

## Children's Select Committee

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### MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN'S SELECT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 19 JANUARY 2021 AT ONLINE MEETING.

#### **Present:**

Cllr Jon Hubbard (Chairman), Cllr Jacqui Lay (Vice-Chairman), Cllr Mary Champion, Cllr Andrew Davis, Cllr Christopher Devine, Cllr Mary Douglas, Cllr Nick Holder, Cllr Chris Hurst, Cllr Hayley Illman, Cllr Jo Trigg, Cllr Philip Whalley, Cllr Suzanne Wickham, Dr Mike Thompson, John Hawkins, Catriona Williamson and Nikki Barnett

#### **Also Present:**

Cllr Laura Mayes

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#### 1 **Apologies**

Apologies were provided by the Chief Executive, Terence Herbert.

#### 2 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meetings held on 10 March 2020 and 16 June 2020 were presented for consideration. It was also noted that an informal meeting had been held on 22 September 2020 and 25 November 2020.

It was therefore,

#### **Resolved:**

**To approve and sign the minutes of the 10 March 2020 and 16 June 2020 as a true and correct record.**

#### 3 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations.

#### 4 **Chairman's Announcements**

Through the Chairman details were provided on the Final Report of the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) Task Group which was received by the Health Select Committee on 12 January 2021. The contents of the Final Report were endorsed for provision to Cabinet Member and the Clinical Commissioning Group. The Executive Response was received at the same meeting, and the Chairman and Vice-Chairman attended the Health Select Committee meeting. It was also resolved to reconvene the Task Group to

consider the impact of Covid-19 on CAMHS and the link between CAMHS and the private and voluntary sector.

The Chairman stated it was disappointing more work had not previously been done on support outside of the CAMHS network and the private and voluntary network as requested by Children's Select Committee. The matter would be discussed under the Forward Work Programme item, as the Chairman considered there needed to be more leading work by the Committee on the impact on young people.

5 **Public Participation**

There were no questions and statements submitted.

6 **Overview and Scrutiny during COVID-19**

A report was received in the agenda setting out details of Overview and Scrutiny Arrangements during the Covid-19 pandemic, with streamlined arrangements with fewer formal committee meetings and a Wiltshire Covid-19 Response Task Group meeting throughout 2020.

It was,

**Resolved:**

**To note the report.**

7 **Safeguarding (performance monitoring)**

A presentation and briefing for Members of the Committee was held before the meeting.

Under the ILACS (Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services) inspection framework Ofsted arrange an annual conversation with every local authority in the country. In Wiltshire the annual conversation was held in November 2020. In preparation for the meeting the latest self-assessment and performance data for children's social care was shared. A report was presented summarising the Ofsted report following the annual conversation.

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Councillor Laura Mayes, was in attendance to provide further information along with Martin Davis, Director, Families and Children, Helean Hughes, Director of Education, and Lucy Townsend, Interim Corporate Director for People.

The Committee discussed the report and comments made by Ofsted, including particularly their interest in the new or developing work being undertaken with family led review of child protection processes and work with fathers, with a view to sharing learning on this on a regional basis. The stable nature of the workforce was noted along with other points as detailed in the Agenda Supplement.

It was stated that it was important that the positive work which had taken place within Children's Services in the past 10 years was maintained, and that it was essential robust scrutiny of performance continue to take place to ensure this.

In respect of education it was noted that the meeting took place during a previous lockdown and some of the information would be out of date with the present situation. Details were provided of weekly attendance surveys, complications with Early Years funding, and the impact of a rise in cases among young people and large cohorts self-isolating and creating Covid bubble arrangements. Plans were being drawn up for a predicted baby boom in the next year.

In response to queries details were provided in an increase of referrals for elective home education (EHE), which referred to expressions of interest rather than that every referral led to the parents in question undertaking home education. Such referrals did increase during periods of lockdown, and all those cases were followed up. It was requested and agreed that a more detailed report on EHE would be produced for a future meeting.

