

Children's Select Committee

MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN'S SELECT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 15 MARCH 2022 AT COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNCIL OFFICES, MONKTON PARK, CHIPPENHAM, SN15 1ER.

Present:

Cllr Jon Hubbard (Chairman), Cllr Mary Champion, Cllr Carole King, Cllr Kathryn Macdermid, Cllr Antonio Piazza, Cllr Mike Sankey, Cllr James Sheppard, Cllr Jo Trigg, Cllr Mark Verbinnen, John Hawkins and Cllr Adrian Foster (Substitute)

Also Present:

Cllr Peter Hutton, Cllr Laura Mayes, Cllr Dominic Muns and Cllr Suzanne Wickham

19 **Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from the following Committee Members:

- Cllr Jacqui Lay (Vice-Chairman)
- Cllr Kelvin Nash
- Cllr Helen Belcher (substituted by Cllr Adrian Foster)
- Cllr Caroline Thomas
- Dr Mike Thomson – Clifton Diocesan RC Representative
- Catriona Williamson – Primary Head Teacher Representative
- Nikki Barnett – Further Education Representative

Apologies were also received from:

- Cllr Chris Williams
- Terence Herbert – Chief Executive of Wiltshire Council
- Tamsin Stone – Head of Performance, Outcomes and Quality Assurance in Children and Adult Services

20 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

Resolved

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 19 January 2022 were approved as a true and correct record.

21 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interests.

22 **Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman reminded the Committee that all Wiltshire Councillors had been invited to watch Item 14 on the agenda, Getting to Outstanding, because of their role as Corporate Parents.

23 **Public Participation**

No questions were submitted by the public.

24 **Covid-19 update**

The Corporate Director People and the Director of Families and Children's Services provided a verbal update on the steps being taken by Children's Services to recover from the impact of the pandemic. It was reported that a Strategic Coordination Group was in place to oversee the recovery and to hold performance to account. Issues identified were similar to those existing pre-pandemic but had increased in terms of demand and complexity. The Directors explained that since the last meeting there had been an increase in the number of lower-level referrals from partner agencies, with over 100 per week coming in from the police. Auditing had taken place to monitor this trend and found that conversion to support cases remained steady.

The Director of Families and Children's Services reported that there were 345 Child Protection cases, equating to about 32.5 per 10,000 children, which was in line with good/outstanding Local Authorities (LAs) and just below Wiltshire Council's target range. The number of referrals for Children Looked After was below the rates of outstanding authorities but in line with other good LAs. They explained that case load levels were increasing but the expected surge in demand had not yet worked through the system.

During the discussion key points included:

- Members thanked the Directors for the update and for their work in addressing the issues caused by the pandemic.
- Questions were asked about whether the benchmark for referrals was too high as the number of Wiltshire's referrals of Children Looked After was at 39.6 per 10,000 children when outstanding LAs were referring an average of 59 per 10,000.
- The Directors explained that thresholds for referral were constantly reviewed and that the Family Key Worker Service has had a known positive impact on onward referral. This part of the service had recently been independently evaluated by Oxford Brookes University. Analysis had shown that the Council's emphasis on early intervention was having an impact on the overall number of cases being referred.
- Members were grateful for the information provided by the Directors but sought further reassurance, given that the number of Children Looked After

referrals were roughly 50 percent higher in some outstanding LAs than in Wiltshire.

