

Children's Select Committee

MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN'S SELECT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 7 SEPTEMBER 2021 AT 2.30PM.

Present:

Cllr Jon Hubbard (Chairman), Cllr Jacqui Lay (Vice-Chairman), Cllr Helen Belcher, Cllr Carole King, Cllr Kathryn MacDermid, Cllr Kelvin Nash, Cllr Antonio Piazza, Cllr Mike Sankey, Cllr Caroline Thomas, Cllr Jo Trigg, Cllr Mark Verbinnen, Nikki Barnett, John Hawkins and Catriona Williamson.

Also Present:

Cllr Trevor Carbin, Cllr Chuck Berry, Cllr Peter Hutton, Cllr Laura Mayes, Cllr Dominic Muns and Cllr Christopher Williams, Louise Lewis, Paul Redford, Lesley Lowe, Michelle Lewellyn, Mark Gurrey, Martin Davis, Helene Hughes, Cate Mullen, Julie Upson and Lucy Townsend.

28 Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr Mary Champion and Cllr James Sheppard. Cllr Suzanne Wickham, Helen Jones, Tamsin Stone and Elly Mills also stated that they would not be able to make it to the meeting.

29 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Resolved:

To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 6 July 2021 as a true and correct record.

30 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

31 Chairman's Announcements

The Chairman drew the Committee's attention to additional Special Educational Needs and Inclusion funding that had been approved by Cabinet on 21 July. He also took the opportunity to praise young people for doing well in their exams at such a difficult time and noted that full school exam results would be presented to Committee in due course. The Chairman encouraged members to participate in a training session being designed to build upon the information provided in the Five to Thrive briefing given to Committee on 3 August.

Helene Hughes, Director of Education and Skills, was pleased to announce that Louise Lewis, Head of School Effectiveness, would be continuing as part-time head of service and was able to attend the meeting. Louise would be sharing the role until Lesley Lowe took over on a full-time basis.

32 **Public Participation**

No questions were received from the public.

33 **Regular updates**

The Chairman reminded the Committee that, as per the previous meeting, regular updates had been listed a single agenda item. He invited members to submit questions ahead of the meetings if they would like to receive further information.

33a Update from Wiltshire Youth Voice

The Chairman explained that an update was available in the agenda pack. The information provided included a summary of recent activities, such as a consultation with young carers, as well as plans for the establishment of the Wiltshire Youth Council from February 2022.

During the discussion it was noted that a report on mental health had been presented to senior council leaders. It was explained by officers that these were quarterly meetings, and that the agenda was prepared by young people. Officers said that they would seek the agreement of young people to bring an action plan based on these meetings to the Committee. Cllr Laura Mayes, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Skills, also offered to follow up on the action plan with officers.

Further questions were submitted in relation to whether all schools would be participating in the school elections. It was explained by officers that plans were in place to ensure full school participation, including with special schools. The Chairman noted that he had been assured that work was also being undertaken to engage with children not currently attending school.

It was also asked whether recent events, designed to engage younger people in Wiltshire, had included members of the traveller and boater communities. Officers were not able to provide specific examples but offered to consult with colleagues to find out the details of engagement with those communities.

33b School Ofsted Judgements

The Chairman drew the attention of the Committee to the update in the agenda pack outlining the most recent Ofsted inspection reports.

During the discussion it was asked why it was stated that four inspections had been undertaken but only the results of one had been included. Officers

explained that the results had not yet been published for all of the inspections, but the results would be brought to the Committee meeting after their publication.

33c DfE Changes - Update from Department for Education

The Chairman referred the Committee to the document contained within the agenda pack which included information about new national funding schemes. During the discussion the Committee welcomed the additional funding, although noted that it was relatively limited and queried the amount that had been applied for and received by Wiltshire. Officers offered to include both national and Wiltshire figures in future updates and explained that only schemes applying automatically to Wiltshire, or those that could be claimed by Wiltshire, had been included.