There were also questions on definitions of key workers, suggestion of rating systems for specific topics to assist the Committee in focusing on key areas, and potential task group looking at a roadmap for the Families and Children Transformation (FACT) programme.

At the conclusion of discussion, it was,

**Resolved:**

- 1) That, in future reports to this committee, the table presenting data include an explanation of acronyms used and also a rag-rating system showing whether figures and changes are good or not, showing trends, comparison to statistical neighbours (if possible using the Safeguarding task group's way of presenting the data), as well as comparison to "high performers" (whether they are statistical neighbours or not).**
- 2) That the committee includes in its legacy report a recommendation for the new committee to receive a 3 to 5 year plan or roadmap showing the FACT programme's journey to date (including its original objectives), the current aims and objectives of FACT (at the time the committee will receive the report), and how the council is planning to deliver these.**
- 3) That the committee also includes in its legacy report a recommendation "to consider the establishment of a task group to scrutinise the impact and effectiveness of the FACT programme" and some of the areas to focus on could be:**
  - Integrated case management system – including engagement from partners and progress on detail of case recording;**
  - Effectiveness of early help / early support and also impact of the Wiltshire Early Support Assessment and Early Help Navigator (post**

introduced in June 2020); (\* also in the report as their areas for continuing improvement)

- Investing in our staff – measuring improvements;
- Progress (meeting targets) in embedding a Contextual Safeguarding approach across Wiltshire from 2019-22;

And possibly the areas for continuing improvement that have been highlighted in the report considered at this meeting:

- Educational outcomes for vulnerable groups including family and community learning
- Whole life pathway service delivery including transitional safeguarding
- Integrated children's commissioning across health and social care
- Voice – having further impact and influence including outcome focused performance framework

As suggested by the Cabinet Member the task group would also need to ensure that the voice of the child is embedded in the FACT programme.

- 4) As offered by officers today, for the committee to receive figures on education at the next meeting, including:
- attendance
  - elective home education

## 8 **COVID-19 update**

The Chairman introduced the report from the council's Chief Executive providing a summary of activity to mitigate the impact of the coronavirus in Wiltshire, which was received by Cabinet on 5 January 2021. Ad noted at that meeting the imposition of further national restrictions on 4 January 2021 meant that many parts of the update had been overtaken by events and would therefore be out of date.

Members of the Committee had submitted questions in advance of the meeting, with written responses to be attached to these minutes. These included questions in relation to free school meals, accessing learning, pressures on nurseries and schools, mental health, seeking the views of young people during Covid and fostering.

The Select Committee sought details on the monitoring of school attendance and the reasons for non-attendance, as well as the procuring of digital devices for use in schools, mental health provision and other subjects.

In relation to the fostering campaign it was stated the council was looking at approximately 50 additional placements through 35 foster carers following the campaign, above the 12-15 that would be average for previous years.

In relation to free school meals it was stated that vouchers were being prepared for half term as were provided at Christmas. For digital devices schools had been putting in orders using the £1.1m grant to acquire new equipment, and the Department for Education was working with Secondary Schools.

On mental health, some members raised concerns that there had been a greater impact on the mental health of young people during the latest lockdowns. Self-referrals to support services including on substance abuse had increased as other referrals decreased as a result of national lockdown, and there had been an increase in demand for the domestic abuse helpline. Meetings with stakeholders took place regularly to monitor capacity.

Following discussion, it was agreed to include further responses in an attachment to the minutes and it was,

**Resolved:**

- 1) To note the Covid-19 update as presented to Cabinet on 5 January 2021 and the minutes of the Cabinet meeting.**
- 2) To thank officers and note the verbal update provided today on the council's ongoing response to the pandemic with regards to Children's Services.**
- 3) To include the questions submitted in advance and responses with the minutes of this meeting.**

**9 Youth Voice update**

A report was received on the results of a survey undertaken by the Families and Children's Commissioning team in the Summer 2020 and the outcomes of meetings held with young people in the autumn. Further updates were provided by Gary Binstead, Head of Commissioning, Families and Children, and Sara James, Senior Manager, Quality Outcomes, Children and Families.