- The Corporate Director People highlighted that local factors, including deprivation levels, will account for much of the difference. She explained that long term trends had been reported to the Performance and Outcomes Board and offered to share details of the detailed analysis that had taken place.
- When asked about why Wiltshire was far closer to outstanding authorities on other measures than the number of referrals of Children Looked After, the Corporate Director stressed that the figures were an average. She pointed to the example of North Yorkshire County Council, which was an outstanding authority but had lower referral rates of Children Looked After than Wiltshire.
- The Director of Families and Children's Services noted that checks and balances were in place across multiple agencies and shared through the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). There had also been no increase in re-referrals, a consequence that would have been expected if the thresholds for referral were too high.
- In response to a question about the availability of teachers and supply teachers, the Directors explained that schools were not always required to report figures to the Council directly but were not experiencing class closures. They then spoke about the importance of the tutoring programme in ensuring that children were kept up to speed.
- Members asked about the number of vacancies among Social Care Practitioners and the workload across the team. The Directors explained the numbers had not been impacted by the recent budget and that caseloads were at a reasonable level. Some teams had higher vacancy rates than others and were harder to recruit to. It was noted that neighbouring authorities had recently received additional funding, so the Council's basic employment offer was being reviewed.
- It was noted that it was currently challenging to recruit agency staff, but a regional working group was looking at recruitment and the pay rates of agency staff across neighbouring authorities to ensure that they collaborated on workforce matters.
- The Directors explained that there was a good balance of experience across the service.

Resolved

To note the update provided and welcome the proposed session on thresholds with regards to Children Looked After and Child Protection, to determine if further scrutiny is required.

25

Regular updates

The Chairman explained that written updates were available in the agenda pack and reminded Members that they were welcome to submit questions in advance of the meeting.

25a Update from Wiltshire Youth Voice Representative

The Chairman highlighted that a mental health consultation had been carried out by the Wiltshire Youth Union and noted that the findings could be useful for the Committee's planned Task Group.

He then welcomed the election of Wiltshire's Youth Councillors and stated that the Committee really looked forward to engaging with the Youth Councillors and Shadow Youth Cabinet in their Overview and Scrutiny work. Cllr Laura Mayes, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills, reported that 41 Youth Councillors had been elected and that a welcome event had been held at County Hall. The Cabinet Member explained that they had already started work and had been involved in a meeting with the Skills Team to discuss apprenticeships. A system would be in place to allow Young People to shadow a Cabinet Member.

The Director of Families and Children's Services highlighted that the Youth Council had come up with a proposal to support those affected by the Ukraine crisis by organising a blue and yellow themed non-school uniform 'mufti' day.

Resolved

To note the full support of the Committee for proposed engagement with young people and to consider ways this could incorporate links with the Committee's work.

25b School Ofsted Judgements

The Chairman expressed concern that the number of good and outstanding schools in Wiltshire had fallen by two percent since October 2021, so was now at 79 percent. For context, he highlighted that the English national average was 86 percent and the regional average for the South West 81 percent. He noted that a large number of schools were no longer directly controlled by the LA but asked about the steps being taken by the Council to help schools to drive improvement in all schools.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills, explained that the Wiltshire Learning Alliance had been established to allow schools to work more collaboratively and was based on a successful model adopted by Lincolnshire County Council. Cllr Dominic Muns, Portfolio Holder for Education, noted that the Alliance had helped to promote a cultural shift in the way that schools supported each other. He also identified the work done by the Family and Community Learning Service in helping parents with home education during the lockdown as a way in which the Council had directly supported children.

In order to explain the specific support that could be given to academies, an officer reported that safeguarding reviews were carried out in all schools, not just maintained ones. She also highlighted the active role played by Wiltshire Council's Traded Services Team, stating that training had been provided for free to outstanding schools. Head Teachers had also been encouraged to contact regional leaders in their area in order to improve collaboration.

Given that St Augustine's Catholic College had previously been rated as outstanding but was identified as requiring improvement at its latest inspection, Members questioned the length of time between inspections of outstanding schools, as well as what support was now being put in place to help the school. In response officers noted that St Augustine's, an academy, had joined with maintained schools and was benefitting from peer review.

Members also noted that the Wiltshire Governors Association had discussed Ofsted results at a recent meeting where the Head of Governors at St Augustine's had provided feedback about their recent inspection. Other schools were able to learn from the feedback provided and the meeting was described as both positive and constructive.