Discussion then turned to the council's role in the roll out and oversight of the CO2 monitor programme. The Director of Education and Skills noted that priority was being given to alternative provision and special schools. It was reported that:

- Downland School would receive 11 monitors on 13 September.
- Exeter House Special School would receive 14 monitors on 20 September.
- The Springfield's Academy would receive 18 monitors on 20 September.
- Silverwood School would receive five monitors on 20 September.

Given that Silverwood was receiving fewer monitors than other schools, the director noted that conversations were ongoing with the headteacher to ensure that more would be made available. However, beyond the special schools, it had yet to be decided when the roll out would take place.

The conversation then moved to what the anticipated actions would be in cases where the CO2 level was found to be too high. It was reported that given the recent pandemic, work had been undertaken to improve ventilation in buildings. Health and safety officers were working with schools to ensure that high CO2 levels were aligned to their risk assessments. It was noted that a report on ventilation had been commissioned by the Department for Education and that further information would be available upon its publication. The director also offered to share the most recent guidance with the Committee.

34 Getting to outstanding (Ofsted)

Martin Davis, Director of Families and Children's Services, provided a verbal update about key performance indicators and changes to the way that their performance was being assessed.

The director explained that the Ofsted definition of outstanding was an authority that is consistently good. He then outlined a four-pronged strategy of how to reach that goal:

- **Self-assessment.**
- **Service development.**
- **Roadmap to excellence.**
- **Line-of-sight.**

It was clarified that the Ofsted assessment framework had changed from 1 September to introduce additional requirements, so the council was adapting its **self-assessment** to reflect these changes.

Service development plans were being reviewed to ensure that they aligned with the council's business plan. It was explained that the majority of the council's key performance indicators were being met and compared favourably to national averages. Some areas of work were already approaching outstanding. Areas of focus included support provided to care leavers, to ensure that consistently good outcomes were achieved. Work was also being undertaken with the Families and Children's Transformation (FACT) Partnership to deliver better early health outcomes.

A document called **Roadmap to Excellence** would be written to outline the key findings from the self-assessment, as well as the changes being implemented as a result. The document would highlight key points in a child's life and use a quality assurance framework to ensure that senior members of the council would have a clearer overview of front-line services. A **Line-of-Sight** framework document would be developed on the back of this to combine the different ways of monitoring performance and make information more easily accessible for Ofsted.

The director used the findings of a peer review, which found that audits of certain issues were being undertaken too frequently, to illustrate why the four-pronged approach was being adopted. Rather than trusting that a good quality service was being delivered, too many audits were being undertaken in high performing areas when resources would be better directed at auditing areas in greater need. The director stated that he hoped that the **Line-of-Sight** framework would help to reduce the level of unnecessary scrutiny activity. He then concluded that having the confidence to reduce audit activity in certain areas was actually a strength, rather than a development that should cause concern. The director then offered to bring the full report to a future meeting of the Committee.

The input that Overview and Scrutiny could have in helping the authority to get to outstanding and how it could demonstrate the benefits of this to Ofsted were discussed. The director emphasised that Overview and Scrutiny would benefit from the transparency created by the new Line-of-Sight document. Scrutiny would be best targeted at specific areas where it was harder to produce consistently good results, such as providing secure accommodation for care leavers. If the more difficult areas could be targeted consistently well, then they would reach their goal of becoming outstanding.

Resolved:

- 1) To thank the director for the update.**
- 2) For the 4 November meeting of the Children's Select Committee, to receive a full report on plans (including the four strands of work) and progress to date on aiming for outstanding at the next Ofsted inspection.**
- 3) At that time, to consider how Overview and Scrutiny can best add value to that process.**

35 **Wiltshire Council Draft Business Plan 2021-31**

The Chairman announced that Full Council would discuss the adoption of the new 10-year Business Plan for Wiltshire Council. The plan would set out the council's overarching strategy and its purpose was to enable senior officers to lead and manage the organisation to achieve the priorities set by elected members. He explained that each select committee would be invited to comment on the Business Plan priorities relevant to their remits, with comments being referred to Cabinet for consideration.