A report was presented as detailed in the Agenda Supplement. It was also stated that a new team was being set up to be responsible for engagement with young people in the future, though the existing forums and others.

The Committee discussed the update, recognising the difficulty of surveying the opinions of young people. They noted that the survey had been provided to only 24 young people who were representatives of groups such as the Children in Care Council, Youth Parliament and Wiltshire Youth Union and therefore to an extent might be unrepresentative, though officers stated the findings were similar to those of a wider Oxford University study across several regions.

Members welcomed the update on a new team being set up to lead on engagement, though some noted that similar efforts in the past had not been as successful as hoped, and the Committee requested a more detailed update including an action plan and a review of the impact of the youth consultant role.

At the conclusion of debate, it was,

**Resolved:**

**To note the update provided and ask for a further update for the March 2021 meeting, including:**

- **impact (both positive and negative) of this current lockdown;**
- **impact from the implementation of the new Youth Voice team (including team structure and roles);**
- **the Youth Voice team's action plan;**
- **evaluation of the impact of the youth consultant role.**

10 **Forward Work Programme**

The draft Forward Work Programme was presented for consideration.

It was noted that there was one further scheduled meeting ahead of the May 2021 local elections, should they go ahead, and the Committee would be preparing a legacy report for the new Council.

Members were requested to reflect on the work that had taken place in the last 4 years and what had worked well and what hadn't, as well suggestions for future priorities.

11 **Date of Next Meeting**

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 2 March 2021.

12 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

(Duration of meeting: 10.30 am - 12.15 pm)

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## **Free school meals (FSM)**

*We have this report on the web but it doesn't really cover what is in the free food parcels and how well the schools are delivering this.*

[Free School Meals - Wiltshire Council Statement - Wiltshire Council](#)

### **1. What we are doing in Wiltshire with regard to FSM packs for children being educated at home?**

As of the 15 January 2020 the FSM arrangements were as follows:

Food parcels	45%
Locally arranged vouchers	25%
Nationally arranged vouchers	15%
Unknown/other	15%

The national voucher scheme has been reintroduced by the government so the number of schools using vouchers is expected to increase.

### **2. How do families get the packs? (*seen reports elsewhere that they are expected to go daily to collect them*)**

Schools are using methods that suit their community.

### **3. As schools are now deciding how to provide the free school meals, if schools provide meals on site rather than vouchers is this likely to increase attendance or is the danger then that children on FSM are less likely to be fed?**

It is possible that this approach could increase attendance or result in families not collecting the meals. Schools have been asked to monitor the uptake of the meals.

## **Accessing learning**

### **4. Are children able to access learning of some kind and what alternative learning might be? Is the council able to monitor offers from schools as government has put higher expectation on primary schools to deliver “daily learning”?**

The council is able to monitor if settings are meeting the remote learning minimum requirements. This information is available via the DfE Portal. 100% of schools in Wiltshire are meeting the minimum requirement.

### **5. Access to online learning (Wiltshire's £1.1m pledge) – is it possible to have an update on the purchasing and plans to distribute the 2,500 devices? These are meant for vulnerable children who cannot currently join in with online learning, so does the council already have a list of intended recipients for these devices?**

Wiltshire Council is allocating £1.1m of government COVID-19 funding to enable schools to buy digital devices for disadvantaged pupils who are currently struggling to

access learning from home. The funding has been allocated based on the number of Ever 6 qualifying children and Free School Meals eligible children attending schools as recorded on the October Census 2020. The number of children qualifying for these payments at each school has been compared to the total number across the County. A fair and equitable percentage of the total available funding has then been allocated to each school for this unique digital investment opportunity.

The purpose of the funding is to enable schools to prioritise the purchase of digital devices for the most in need and digitally deprived children. Schools can decide to gift the devices to the children on a permanent basis or retain ownership of the asset and loan the device to the child on a long-term basis. The most important outcome is that every device purchased as part of this funding, reaches a child to support and improve their learning opportunity.