Officers highlighted the importance of leadership in schools and noted that a number of Head Teachers had recently retired. However, they stated that a good number of replacement candidates were coming forward. It was explained that becoming an Interim Head teacher was a good way of helping Deputy Head Teachers to gain further experience and to promote their career development. A number of Interim Head Teachers from outside of the county had applied for full time Head Teacher roles in Wiltshire.

25c DfE Changes - Update from Department for Education

The Chairman referred the Committee to the written update included between pages 25 and 30 of the agenda pack.

In response to questions submitted by Members in advance of the meeting, it was reported that school attendance in the week beginning on 7 February was 90.2 percent in Wiltshire. The national average was around 90 percent. In the same week school attendance by children with an Education and Health Care Plan was 86.2 percent compared with a national average of 85 percent. 484 penalty notices had been sent to parents for absenteeism, leading to 148 prosecutions.

Officers also reported the strategies being put in place to increase school attendance included tracking persistent absentees and discussing individual cases at multi agency meetings. Officers stressed that the Five to Thrive programme was being rolled out to help children with mental health issues. Leaders were being encouraged to have gentle conversations with children that they had concerns about, rather than adopting a more confrontational approach.

Members asked about the number of air cleaning units being taken up by Wiltshire schools, as well as the effectiveness of the systems themselves. Officers reported that any school could apply for a unit. Other measures being taken included leaving windows open, but it was acknowledged that this measure could have environmental and cost impacts.

Information, included on page 27 of the agenda pack, relating to the support being given to children's mental health, was highlighted by Members. Members

asked whether the figures behind the report would be made available, what Wiltshire's own figures were and whether they included the comments of partners such as Bernardo's.

The Corporate Director People explained that Wiltshire Council would remain vigilant about the issue of mental health and offered to share the results of their own health and wellbeing surveys. Work was also being done to increase recruitment to Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAHMS). She reported that the Integrated Care Board had recently held discussions across BaNES, Swindon and Wiltshire, to discuss further measures. Work was also ongoing as part of the Early Support Strategy and bids were being submitted relating to Family Hubs.

26 **Corporate Parenting Panel Bi-annual report**

The Chairman reminded the Committee that they received two reports a year from the Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP): the draft Annual Report and an interim six-month update. He explained that the six-month interim update would be considered at the meeting and that the Committee would be asked to include the full annual report in its Forward Work Programme for September 2022.

The Head of Children in Care and Young People referred the Committee to the scorecard attached to Agenda Supplement 1, which outlined performance against eight strategic priorities. She explained that each of the priorities had a Councillor linked to them to ensure accountability. She also noted that the priorities had been identified two years ago by Young People and that they heavily relied on their feedback. She then went on to provide a number of examples of the work being undertaken, including rock climbing activity sessions being run by the Child and Youth Voice Team. Other examples included ensuring that community links were developed in the Fostering Excellence programme to make sure that children developed appropriate local links.

The officer explained that an Ofsted inspection carried out in January had found that Care Leavers had been provided with the right support and that the team had a skilled and stable workforce. Efforts were being made to make processes less bureaucratic for Young People to ensure that services were as friendly and accessible as possible.

During the discussion key points included:

- Members thanked the Head of Children in Care and Young People for the update and praised the positive actions in the report.
- Cllr Peter Hutton, Chairman of the CPP, drew attention to the Ofsted visit as well as that of Mark Riddell, National Adviser for Care Leavers, whose comments were included in the report. Cllr Hutton was pleased that the work of the CPP was being recognised and stated that they were looking forward to working closely with the newly elected Wiltshire Youth Council.

- In response to a question about the advertising of fostering placements, the officer confirmed that promotion was taking place across the whole of the county.
- Members asked questions about why the Health and Wellbeing key performance indicators were below target levels, specifically the number of Children Looked After accessing dental treatment. In response, the officer explained that the pandemic had had a significant impact on access to dental treatment, but that work was ongoing with social workers to ensure that appointments were being booked. The dental figures in the report were from financial year 2020/21 and she expected that there would be a significant improvement in these figures in the next financial year.
- As eight strategic priorities had been identified in the report, it was discussed whether the officers could present their findings in the form of a pre-meeting briefing rather than the Committee receiving the six-monthly update.

