

Children's Select Committee

MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN'S SELECT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 20 SEPTEMBER 2022 AT COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNTY HALL, BYTHESEA ROAD, TROWBRIDGE, BA14 8JN.

Present:

Cllr Jon Hubbard (Chairman), Cllr Jacqui Lay (Vice-Chairman), Cllr Mary Champion, Cllr Carole King, Cllr Kathryn Macdermid, Cllr Mike Sankey, Cllr Jo Trigg, Cllr Mark Verbinnen, Dr Mike Thompson, John Hawkins and Cllr Adrian Foster (Substitute)

Also Present:

Cllr Laura Mayes, Cllr Tony Jackson and Cllr Peter Hutton

62 **Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from the following:

- Cllr Helen Belcher (substituted by Cllr Adrian Foster).
- Cllr Kelvin Nash

63 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

Resolved

To approve the minutes of the previous meeting, held on 6 July 2022, as a true and correct record.

64 **Declarations of Interest**

The chairman declared a non-pecuniary interest that he was a trustee of the 4 Youth charity.

65 **Chairman's Announcements**

The chairman reminded the committee that Kit Malthouse MP had taken over from James Cleverly MP as Secretary of State for Education.

66 **Public Participation**

There was no public participation.

67 **Children and young people's mental health**

The chairman reminded the committee that they had received a briefing on the subject of young people's mental health prior to the meeting and noted that a

draft mental health strategy was due to be published by early 2023. He stated that the committee would welcome the opportunity to review detailed metrics to gain a better understanding about the impact of mental health services being provided.

The Corporate Director People thanked members for the feedback they had provided at the pre-briefing as it gave a clear indication of the information that was required at the next meeting.

The Director of Procurement and Commissioning noted that a report would be brought to the committee outlining the impact of the contract with Oxford Health across the whole of BaNES, Swindon and Wiltshire (BSW), in particular the £518,000 annual contribution from Wiltshire Council. She also offered to bring a second report specifically focusing on the additional money spent on bespoke services by the Local Authority.

The committee stated that they would welcome the reports. They would also welcome the attendance of the Director of the Wiltshire Integrated Care Alliance, the Place Based element of the BaNES, Swindon and Wiltshire Integrated Care System, at their next meeting.

Resolved

- 1. For the committee to receive a report outlining the impact of the contract with Oxford Health as well as a separate report focussing on the impact of bespoke services commissioned by Wiltshire Council.**
- 2. For the Children and Young People’s Mental Health Task Group to be formed as soon as possible and advertised to members after the next meeting (where further reports mentioned above will be received that may influence the aim and terms of reference for the task group).**
- 3. For the committee to review the Mental Health Strategy either at a committee meeting or through its Standing Task Group (draft expected late 2022/early 2023).**

68 Business plan and action plan update

Members were notified about the progress made towards implementing the Business Plan in areas within the remit of the Children’s Select Committee. The chairman invited the committee to review the report about the activities of relevant services and how they related to the Business Plan. He then reminded members that they had agreed to set up a task group to determine the best approach to oversee and scrutinise these plans.

The Director of Education and Skills and the Director of Families and Children’s Services each provided further information about the activities in their respective service plans and how they linked to the stated missions in Wiltshire Council’s Business Plan.

In addition, the committee were invited to review the Council Performance and Risk 2022/23 – Quarter One Monitoring Report ahead of its consideration by Cabinet on 27 September. The Corporate Director People explained that the data provided in the report related to activities designed to deliver the 10 stated missions within the Business Plan and listed the relevant key performance indicators in Appendix A of the report. She also highlighted the two areas in the Strategic Risk Register relevant to the committee namely, demand for SEND services and safeguarding children.

During the discussion points included:

- Members thanked the directors for introducing the reports, noting that they gave a good overview of the plans. They also stated that they looked forward to receiving further detail about the metrics within in the individual service plans.
- The chairman of Corporate Parenting Panel reassured the committee that the panel scrutinised placement sufficiency for Children Looked After, including a breakdown of children placed within different Local Authorities (LAs). The Corporate Director people assured members that this was an area which they monitored closely.
- Members stated that they would welcome further information about the impact of housing shortages on children's services.
- In response to a question about the level of educational provision for excluded children the Director of Education and Skills reported that their service length agreement had been reviewed two years ago, in consultation with ISOS and headteachers, to ensure that outcomes were put at the centre. A new governance structure was in place to monitor outcomes, including the director, headteachers and the Head of Alternative Provision.
- A question was asked about whether there were opportunities to improve partnership working with schools to promote the Healthy Schools Programme and mental health provision. The Director of Procurement and Commissioning replied by explaining that they had undertaken a survey of schools to find out about the mental health services that they were commissioning, and they planned to repeat the exercise to get further information.
- When asked about the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on early years provision the Director of Education and Skills, highlighted that there were concerns in this area as the providers of early years services were privately run. She reported that two providers had recently closed but measures had been put in place to ensure that the children affected had alternative provision. Wiltshire Council's Early Years Team had done lots of exciting work to promote careers in the sector. The chairman noted that the Childcare Sufficiency Report was due to come to the committee's next meeting.
- The Director for Education and Skills offered to clarify the timescale of the maintained schools' temporary building replacement programme.
- It was noted that the council's responsibility for post-16 education related primarily to SEND provision and lots of collaborative work was done through the Wiltshire Learning Alliance to develop these services. The Employment, Education and Training Team had responsibility for this area in the Business Plan.
- The Director of Families and Children's Services provided information about placement sufficiency, reporting that 29 percent of children were placed outside

of the county in Q1, compared to an English average of 42 percent and an outstanding LA percentage of 45 percent.

- Members sought further information about the long-term impact of vacancy rates within children's services. The interim director reported that there was a 29 percent vacancy rate for social workers across Families and Children's Services and agency staff made up between five and eight percent of the staff. The agency worker staff levels were far lower than the regional average and measures were in place to encourage staff to join Wiltshire Council on a permanent basis, such as detailed analysis of why staff were leaving.
- The committee took the opportunity to commend staff for the work they were doing given the high vacancy rate in the service.
- The Corporate Director People noted that they would monitor the impact of cost-of-living pressures on agency staff rates. She noted that LAs in the South West had signed a memorandum of understanding about pay rates for agency staff. The council was also studying pay rates for its staff to benchmark them against regional averages.
- Wiltshire Council had committed funding for the Family Help pilot and was working with partners to establish additional funding.
- It was confirmed that Wiltshire Council had purchased the results of a Personal Outcomes Evaluation Tool survey in order to help inform its SEND and Inclusion Strategy.

Resolved

- 1. The committee welcomes the report and the KPIs and outcome measures that will be in future Cabinet reports.**
- 2. To welcome sight of future reports to Cabinet as well as specific reports on those areas specifically relating to areas overseen by Children's Select Committee.**
- 3. For these reports to be received every six months.**

69 Children missing education / children missing out on education

The Head of Targeted Education was pleased to report that permanent exclusion rates in Wiltshire are very low. She then gave further details about the work that the council undertakes to provide oversight of the children missing out on education (CMOE). She explained that she chaired an oversight group every other month to review data and co-ordinate work between different agencies. She also noted that CMOE sub-groups meet on a weekly basis during school term time to identify children at risk of missing education. The head of service also reminded the committee that legislation was coming in which would make it a requirement for creation of LA administered registers for children not in school.

During the discussion the following points were made:

- Members thanked the head of service for the report.
- It was confirmed that the CMOE group also had oversight of children with a reduced educational provision and monitor attendance patterns. The group works closely with schools to ensure that reliable data was available.

- Every school would receive support from Education Welfare Officers.
- Children from Traveller backgrounds received help from the Education Welfare Service and they had a specialist officer within their team working with Traveller families.
- Wiltshire Council was responsible for attendance of all children resident in Wiltshire so worked closely with neighbouring LAs.
- The Head of Education and Skills noted that a three-year service length agreement had been signed in 2021 for the provision of personalised learning to excluded pupils and those at risk of exclusion. She felt that this offered a good opportunity to share best practice and increase school visits by the council.

Resolved

To receive an annual report in a year's time but for it to first be considered by the Standing task group in its draft form to ensure that it provides the information needed by the committee to be reassured about the quality of the council's performance.

70 **Elective Home Education**

An update about how the Education Welfare Service supported children receiving elective home education was provided by the Head of Targeted Education. The head of service highlighted that there had been a slight increase in the number of children receiving home education between the academic year ending September 2021 and 2022. She also stated that there had also been a slight increase in the proportion of children with SEND within the overall number of children being home educated. Although there was no official national data recording the number of elective home educated children, the number of children starting home education was broadly in line with the regional average. Wiltshire Council worked closely with schools and parents to ensure that the education provided was compliant with Department for Education (DfE) guidelines. In addition, an online portal would be developed to make it easier for families to register their children as elective home educated, once legislation had gone through parliament requiring national data to be collected.