Schools are asked to consider, in the spirit of this funding, to distribute these locally funded devices to groups that have not benefitted from other initiatives to date. Such as

- Multiple siblings who are currently sharing a device;
- Children using mobile phones to access learning;
- Free School Meal eligible children for all year groups

By funding the digital devices in this way, schools will be able to:

- Buy devices that are the greatest fit for their children that are most in need;
- Use existing suppliers to secure devices that mirror your current digital assets;
- Configure the device with the software the school uses including remote learning platforms;
- Ensure that the safeguarding and security of devices reflects the school's guidelines;
- Manage the ongoing support and maintenance of the device for its useful life;
- Support your children to access on-line learning and all the resources available.

Schools will need to submit a purchase order or invoice dated on or after 14 January 2020, from their preferred or existing supplier that is equal to or in excess of the allocated funding amount. Please submit these orders or invoices digitally to [digitaldevices@wiltshire.gov.uk](mailto:digitaldevices@wiltshire.gov.uk).

## **6. There have been comments that children should be sharing devices and spending only an hour on them – hence is this enough time and how does this affect families with several children?**

The additional funding will help to address this issue. In addition to the £1.1m from the Council, the DfE has increased the number of digital devices that schools can access.

Pupils who do not have access to a digital device or a quiet place to work can now access a school place; they are classed as vulnerable.

## **7. There seem to be issues with connectivity to the internet in parts of the county and some families may also struggle to purchase enough data**



## **allowance to support online learning for multiple children – are schools and / or the council able to offer any help with this?**

As part of the current DfE digital device distribution programme, schools can request increased data allowances on behalf of their families receiving a device. There are a number of mobile phone companies supporting the rollout and they are offering an increase in data to a mobile phone in the household that is already linked to a mobile phone contract. All the major companies are involved and this will help to reduce the financial burden and worry where there is currently no home broadband.

## **8. Some schools are giving out paper packs for learning so would be good to know how well these are received?**

Some schools are providing paper packs as part of their remote offer – this helps some families who have a number of children sharing one digital device, it prevents an overreliance on digital work, it supports access to home-learning where Wi-Fi signal is poor and some parents and children also prefer paper packs. Schools have processes in place to collect and mark this work so pupils still receive feedback.

### **Pressure on settings**

## **9. How are the nurseries etc. coping?**

***Some nurseries are taking in older children where they have a younger family member at the nursery. If the parent needs to work, and they have an under 5 at nursery as well as a 6 – 10 years old then they need somewhere for these children to go hence the nursery is taking them in. Not many but it is the only way they can continue to keep the under 5.***

Only childminders are able to take school aged children during the day and only if there is no school place available (It is only allowed if the child would currently be eligible for a school place due to being vulnerable or a critical worker). Nurseries and wrap around providers are not able to take school aged children during the school day and this includes vulnerable and keyworker children.

There is sufficient early years childcare provision currently. A hardship fund was created for settings and payments have been made to four providers. The number of children registered for Early Years Entitlement this Spring is very similar to that in 2020. The early years sector has not had any specific national COVID support and yet remain open to support pre-school children and facilitate the needs of working parents. £1million of the COMF containment funding will be used to support this sector. This funding will enable the sector to remain COVID compliant. There are three strands to the funding:

- financial support for settings where they have a loss of fee-paying income when a bubble is burst, and they need to ask all staff and children to self-isolate.
- financial support for a setting with staff who are Clinically Extremely Vulnerable and therefore not able to work due to shielding.
- one-off payment of between £150-£1000 (depending on the size of the setting) to help with PPE and enhanced cleaning.

In the current lockdown all early years settings are being asked to remain open for all children. A daily attendance survey is carried out, this showed that on 13/01/21, 80.20% of those settings responding were open, with an average of 76% open over a week. This is a variable picture, as settings do not always open five days a week and there are a varying number of closures due to positive Covid cases within settings.