Resolved

- 1. For the Draft Corporate Parenting Panel report to go to the Standing Task Group again this year.**
- 2. To receive presentations from the CPP lead Councillors and Strategic Lead Officers on their CPP strategic priorities at pre-meeting briefings of the Children's Select Committee.**
- 3. For updates about key figures to be provided at Committee meetings throughout the year.**
- 4. To delegate to Chairman and Vice-Chairman to meet with relevant officers to discuss how points 2 and 3 could be implemented.**

27 Executive response to the Rapid Scrutiny on Provision of Accommodation for Young People at Transition Time - Gap Analysis

The Committee were reminded that they had considered the final report from the Rapid Scrutiny exercise at their last meeting. The Chairman welcomed the acceptance of all of the group's recommendations in full. In addition, he welcomed the opportunity for the Committee to be involved in the drafting of the accommodation strategy, covering the needs of children and young people with a learning disability, mental health issues, or autism.

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills thanked the Rapid Scrutiny group for their recommendations, particularly surrounding SEND provision. She noted that the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, SEND, Transition and Inclusion was meeting with the Cabinet Member for Housing, Strategic Assets and Asset Transfer to take the matter forward.

Resolved

- 1. To note the Executive response to the report of the Rapid Scrutiny Exercise: Provision of Accommodation for Young People at Transition Time – Gap Analysis.**
- 2. To consider the draft of the Accommodation Strategy covering the needs of children and young people with learning disability, mental**

health, and autism (to potentially be published mid-2022) – either at a meeting of this Committee or its Standing Task Group.

3. For the report to include the outcome of the gaps / needs analysis of Wiltshire Care Leavers (so that any strategy developed can be targeted and include metrics to allow measurement of performance).

4. To receive an annual update on relevant parts of the strategy's delivery.

5. To continue to monitor the data on care leaver accommodation provided in the Corporate Parenting Panel's annual report.

28 **Executive response to the Standing Task Group report on Traded Services**

The Chairman informed the Committee that the recommendations of the Standing Task Group had been accepted. The Head of Traded Services then took the opportunity to thank the Task Group for their useful input. He stated that he would provide the Committee with as much of the requested data as possible, given the commercial sensitivity of the Traded Services Team's work. It was noted that the full end of year report was due in November with an interim report to be provided in May. The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills welcomed the structure put in place to monitor the performance of the service and highlighted that it was important for Traded Services to remain nimble given the evolving national picture.

Resolved

1. To note the Executive response provided.

2. For the Standing Task Group to receive the May 2022 interim report on Traded Services – which will include the overarching principle and strategic direction for Traded Services.

3. For the Standing Task Group to also receive the Traded Services full year report (November 2022) which should integrate the changes proposed in the third recommendation of the Task Group.

4. At this point in time a decision will be made on the frequency of future reporting and whether these reports come to the Children's Select Committee or Standing Task Group.

29 **Overview and Scrutiny Activities Updates**

The Chairman referred the Committee to the report, included in the agenda pack, on the work carried out by Task Groups and Rapid Scrutiny since the last meeting. He also reported that a conversation was ongoing about the start date for the Business Plan Metrics Task Group. Furthermore, he explained that the Business Plan Metrics, Fostering Excellence and Disadvantaged Learners Task Groups were due to report to the June meeting of the Committee.

Resolved

1. To note the update on Task Group and Rapid Scrutiny activities provided.

2. To endorse the terms of reference for the Fostering Excellence Task Group.

30 Forward Work Programme

The Chairman referred the committee to the Forward Work Programme outlined in the agenda pack and invited Members to speak if they had any additional items that they wanted to be included. He also noted the request, made by Members during Item 7c, for further information about the distribution and effectiveness of air cleaning units in schools.

31 Urgent Items

There were no urgent items.

