

Children's Select Committee

MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN'S SELECT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 5 SEPTEMBER 2024 AT COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNTY HALL, BYTHESEA ROAD, TROWBRIDGE, BA14 8JN.

Present:

Cllr Jacqui Lay (Vice-Chairman), Cllr Helen Belcher OBE, Cllr Mary Champion, Cllr Caroline Corbin, Cllr Carole King, Cllr Kathryn Macdermid, Cllr Jo Trigg, Cllr Mark Verbinnen, Cllr Bridget Wayman and John Hawkins

Also Present:

Cllr Peter Hutton and Cllr Sam Pearce-Kearney

81 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from:

Cllr Jon Hubbard
Cllr Kelvin Nash
Cllr Mike Sankey

82 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

Resolved

To approve the minutes of the previous meeting, held on 18 July 2024, as a true and correct record.

83 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

84 **Chairman's Announcements**

Cllr Jacqui Lay, in the Chair, made the following announcements:

It was noted that Cllr Graham Wright, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee had thanked *“the Select Committee for the exemplary work which they are renowned for as well as the in-depth Scrutiny which they have conducted”*

On 23 August 2024, Spurgeons sent an email notification of the temporary closure of outreach introductions to Wiltshire Family Hubs for a 4-week period. This raised concerns for the Chair and Vice-Chair and suggested further scrutiny was needed to understand what was happening. It was agreed that this

announcement would be referred to agenda item 11 to be debated as a possible Forward Work Program item.

85 **Public Participation**

There was no public participation.

86 **Alternate Provision (AP) and Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Strategy 2024-2029**

Kai Muxlow - Interim Head of Families and Children Commissioning, introduced the report.

Councillors were informed on the development of the new co-produced local area SEND and AP Strategy which forms the basis of Wiltshire Council's approach to working with families and children with additional needs.

Particular attention was drawn to the strategy's six priorities:

Priority 1: Children and young people and their families would be at the centre of planning, their views and aspirations heard and acted upon, as true partners.

Priority 2: Getting the right support at the right time, identifying and acting on our children's needs at the earliest opportunity and through promotion of inclusive approaches and practice across the local area.

Priority 3: Provide opportunities for timely planning, reflective of the views of the child or young person and parent carers' current needs, that have clear outcomes.

Priority 4: Ensure good quality communication and information, for families to have a positive experience when navigating services, with information that is easy to access and use.

Priority 5: Professionals and officers across the SEND system would have the skills, knowledge and training to enable effective collaboration across services, joint assessments and sharing of good practice.

Priority 6: Children and young people would be prepared for adulthood and experience timely transitions, leading to increased skills, greater independence, and a greater range of opportunities in life

Councillors welcomed the strategy, however suggested that it would be helpful to understand with more detail what the strategy aims to achieve, with defined deliverables and how these would be measured. Councillors also raised concern that without an implementation plan, it was incredibly difficult for Councillors to understand and appreciate how the strategy's objectives would

be achieved. Councillors also expressed a wish to see a clearer role for schools within the strategy.

It was clarified that the implementation plan would be brought to the Committee for scrutiny in the near future. Officers also clarified that Alternative Provision was included in the strategy as the national framework asks both AP and SEND be developed together.

Resolved

- **To note the report**
- **That the strategy and implementation plan include specific objectives, how they will be delivered and the hoped for outcomes.**
- **That the implementation plan is shared with the committee**

87 **Support for Young Carers**

Kai Muxlow - Interim Head of Families and Children Commissioning, introduced the report.

It was highlighted to the committee that the reason for the report was to provide information as to why the service had been re-tendered and the background work that had taken place between organisations.

It was described that a lot of engagement work with young carers had taken place in 2023, and that concern had been raised at the level of support young carers had been receiving. It was stated that it was clear from discussions that the service was not meeting young carer's needs. Young carer's views were collected and directly fed into the commissioning exercise.

Councillors welcomed the report and amount of work to support young carers. Councillors welcomed the inclusion of selected KPI's in the report and asked to see the full range of KPI's and performances against them in future reports.

It was clarified that the primary focus was to support young carers to be able to live as children, enjoying their childhood and ensuring achievements at school were not affected. As part of this, young carers were being supported to avoid an overwhelming amount of responsibility.

It was further mentioned that social services were closely worked with to ensure that the full range of support was offered, and requirements were met.

It was explained that direct payments had not been stopped but were being reviewed and remodelled.

Resolved

- **To note the report**
- **That the committee receives an annual performance report on the Young Carers contract, including a full set of KPIs.**

88 **Children and Young People's Mental Health Support**

Kai Muxlow - Interim Head of Families and Children Commissioning, introduced and summarised the report.