The attendance of all Children Looked After (CLA), Child Protection children (CP) and Children in Need (CiN) is followed up to ensure that they are in a setting and if not that the social worker is informed, and the setting stays in regular contact with the family. Most early years settings will be able to access lateral flow tests through the community testing programme. From the 25 January those early years settings which are run by a school will have access to the lateral flow testing in line with the primary schools.

**10. Concerns from nursery workers as to them being at risk by coming into contact with children, plus the viability of privately run nurseries - are there dedicated officers who keep in regular contact with the nurseries to help them through this and address their concerns?**

The Council is following national guidance which is based on the low risk of transmission in early year settings. The Local Authority is offering £1m of support to early years settings to meet the additional costs of infection prevention and control. Any provider that is concerned about its financial viability should contact [EarlyYears@wiltshire.gov.uk](mailto:EarlyYears@wiltshire.gov.uk) or telephone 0300 003 4561 and officers can offer advice.

### **Primary schools attendance**

**11. It was stated in the press that schools are finding that many more people are classing themselves as 'key workers' to enable them to send their children to school. This can have implications for the impact of the current lockdown and specifically in the safety of the school environment.**

**In view of the reported very large increase in the number of parents classing themselves as 'key workers' during this lockdown compared with the previous ones, has the number of children attending school and having to be supervised by TA's while they engage with online learning in school increased substantially? Is this situation a problem in Wiltshire? If it is a problem what can be done to either clarify 'key worker' status or to support the schools with the increase in numbers?**

Overall attendance is higher than in lockdown 1 and reflects the increasing number of critical workers accessing a school place. Attendance is higher in primary schools. Nationally, as at 11 January 2021 14% of children on roll were in attendance (20% in primary; 4% secondary; and 29% special schools). In Wiltshire, the overall attendance was inline with national; 22% of pupils on roll were in attendance in primary; 4% in secondary schools; 32% in special schools.

A letter has been written to parents asking that a school place is only taken up where absolutely necessary, this is in-line with DfE guidance.

**12. Could we have the number of children attending primary schools at the moment, compared to the last lockdown and (if possible) showing whether they are attending under the “vulnerable” or “key worker” category.**

This week in April last year was chosen as a few weeks into lockdown but not during the Easter holiday.

2020	27-Apr	28-Apr	29-Apr	30-Apr	01-May	Average
TOTAL	1372	1456	1524	1424	1307	1417
CW	968	1045	1078	1010	888	998
'vulnerable'	404	411	446	414	419	419

2021	11-Jan	12-Jan	13-Jan	14-Jan	15-Jan	Average
TOTAL	8357	9047	8910	8798	7950	8612
KW	6700	7349	7241	7077	6349	6943
'vulnerable'	1657	1698	1669	1721	1601	1669

Due to overlap of vulnerable categories, e.g. both EHCP & SW, the 'vulnerable' totals above are the difference between the overall total and the total children of key workers and will include those identified as vulnerable by the school.

**13. It seems that there is lower attendance of vulnerable children who could still be attending school along with the children of key workers during this new lock-down. How can we try and improve this attendance as school is often a support for these children and their families?**

**Are schools able to carry on offering support and monitoring situations where required?**

Internal attendance monitoring into team around the school process from daily register information is in place again, flowchart below:

**Young People Voices**

**14. The update we have on the agenda was probably written before the lockdown – what is the council able to do at the moment to gather young people voices re their concerns, etc.?**

Wiltshire Council Youth Consultants have continued to consult with young people throughout the Covid-19 period including through our Family-led Review of Child Protection.

All of the children consulted with said they have had support during the lockdown period. Some noted the remoteness of on-line contact and the pressure that they felt under as 'vulnerable children' to attend school, with the latter increasing tension within the household.

44.4% said they would prefer to see their social worker face to face. One young person did not like having virtual contact because he did not already have an established relationship with the social worker.

11% said they would prefer to have virtual contact with their social worker. The young people who said they would prefer virtual contact all said it was because they would get more support and see their social worker more.

The remaining 33% said they would prefer to have no contact with the social worker or did not answer the question.

