

Children's Select Committee

MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN'S SELECT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 26 NOVEMBER 2024 AT COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNTY HALL, BYTHESEA ROAD, TROWBRIDGE, BA14 8JN.

Present:

Cllr Jon Hubbard, Cllr Jacqui Lay, Cllr Bridget Wayman, Cllr Mark Verbinnen, Cllr Carole King, Cllr Jo Trigg, Cllr Helen Belcher OBE, Cllr Caroline Thomas, Cllr Adrian Foster (substitute) and John Hawkins

Also Present:

Cllr Stewart Palmen, Cllr Peter Hutton, Cllr Laura Mayes and Cllr Suzanne Wickham

98 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from:

Cllr Caroline Corbin

Cllr Kelvin Nash

Cllr Mary Champion

Cllr Kathryn MacDermid (Substituted by Cllr Adrian Foster)

99 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

Resolved

To approve the minutes of the previous meeting, held on 05 September 2024, as a true and correct record.

100 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

101 **Chairman's Announcements**

The Chair was sad to announce that in October, Dr Mike Thompson resigned as the Clifton Diocese Co-opted Member of the Children's Select Committee. Dr Mike Thompson had been a member of this committee (and its predecessors) since 2002. He also chaired the Schools Organisation Committee and the strategic working group on Further Education and has been a school and college governor.

On behalf of the Committee, Cllr Hubbard thanked him for his unwavering commitment to ensuring the best educational opportunities for children and young people in this county.

Dr Mike Thompson also passed his best wishes to the committee and its future activities.

The Chair was also extremely sorry to announce that Marie Gondlach would also be leaving Wiltshire Council. Marie was described as a great support to the Chair and Vice-Chair who was always passionate about the work of the Children's Select Committee. Further described as professional, diligent and focused on scrutiny and outcomes for children and young people, the Chair wished Marie all the best for the future on behalf of the Committee.

Lastly, the Chair informed the Committee that there would be a Chair's briefing on Childcare sufficiency on 3 December 2024 and that all committee members were welcome.

102 **Public Participation**

There was no public participation.

103 **Alternative Provision Update**

John Spring, Head of Service Targeted Education introduced the report.

The Committee thanked officers for the report and expressed frustration at the actions of certain schools that have withdrawn from county-wide Alternative Provision schemes and have high numbers of students being permanently excluded. Councillors questioned why these schools were not being publicly named to allow parents to make more informed decisions on school choice.

During debate, the following was clarified for the committee:

- The directory was considered really important to uphold standards and sustain communication with all providers. Officers meet regularly with school leaders to explore any gaps in AP.
- Schools have been excellent at responding to requests for statistics on how many children are accessing AP, meaning officers have a really good situational picture.
- Schools outside of Wiltshire who have children from a Wiltshire address on role do provide statistics and remain in contact in officers meaning both the school and students can be supported.
- There is strong collaboration from all types of schools to accommodating SEND students.
- If officers feel that parents may have been "encouraged" to off roll their child, sufficient challenges and frameworks are in place to communicate with both the school and parents.

- A new team of secondary behaviour support teachers was being established as a traded service running with a 100% subsidy for two years for all secondary schools. The numbers were given as two behavioural support teachers (for which it was a requirement that they were qualified teachers) and five mentors.
- Wiltshire Council monitor closely the SEND status of children who are permanently excluded, and further information would be provided regarding the statistics of young carers who are permanently excluded.

Cllr Suzanne Wickham reminded Councillors that Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, an Alternative Provision provider, had an open invitation for Councillors to visit.

Resolved

To receive an annual report on Alternative Provision. To be next scheduled for 5 November 2025.

To note the report.

104 **Affordable Schools Strategy**

This item was deferred.

105 **Early Years, Childcare and Entitlement Strategy**

The Chair informed the Committee that they were being asked to consider and approve the proposed Early Years, Childcare and Entitlement Strategy.

Emma Cooke – Early Years Manager, delivered a short presentation, which was included in the minutes and invited questions and comments on the strategy.

Councillors welcomed the strategy and thanked officers for their work. Councillors raised concerns at the level of EHCPs given the national context and Wiltshire Council's Safety Valve program.

During debate, the following was clarified for the committee:

- It was assured that a small missing section of the report would be circulated to Councillors.
- More provision was currently being built to support new houses, with section 106 agreements in place.
- There is a big focus on retaining staff to avoid high turnovers.

