partnership, the early identification of SEND and support through a graduated approach across the local area partnership, the voice and engagement of service users and families, the neurodevelopmental pathway in Wiltshire and join commissioning arrangements across the local area in Wiltshire.

56 **Cabinet Member and Portfolio Holders' update**

The committee received a verbal update from Cllr Laura Mayes, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Skills and also Cllr Suzanne Wickham, SEND portfolio holder highlighting news, successes or milestones in their respective areas since the last meeting of the committee.

An event was held to celebrate the independent visitor scheme. The LGA's SEND review was stated as being the week after the meeting.

Cllr Suzanne Wickham stated that she had attended several extremely useful meetings including the SEND Continuum Event.

57 **Chair's update**

The committee received a verbal update from the Chairman Cllr Jon Hubbard on work undertaken or news since the last meeting.

The chair invited committee members to read the outcomes of the working group placement strategy.

The chair provided feedback on his attendance of the People's Voice Conference in Manchester. It was confirmed that Wiltshire Council is taking part in the Risk Outside the Home Pilot.

The chair noted that Wiltshire Community Foundation were bringing together youth organisations to create a more co-ordinated county wide approach.

58 **Forward Work Programme**

The Committee noted 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.

A vacancy on the standing task group was highlighted. It was also requested that school transport be added to the Forward Work Programme.

59 **Date of Next Meeting**

The next scheduled meeting is due to be held on **Wednesday 12 July 2023** at County Hall, Trowbridge, starting at **10.30am**.

60 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

(Duration of meeting: 10:40 – 13:01)

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

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