The key points summarised included:

- That there had been increased recognition at national and local level of the increased prevalence of mental health disorders in children and young people.
- Reasons for increased levels include anxiety, self-harm and the COVID pandemic
- That these increases and the reasons for them had been highlighted in the BSW ICB's draft health strategy for 2024-2029.
- That there had been significant challenges in gathering data from the Council's CAMHS provider Oxford Health, meaning some comparative data had not been made available for a period of time.

The chair informed the committee that there had been a rapid scrutiny earlier this year on the development of the ICB's new Mental Health Strategy. The rapid scrutiny noted the following:

'There is a shift in the funding model for services from high-cost placements, inpatient and crisis services to community-based provision.

'To support community-based provision, there will be a change too in commissioning to enable the funding of a greater number of small, third sector service providers.'

Councillors requested that more communication was made with them, so that they could signpost the services that are available as often councillors are asked about where support is available. Councillors also asked for more information on the timeframe between first contact with children and young people and them feeling comfortable with the support being provided.

It was clarified that specific statistics on how many homeschooled children suffer with their mental health was not immediately to hand but could be provided. It was stated that efforts were made to ensure the same level of support could be offered to those homeschooled.

It was stated that Oxford Health had undertaken significant work to ensure a more robust system was in place following a previous cyber-attack which had led to lost data.

Resolved

- **That the Children’s Select Committee have the opportunity to scrutinise service specifications before providers are commissioned to understand how the contracts will meet the needs identified in the mental health strategy.**
- **That third party providers play a part in the provision of support**

89 **Adoption Report**

The Committee was informed that they had the opportunity to scrutinise Wiltshire Council’s annual report of the adoption service before it goes cabinet in October.

The Committee were also informed that included within the report was the report from Adoption West, who are the regional adoption agency commissioned by Local Authorities including Wiltshire. It is their responsibility to recruit adopters and support the adoption process. Adoption West is scrutinised by a panel of members representing each of the 6 local authorities. The representative from Wiltshire is Cllr Carole King.

Netty Lee, Head of Service for Support and Safeguarding, introduced and summarised the report.

The committee was reminded that it is a statutory requirement that Wiltshire Council’s Adoption Service provides a year-end report in relation to the child’s journey to adoption, and included the management arrangements, outcomes, priorities, and finances for the period 01 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.

Netty Lee drew points from the executive summary of the report, and then welcomed questions from the committee.

It was clarified that adoption placement numbers were being closely monitored and that a recruitment strategy was in place.

It was clarified that should the relationship break down between Adopters and children, that there was support in place including being referred back into support services.

Councillors were extremely pleased with the report, describing it as “bright and colourful” because how the service strived to provide an excellent level of support for both adopted children and those who adopt.

Resolved

- To note the report.
- To recognise the work of Cllr Carole King in representing Wiltshire Council on Adoption West Scrutiny Panel.

90 **Regular updates**

It was noted that because of school summer holidays, there were fewer regular updates for this meeting.

90a Update from Wiltshire Youth Voice Representative

The Committee commended the report for demonstrating the wide range of work being supported by officers.

The written report was noted.

90b DfE Changes - Update from Department for Education

The chair wished to remind the Committee about the recent announcement to scrap Ofsted single word judgements. Officers clarified that they were working with schools and keeping them informed of any developments.

The written report was noted.

90c Safety Valve update

Ben Stevens introduced and summarised the report and dashboard.

Councillors raised concerns over the manageability of the number of EHCPs, with officers clarified that the number of needs assessments was no longer increasing, describing it as an important step in

It was also clarified that teachers were being supported to feel “SEND confident”.

The written report was noted.

91 **Directors' update**

Kathryn Davies – Director for Education and Skills, updated the committee that Ofsted’s report into Adoption West should be available by 30 September, and that the outcome would be shared to the committee at its next meeting.

It was also stated on behalf of Jen Salter – Director for Families and Children, that she would be starting maternity leave in the next few weeks, with cover arrangements being developed and would be confirmed in the next week.

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

Cllr Peter Hutton updated the committee that he had attended the opening of Phoenix Grove in Melksham, a provision for 7–17-year-olds, and that Ofsted were due to give their “final sign-off” soon.

93 **Chair's update**

Cllr Jon Hubbard had given his apologies, and Vice-Chair Cllr Jacqui Lay had no updates.

93a Overview and Scrutiny Activities Updates

There were no updates provided for this item.

94 **Forward Work Programme**

Through the chair, proposals were offered to the committee for potential addition to the Forward Work Programme:

- As mentioned in agenda item 4, following on from the temporary hold on their outreach service in August, to request a report to committee in November on progress being made in the delivery of Family Hubs now that we are 6 months into the contract.
- A rapid scrutiny to consider the impact of out of county education – highlighted on p135 of the agenda pack.
- A rapid scrutiny of service requirements/specifications before commissioning of preventative mental health services to support children and young people.

Resolved

To approve the Forward Work Programme with the proposed additions.

95 **Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be on 26 November 2024.

96 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

97 **Glossary**

(Duration of meeting: 10.30 am - 12.50 pm)

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