- A report which was requested at a previous meeting was being finalised and would be shared with Councillors in December.

Resolved

To endorse the strategy.

To receive an annual update on the progress of the action plan of the Early Years and Childcare strategy. To be next scheduled for 3 September 2025.

106 **Safeguarding Vulnerable People Partnership (SVPP) Annual Report**

The Chair stated that this report had been circulated in the Agenda Supplement. It was proposed that given the number of items and restricted time, that the standing task group be tasked with considering the annual report and report their findings in January's meeting.

Resolved

For the Children Select Committee Standing Task Group to review the sections of the SVPP Annual Report relating to children and young people and report its findings to committee at its meeting on 15 January 2025.

107 **Families and Children's Services Roadmap 2024-2026**

Gary Norton-Sanders, Service Manager, Quality Outcomes for Children and Families briefly introduced the report and invited questions and comments.

The 9 priorities were specifically highlighted:

1. **Children in Safe, Loving Homes** – *Our ambition is for all children to grow up in homes filled with love, care, and security.*
2. **Protecting the Most Vulnerable** – *We will do everything in our power to protect the most vulnerable children from harm.*
3. **Supporting Families Early** – *Our focus is on preventing problems before they start, ensuring children have the best start in life.*
4. **Improving Care for Children in Care** – *We are committed to providing the highest quality care for children in care and ensuring they have every opportunity to succeed.*
5. **Listening to Children and Families** – *We will listen to the voices of children and families, making sure they are heard and their needs are met.*
6. **Supporting Mental and Emotional Wellbeing** – *We will ensure every child has the emotional support they need to succeed, fostering resilience and confidence.*
7. **Protecting from Exploitation** – *We will provide safe spaces for children and protect them from harm, including exploitation and abuse.*

8. A Skilled and Compassionate Workforce – *Our workforce will be skilled, compassionate, and committed to supporting every child and family to achieve their best.*

9. Quality Services for All – *We will make sure that every child and family receives the highest quality support, every time.*

Councillors thanked officers for a “fantastic, proactive and ambitious” plan that is very clear. Councillors requested a data set to sit alongside parts of the plan to allow cross-referencing.

It was clarified that it was a purposeful choice to communicate a front facing sheet without lots of heavy data, but that feedback was welcomed.

Resolved

To receive an update evidencing progress against the 9 priorities of the Roadmap, to be scheduled for 5 November 2025.

108 **Executive Update to the Youth Provision and Area Board Youth Funding Task Group Recommendations**

The Chair reminded the Committee that the Youth Strategy would be an agenda item in January 2025. Members were invited to ask questions relating to the upcoming update which could be fed back for answers in January.

Resolved

To forward questions raised by members concerning the update and request that these are addressed under the Youth Strategy agenda item at committee on 5 January 2025.

109 **Regular updates**

109a Update from Wiltshire Youth Voice Representative

The Chair thanked officers for providing the report, however proposed that an annual report may be more appropriate than at every meeting.

Resolved

To note the report and consider outside the meeting whether to move to an annual report instead of regular updates.

109b School Ofsted Judgements

The written report was noted.

109c DfE Changes - Update from Department for Education

The written report was noted.

109d Working together to improve school attendance

The written report was noted.

109e Schools Forum

The written report was noted.

109f Corporate Parenting Panel

The written report was noted.

109g Safety Valve update

Ben Stevens briefly introduced and summarised the report.

Councillors requested that where possible the dataset was shared with the Committee in advance of the meeting, as it had been incredibly useful in past meetings.

Resolved

To note the report.

To set up a member briefing on new interventions as proposed in the report.

109h Directors' update

There was no significant update.

109i Cabinet Member and Portfolio Holders' update

Cllr Suzanne Wickham wanted to draw attention to the Reverse Careers fair and hailed it as a great success.

109j Chair's update

There was no update.

109k Overview and Scrutiny Activities Updates

The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the need for members for the vacancies on the Homelessness and Young people rapid scrutiny and stated that the other vacancies had now been filled.

Resolved

To note the update on task group and rapid scrutiny activities provided

To seek members for the vacancies on the Homelessness and Young people rapid scrutiny – the other vacancies have now been filled.

110 **Forward Work Programme**

Resolved

To note the updates from the meeting and approve the Children’s Select Committee Forward Work Programme.

111 **Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Children’s Select Committee will be on 15 January 2025.

112 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

113 **Glossary**

(Duration of meeting: 10:30am – 13:15pm)

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