32 Getting to Outstanding

The Committee were reminded that they received a report at their November meeting on the progress made towards Getting to Outstanding. They had requested further updates so that they could consider how they could best add value to the process.

The Corporate Director People provided some background information about the development of Children's Services over the past few years, explaining that performance was measured through a Performance and Outcomes Board. She noted that a large amount of self-assessment had been undertaken and results were shared with Ofsted. She, along with the Chief Executive of Wiltshire Council, had commissioned a test of assurance to assess the progress made, including through a series of interviews with officers. The Director stressed that Wiltshire Council was a sector led improvement partner and welcomed the opportunity to share experiences to support other LAs in their development.

A summary of the findings at recent Ofsted inspections, as well as the priorities for further development, were set out by the Director of Families and Children's Services. The Director reported that the last full Ofsted inspection, in 2019, concluded that the LA was good in all areas. A follow up Ofsted inspection in January 2022, focusing on the experiences of Care Leavers, praised Wiltshire for being proactive and ensuring that Young People were not limited by their past experiences. The Council was identified as having a passionate workforce and for its leaders being open to challenge. Support for asylum seeking children was also recognised as a particular strength. Overall, Care Leavers were found to receive the correct support at the right time as Wiltshire's processes and self-assessments were the correct ones.

A further inspection was expected within the next year and, given that Wiltshire was rated as good at the last inspection, it was anticipated to last for approximately a week. During the inspection Wiltshire Council would share detailed reports allowing Ofsted to test a range of activities, as well as highlight an area that it felt was in need of further investigation.

During the most recent inspection in January two areas were identified that would benefit from further development; the recording of reflective practice and increasing the depth of audits carried out on the experiences of Young People leaving the service. The Director announced that actions were already in place to make progress in these areas, including reviewing the balance of recording feedback by adapting the audit schedule. In addition, a line-of-sight document was being used to allow managers to better monitor the level of recording taking place.

Ofsted were impressed by the Council's seven key priorities identified during the January inspection. The Director explained that priorities included a focus on early intervention, increasing adoption placement options and working closely with fathers. He then went on to outline how some of the priorities were being met, reporting that the Dads Matter Too project was being launched to strengthen the support in that area. To allow the Committee to maintain an overview of the work being undertaken in all the priority areas, the Director suggested providing a briefing on each.

During the discussion key points included:

- Members thanked the Directors for the update and praised the work that had been undertaken. They also commended the passion of the staff in supporting Children Looked After in Wiltshire.
- The idea of receiving a briefing on each of the seven priorities was welcomed by Members. Directors also noted that, if time allowed, Rapid Scrutiny could be undertaken on the roadmap and line-of-sight documents to be prepared for Cabinet. Members stated that they would welcome details of the roadmap to help them decide which priority areas to focus on.
- Members discussed the importance of adopting a holistic approach to addressing children's mental health needs. This suggestion was welcomed by Directors, who spoke about the benefits of continuing to review the CAHMS service to increase recruitment within the team.
- The Directors spoke about the importance of monitoring demand for mental health services and working with partners to ensure that effective community provision was in place.
- The Grandmentor Volunteer Scheme was warmly praised by Members as a way of providing support to children by allowing them to speak to people who were not familiar with their backgrounds. The Directors noted that the scheme was being expanded to work outside of Care Leavers.
- In response to a question about auditing of feedback from Care Leavers, the Directors stated that a number of different types of audits were undertaken, such as compliance, but that going forward there would be a greater number of in-depth audits completed for that cohort.

Resolved

1. To hold a Rapid Scrutiny on the proposed road map (timeline) and aim to report back to the Children's Select Committee at its June meeting.

2. At the June meeting to also receive the first in-depth update on the first key priorities.

33 **Date of Next Meeting**

The date of the next ordinary meeting of the Committee was confirmed as Wednesday 8 June 2022, at 10.30am.