The draft plan was not available at the time of the meeting, but the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Skills was present to provide an update and outlined the four key priorities identified in the plan:

- **Empowered people.**
- **A resilient society.**
- **A thriving economy.**
- **A sustainable environment.**

The cabinet member explained that the executive was working on the plan and that Cabinet hoped to share the document ahead of the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee. She then encouraged members to read the proposals and suggest potential additions that would assist her in her aspiration to put children at the heart of the plan.

During the discussion the Committee thanked the cabinet member for the update. They also stated that they would have welcomed the opportunity to read the document ahead of the meeting, so that they could have the best available information to scrutinise and contribute to the plans. It was noted that this was the sole opportunity at a formal Children's Select Committee meeting to provide input to the plan before it was considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee.

The cabinet member said that she would welcome a coordinated response from the Committee if they were able to meeting informally before the next meeting of the O&S Management Committee. Options such as conducting a Rapid Scrutiny exercise, or an informal meeting, were then discussed.

Committee members raised questions about the budget implications of the plans, as well as how progress would be measured. They then offered a range of suggestions about issues that they would like to see included in the plan. Suggestions included:

- An emphasis on early years and family support.
- Stressing the importance of early intervention in achieving strong outcomes.
- Closing the attainment gap for disadvantaged and vulnerable children.
- A focus on mental health issues.
- Strengthening Local Youth Networks.

The cabinet member assured the Committee that all of the proposals would be affordable but given that the plan was due to cover a 10-year period there was scope for the addition of further ideas. She also noted that each service would have a delivery plan and that the details of how targets were to be measured would be included in those documents. In addition, she echoed the comments of the Committee about the importance of the issues that they had highlighted, stressing that she would review the document to ensure that the key messages came through strongly.

Resolved:

- **To organise a briefing open to all members and substitutes of the Committee (likely to be Monday 20 September 2021) to discuss the Committee's priorities and the draft Business Plan, once available around Friday 17 September, which would then be fed back by the Chairman to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on 21 September.**

36 **Safeguarding Vulnerable People Partnership**

Mark Gurrey, Independent Chairman of the Safeguarding Vulnerable People Partnership (SVPP), provided a presentation about their recent achievements and plans for the forthcoming year. Following on from a briefing provided to members the day before, which provided background information about the SVPP, he reiterated that they were a scrutiny body helping to protect vulnerable people, including children, from safeguarding threats.

The SVPP Chairman went on to outline structural changes made as a result of their work. Alongside Swindon Council they had recently established an exploitation subgroup to help to protect younger people against safeguarding threats from outside of their families, such as from County Lines. The Community Safety Partnership had also been restructured to place greater emphasis on the safeguarding agenda.

The SVPP Chairman then took the opportunity to praise the effective use of demand modelling in Wiltshire to predict changes in demand caused by Covid-19. He also noted that an independent Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, recently established to provide oversight at a national level, had been very complementary about work carried out by Wiltshire Council and its partners.

Furthermore, it was reported that it would now be an expectation that a review would be carried out within 15 days of a tragic incident to establish whether a more in-depth review was required.

Among the priorities identified were children under one, given that there were more deaths and severe injuries among babies than many older age groups. A focus on meeting the needs of those suffering domestic abuse, exploitation and mental health issues were also seen as areas to focus on.

In summing up the SVPP Chairman spoke about the need for more specialist independent scrutiny, given that currently it primarily came from himself as an independent chairman. He then stated that he would outline plans for further scrutiny to be undertaken and looked forward to working with the Children's Select Committee to find areas of overlap. In order to assist with this process, the SVPP annual report would come to a future meeting.

During the discussion the Committee noted that they were grateful that SVPP had taken up the work formerly carried out by the Local Safeguarding Children Boards in providing an overview, given that work was being carried out between different agencies. They also gave their thanks for the briefing provided the day before by Julie Upson, Partnership Boards Manager SVPP.