Young people locally and nationally reported levels of fatigue with on-line communication. In Wiltshire we prioritised face to face visiting early in the pandemic and have maintained this approach to date. We have worked in partnership with Public Health colleagues to ensure our guidance to staff on how to protect themselves and the families we work with is kept up to date. Public health colleagues have spoken to families to help address individual concerns, this approach was invaluable in our attempts to maximise the number of vulnerable children attending school.

Individual risk assessments are in place and these include the views of young people and their families. Where appropriate we will amend our visiting approach.

### **Impact on children and young people**

#### **15. Mental Health is a worry and are young people accessing help they need?**

Under current circumstances, the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services task group's final report part B was considered by the Health Select Committee, on behalf of Children's Select Committee (joint parent committee) on Tuesday 12 January 2021, where it was agreed that scrutiny would carry on with the task group being reconvened.

Nationally Barnardo's report that restrictions on freedom, decreased feelings of control and power over aspects of life, and not being able to regularly get out of the house is negatively impacting on children's mental health and feelings of wellbeing. Maintaining some kind of daily routine is viewed as helping to keep motivation and energy levels up. But structure and routine can be difficult to maintain when freedom is so restricted. In discussing positive experiences of lockdown, references are made to the absence of complicating factors, such as school or pressure to conform.

Locally during lockdown, we do know that referrals to community CAMHS decreased. However, this trend has now reversed and referrals into the service via the new Single Point of Access are reportedly extremely high. Modelling work has been carried out by Oxford Health which demonstrates an anticipated significant

increase in demand, this is already being seen in relation to children with eating disorders.

Updates on local development, also received by Health Select Committee, include:

Wiltshire Healthy Schools Programme – whole school public health programme to improve the health and wellbeing of children and young people and in doing so raise educational attainment. Provides an evidence-based framework for schools to work towards covering 4 key themes including Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health. Currently 55% of schools are engaged with the programme.

Education Recovery includes aim to increase engagement with the programme focussing particularly on those schools in most deprived areas.

Linking with School Effectiveness Team and School Nursing Service to be ambassadors of HS, actively promoting and supporting schools to engage and achieve HS status

School Nursing Service – preventative work promoting health and wellbeing, positive mental health and resilience. Regular drop-ins for CYP in secondary schools, 1:1 and group-based work in response to requests from schools where need is identified.

Health Improvement Coaches – an 18+ service with a strong focus on promoting positive mental health and wellbeing and building resilience. They are therefore, well placed to support parents whose mental health and wellbeing may be impacting on their ability to parent and be in the best position possible to respond to the needs of their children.

Local Area Co-ordinators – is a whole family approach to support individuals (including disabled people and people with mental ill health), their families and carers to obtain information, make practical and local connections and live the life they would like. Making local social connections is central to emotional wellbeing and mental health.

CCG are preparing an update on Children's Health Services for Health and Well-being Board which will be presented on 28 Jan.

**16. Have there been increases in reporting of substance abuse and / or ASB from youngsters who might be struggling with what is happening?**

Reported incidents of anti-social behaviour and substance misuse have reduced in the last year. There has been relatively good compliance with social distancing requirements including with lockdown. Support agencies report a decline in some forms of drug taking but a likely increase overall in the misuse of alcohol. Identifying those who are misusing drugs and alcohol is made difficult during lockdown and there is likely to be an increase in referrals to support agencies in the future.

## **Fostering**

### **17. Fostering – any response to recent ads?**

The Fostering Excellence Campaign launched in April '20. We have set ourselves a target of recruiting an additional 100 carers over a three-year period.

This year we have already approved 25 carers (Apr-Dec) with a further 10 scheduled to attend Foster Panel before the end of March. In the two years prior to this we recruited an average of 12 carers each year.

In addition to this the Fostering Service has assessment and approved 20 new 'connected person' carers.

The percentage of children looked after who are placed within 'in house' foster care was at 44% in April 2020 by December this had increased to 50%. Our three year target is to have 65% placed in-house.