(Duration of meeting: 10.30 am - 1.05 pm)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Matt Hitch
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Getting to Outstanding

Update to Children's Select 15.03.2022

Under the ILACS inspection framework Ofsted undertake a range of activities:

- Full inspection – our last was in 2019 where we were rated Good across the board
- Annual conversation – our last was in Nov. We use this to share our self-assessment and respond to any lines of enquiry this raises for Ofsted.
- Focused visits – between ILAC inspections Good and Outstanding authorities can expect a focused visit. This is a 2 day inspection involving 2 HMI on-site looking at a discreet area of practice.
- Short-inspections – where an authority is good at the last full inspection it would expect the next inspection to be a short inspection (one week). Ofsted reserve the right to undertake a full 2 week ILACS if the authority appears to be declining. Any focused visit will be used to help determine this.

Our Focused Visit took place on the 24th and 25th Jan with the focus being on Care Leavers.

Headlines:

- Care leavers in Wiltshire receive the right support, at the right time, to help them make progress in their lives and a large majority have positive experiences.
- They are well supported by a passionate, skilled, and stable workforce. Their individual achievements and successes are recognised and celebrated by workers, managers, leaders and elected members who are aspirational for them and share an ambition to be the ‘best parents in the country’.
- Leaders have a good understanding of service strengths and development areas and actively seek scrutiny and challenge from external sources and through regular and varied consultation with care leavers. This leads to plans which drive service improvement and help care leavers achieve their potential.

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Drilling down a little further:

- Care leavers have stable and trusting relationships with their workers and are visited regularly.
- Care leavers who sought or who are still seeking asylum are helped well by specialist workers and a range of community services to help them settle and start their new lives.
- Care leavers are well supported in accessing the help and services they need to meet their physical and emotional health needs.
- They have strong support from their personal advisers and this really benefits their emotional well-being. At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, enhanced support to care leavers helped lessen loneliness and the impact of isolation.

Drilling down a little further (continued):

- Care leavers who have limited support networks can access a range of services that provide the longer-term emotional and practical support they need as young adults learning to live independently.
- Most care leavers live in safe, stable and suitable accommodation that is well matched to their needs. Effective systems are in place to help senior managers measure and monitor the sufficiency and quality of accommodation. This includes senior managers visiting accommodation to see the quality first-hand.
- Care leavers in Wiltshire are helped to live successfully in independent accommodation and hold secure tenancies because of the preparation and support they receive.

Drilling down a little further (continued):

- Care leavers are helped to apply for higher education, training and apprenticeships and given the support they need to stay in their chosen pathway and to succeed.
- The corporate parenting panel is inclusive of care leavers and provides effective scrutiny of the quality and impact of services received by care leavers.
- Staff enjoy working in Wiltshire and morale is high. This is having a positive impact on practice and improved outcomes for care leavers.

The inspection identified two areas for development:

- The frequency of supervision and recording of reflective practice discussion and actions.
- The depth of information gained from audits that focus on the experiences of care leavers, and the extent to which their voices are included in this work to help inform learning and service planning.

Priorities in Service Development Plan

1. Children and young people are central to everything we do; therefore, **we will listen to their voice and use this to inform practice development.** We will ensure their voice is clear in all our work and they understand fully why decisions are made.
2. That **father's voices are heard, and we build on their strengths as well as recognising their potential risks;** that we work with them to be part of their children's lives.
3. Our Early Help offer is strong. Families get the right help at the right time from the most appropriate professionals; and our **partnership working encourages early help from the front door and upon step down.**

Priorities in Service Development Plan(continued)

4. We work collaboratively and have **good access to CAMHS and SEND to support children** and young people's mental health and thrive educationally and socially.
5. Children and young people's needs are matched to the right carers be that with extended family, foster care or adoption. **We have placement choice** to match children and young peoples need for therapeutic care to support them to recover from their trauma. **Permanence planning is timely**, and children understand their story and lived experience
6. **Transition planning will be seamless** in preparing children and young people for adulthood
7. To support our workforce to be their best; to be happy in their roles, learn and develop. **To promote creativity and celebrate our successes and differences.**