During the discussion points included:

- Members thanked the head of service for the update and praised the support provided by Education Welfare Officers.
- It was noted that 31 percent of the elective home educated children had SEND, so it was queried whether this was seen as an indicator that there were an insufficient number of suitable places for children with additional needs in the county. In response, the head of service stressed that elective home education was often seen as a positive choice by parents, and it was important to ask parents the reasons why they wished their child to be home educated.
- The head of service noted that the Education Welfare Service liked to hold discussions with parents before they decided to take their child out of school.
- The Director for Education and Skills reassured members that provision for SEND school places would continue to grow at Sliverwood sites in Trowbridge and Chippenham.

- The Cabinet Member for Children’s Services, Education and Skills confirmed that there were no current plans to close sites at the former St Nicholas or Larkrise Schools, now part of Silverwood School.
- The director also offered to get information from schools about how much work was required by them to bring home educated children back to school.
- It was explained that the formation of the Targeted Education Service in November 2021 allowed Education Welfare Officers to get enhanced support from other teams, including the Medical Needs Service, as they were now part of the same service.
- A councillor noted that they had been informed by a parent with a home educated child that they attended a support group. The head of service observed that they were aware of support groups and were always looking to build strong links with these organisations.
- It was confirmed that legislation going through parliament to create a Children Not in School Register would improve the recording of children who had always been home educated. NHS data was currently being used to help identify children who had never attended school.
- When asked about the attainment of home educated children, the head of service explained that they were working closely with their Education Employment and Training team to develop post-16 support for previously home educated children. As part of this work, information was being gathered about the longer-term employment of previously home educated individuals and how they compared to the wider population.

Resolved

To receive an annual report in a year’s time but for it to first be considered by the Standing task group in its draft form to ensure that it provides the information needed by the committee to be reassured about the quality of the council’s performance, especially as the DfE is working to formalise the data collection for elective home education from October 2022 which should enable benchmarking.

71 **Regular updates**

The chairman reminded members that they were able to submit questions in advance of the meeting.

71a Update from Wiltshire Youth Voice Representative

The recent activities of the Wiltshire Youth Union and Children in Care Council were welcomed by members and praise was given to the Youth Voice Team.

71b School Ofsted Judgements

Officers were thanked for providing the report showing the split between results for academy and maintained schools.

71c DfE Changes - Update from Department for Education

The recruitment of another speaker of Ukrainian to the Bilingual Assistant Team was praised by members and they were pleased to see that this support is available to schools at no cost.

It was confirmed that the new admission appeals code, coming in from October 2022, would make permanent changes, bought in during the pandemic, to allow appeals to be held online. Alternative arrangements could be made if a parent/guardian did not have access to an internet capable device.

The inclusion of Wiltshire Council's position to the issues in the report was also commended by the committee.

72 **Working together to improve school attendance**

The Head of Targeted Education reported that all but six schools had signed up to Group Call, a system that provides live attendance data to the LA. She also reminded the committee that Wiltshire was following current guidance around support for school attendance and that this was expected to become statutory from September 2023.

73 **Schools Forum's update**

The chairman explained that the committee had been provided with a brief update about the work of School's Forum. He noted that a more detailed presentation was expected by January 2023 and that funding arrangements for schools were complex.

74 **Corporate Parenting Panel update**

The chairman highlighted that this update was the chance for the committee to look at the work of the Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP) in between the formal annual reports. He also noted that the committee would receive presentations from the strategic priorities leads, who are councillors on the CPP.

The CPP's chairman informed the committee that he had attended a bubble football session in Salisbury, as priority leads were keen to be involved in an activity of the Children in Care Council, although did not actively participate in the football match itself. He explained that the CPP actively invited housing officers, leisure officers and Strategic Partnership and Engagement Managers to attend their meetings, so they could hear the views that young people had passed on.

74a Directors' update

The following updates were provided:

The Director of Education and Skills

The Director of Education and Skills reminded the committee that Wiltshire Council had submitted its registration of interest to establish a LA Multi

Academy Trust (MAT) in July 2022. She explained that only a number of applications would be granted nationally, but that Wiltshire's application was still under consideration by the DfE. It was also likely that there would be future opportunities to register interest.