Resolved:

- 1) To thank the SVPP representatives for attending today and for yesterday's briefing.**
- 2) For this year's SVPP's annual report to be considered by the full Committee. Consideration will be given to this annual report, and further annual reports, being considered by the Standing Task Group depending on timing of publication of the report.**

37 Traded Services Team Structure and Governance Arrangements

Paul Redford, Head of Traded Services, referred the Committee to the document attached to the agenda pack which proposed to bring an annual report to the Committee. The report would outline the services offered to schools, provide an overview of the performance of each service over the last year and give a list of objectives. Under these proposals an interim report would also be brought to the Committee. The most likely time for the interim report would be May, as this was after the window during which maintained schools undertook their purchasing for the year, so would provide a good indication of the level of activity for the following six months.

By bringing these reports to Committee it was hoped that it would allow members to offer suggestions for key areas of focus and to provide feedback from their own communities about the services being delivered to maintained, academy and independent schools. The officer also noted that Traded Services did actively seek feedback from schools and held a series of briefing events throughout the year.

During the course of the conversation the following points were made:

- The Committee thanked the officer for proactively inviting scrutiny to play a role in assisting the development of the service.
- It was noted that the frequency of reporting should be reflective of the level of difficulty faced by each service. The officer welcomed the point raised and confirmed that the report would focus on areas of concern. He clarified that Traded Services had to opportunity to raise concerns at the Performance and Outcomes Board chaired by the Corporate Director of People. If the Board then wished for the issue to be escalated to Children's Select than this might be possible in addition to the regular reports.
- A question was submitted about how the annual report would cover the balance of providing services to financially vulnerable schools with the need to improve the attainment of children. The officer noted that the focus of the report would be on the delivery of services. He also reassured the Committee that profit making was not the overriding focus of the service and they were keen to ensure that services were delivered to as many children as possible. He then explained that services could be offered to maintained schools at a cost neutral price if they were financially vulnerable. There was also an option for lower charges to be sent to smaller schools and for schools to come together to jointly purchase services.

Resolved:

- 1) To thank officers for their continuing engagement with overview and scrutiny.**
- 2) For the full-year update (November) and the six-month update (May) to be brought to the Standing Task Group and Children's Select Committee. Depending on the situation reported at this point, a decision will be made on the level of scrutiny required in future.**

38 Task Group and Board Representative Updates

The Chairman took the opportunity to thank members for expressing an interest in joining the newly established standing Task Group. He then apologised to those who had volunteered but had not been selected as one of the six standing members. He went on to stress that the Task Group was open to all members and substitutes of the Committee should they wish to attend and that the documents would be circulated to all members of the Committee. The six standing members of the Task Group were:

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

It was announced that the first meeting of the standing Task Group was planned to be held on the week commencing 20 September 2021 and would scrutinise the draft Corporate Parenting Panel report.

The Chairman also announced that he had been re-elected as the Chairman of the Adoption West Joint Scrutiny Panel and that the authority from which the Chairman was elected was allowed an additional representative to sit on the panel. The Chairman noted that two people had put their names forward but invited members to come forward if they also wished to be considered for the role.

39 **Forward Work Programme**

The Chairman referred the Committee to the documents attached to the agenda pack 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. He then drew the attention of the Committee to two task groups and a rapid scrutiny exercise, as they were soon to be advertised to members so that they could volunteer to participate:

- Disadvantaged / Vulnerable Learners Task Group.
- In-house Foster Carers Task Group.
- Rapid Scrutiny: Housing – Provision of Accommodation for Young People at Transition Time.

40 **Date of Next Meeting**

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Thursday 4 November 2021, at 10:30am.

41 **Urgent Items**

It was noted that there was a possibility that child refugees from Afghanistan would be supported in Wiltshire, so questions were asked about what preparations were in place for their arrival and to support their education. Lucy Townsend, Corporate Director of People, was in attendance and reported that there were currently three referrals in progress. It was explained that Wiltshire Council would contact the Home Office to notify them if it had accommodation available and then referrals would be sent by the Home Office. It was explained that all statutory obligations to provide education to school-age children and to meet their social care needs would be met, but that additional services could be provided in liaison with the Home Office. The director then offered to provide a briefing to members in order to give them updated information.

(Duration of meeting: 2.30 - 4.20 pm)

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