The director reported that Wiltshire Council was looking at the implications of all schools becoming academies by 2030 on how it provided services, with around 120 schools expected to become academies over the next eight years. Particular consideration was being given to how the council would continue its support for vulnerable students. Discussions were also taking place with groups of maintained schools to help the council oversee the transition at a strategic level and to try to ensure that schools did not all transition to become academies simultaneously.

Members thanked the director for the update and raised concerns about whether some smaller schools would be attractive to MATs given that they would be unable to offer the economy of scale that larger schools could.

In addition, the director noted that the new Head of School Effectiveness was in post and looked forward to attending a future meeting.

Corporate Director People

The Corporate Director People noted that Wiltshire Police had been rated inadequate at in a recent PEEL inspection by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS). HMICFRS had also undertaken a Child Protection Inspection which had made a number of recommendations to the police, so Wiltshire Council were working closely with the service as it sought to implement the recommended improvements. The corporate director informed the committee that she now chaired the Safeguarding Vulnerable People's Partnership and that they were working closely with the police to look at the recommendations in the HMICFRS reports. A new Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) Strategic Board had also been set up to review recommendations made at a national level.

The corporate director then informed the committee that three significant instant notifications been submitted to Ofsted by the LA, on behalf of the council and its partners. The instant notifications related to situations where either a fatality had occurred, or significant abuse had taken place. She confirmed that one of the cases was known to social care and two of the cases related to babies. She explained that urgent reviews had taken place so that agencies could quickly take lessons from the incidents that had occurred.

Members stated that they would welcome a briefing about the implications of the recommendations of the two inspections carried about on the police. The committee were deeply saddened to hear about the recent incidents submitted to Ofsted. They noted that there was an established process to go through and that they would be appreciative of future reports.

Director of Families and Children's Services

The Director of Families and Children's Services explained that a national review was being undertaken about children with disabilities or complex needs in residential settings. The panel undertaking the review had asked each LA to identify children in their areas that might fall into this category. The director highlighted that there were up to 30 children that this review could apply to in Wiltshire. Wiltshire would respond to any recommendations from the national panel and would submit further information to the DfE by the end of December.

In addition, the director reported that Wiltshire had been invited to be a consultant by the DfE in reviewing national recommendations of a care review. She also noted that Wiltshire Council have asked the Institute for Public Care at Oxford Brookes University to review its safeguarding arrangements, including a look at waiting times for those children needing assistance. The director was confident that Wiltshire had robust processes in place to help children in need, including early intervention, but welcomed the external scrutiny to provide assurance about the services being provided.

When asked about the progress made at Canon's House, the director confirmed that the improvement plan was progressing well. She noted that Canon's House had now been reinspected and was listed as requiring improvement overall but rated as good for health and protection. Independent Reg 44 monitoring would also take place. In response the committee said that they were very pleased with the progress that had been made in a short period of time and welcomed the continuation of the Reg 44 inspections. The chairman of the CPP stated that he was also holding a meeting with the management of Canon's House and that there would be opportunities for councillors to visit the building.

It was reported that the council had decided to use Aspire House as part of a tender for setting up a children's home in Wiltshire.

74b Cabinet Member and Portfolio Holders' update

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills reported that there were approximately 440 Ukrainian child refugees had now been settled in Wiltshire. 211 primary school places had been offered to these refugees as well as 138 secondary school places. She reassured the committee that Cabinet were continuing to monitor the housing of these children in the medium to longer term and the possible impact on school placements.

The cabinet member also noted that she would be completing a peer review self-assessment with cabinet members from different LAs, including Cornwall.

75 **Chair's update**

The chairman reported that he had been holding discussions with the Youth Voice team about how young people could play an active role in scrutiny. He

also noted that he was on a national body for employers', and that they were holding discussions about pay for teachers.

76 **Overview and Scrutiny Activities Updates**

It was noted by the chairman that the Standing task group had held a productive meeting about the recent adoption report and had made a number of suggestions, as included on the agenda, that he would convey to Cabinet on 27 September. He also reminded the committee that there was still a vacancy on the Standing task group and encouraged members to let the Senior Scrutiny Officer know if they were interested in the role.

77 **Forward Work Programme**

The chairman informed the committee that the vice-chairman and he were due to meet with the relevant cabinet members, portfolio holders and directors on 24 November to consider the priorities for children's services in 2022-23. He then invited members to submit suggestions about what they would like to be considered at the meeting.

78 **Date of Next Meeting**

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Tuesday 25 October at 10:30am.

79 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

(Duration of meeting: 10.30 am - 12.55 pm)

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