

Children's Select Committee

MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN'S SELECT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 15 JANUARY 2025 AT COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNTY HALL, BYTHESEA ROAD, TROWBRIDGE, BA14 8JN.

Present:

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

Also Present:

Cllr Sam Pearce-Kearney, Cllr Suzanne Wickam, Cllr Stewart Palmen, Cllr Laura Mayes, Cllr Iain Blair-Pilling

1 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from:

Cllr Kelvin Nash
Cllr Kathryn MacDermid (Cllr Adrian Foster substituting)
Cllr Caroline Corbin
Cllr Peter Hutton

2 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

Resolved

To approve the minutes of the previous meeting, held on 26 November 2024, as a true and correct record.

3 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

4 **Chairman's Announcements**

The Chair shared an opportunity for Overview and Scrutiny (OS) to look back on its activity during the outgoing council as an important part of its improvement journey.

At the next meeting on 11 March, Children's Select Committee would receive a report outlining key activities during 2021-24 and also propose some **future work priorities** for our successor committee after the elections in May.

To feed into this process, members of this committee would soon receive an email asking for submissions on what scrutiny should be looking at under the next council.

The Chair also proposed moving the safety valve report up the agenda as he felt it was more significant than a “regular” update, with the regular item being moved further up the agenda permanently in the future.

5 Public Participation

The Committee welcomed Margeret Firth, Director of Partnerships at Wiltshire Community Foundation, who was present for agenda item 7 regarding the Wiltshire Youth Framework.

6 Wiltshire Youth Framework

Having a youth strategy was a recommendation coming out of the Youth Provision and Area Board Youth Funding Task Group in Sept 2023. The Committee received the Executive response in January 2024 and an Executive update in November 2024, with the draft framework being presented at this meeting.

Cllr Iain Blair-Pilling introduced the report, before handing over to Darryl Freeman and Rhys Schell who presented a PDF File attached to the agenda.

The Committee thanked officers for the report and presentation and welcomed the framework and the positive changes and funding it will bring. The Committee were acutely aware of the level of work that had gone into the framework and thanked officers for their dedication. The Committee questioned whether the level of funding was enough and were disappointed at the lack of a detailed plan for implementation given the length of time the framework had been worked on.

During debate, the following was clarified for committee:

- That recruiting was a main priority, including volunteers, and a significant amount of funding (£100,000) was set aside for this.
- That volunteers are the cornerstone of the framework, and it is incredibly important that resources are available to support them, and Councillor comments would be taken onboard when considering the level and variation of support offered.
- It was important to be mindful of the level of effort and knowledge that skilled youth workers were providing to this framework also.
- That the Youth Partnership was a standalone organisation that had proposed its own plan to Wiltshire Council of which core funding would be for both Wiltshire and Swindon, however additional funding and

resources would only include Wiltshire and not Swindon. The delivery plan for this was still being drafted.

- Disappointment was expressed that the Committee were unhappy at the level of funding.
- It was important that the focus wasn't only on Youth Clubs and activities.
- That unfortunately there was limited funds, which many Councils across the Country are experiencing, and therefore the aim is to provide the most out of the funding the Council does have.
- That Wiltshire Councils relationship with surrounding organisations is constantly improving and influencing the framework and that the overall picture is very complex.
- That Area Board funding was there to fill the gaps in what was already provided by Wiltshire Council itself and other organisations.

Resolved

- **To note the report.**
- **For the delivery plan to be brought to the committee before it is published.**
- **For the committee's suggestions and challenges to be taken into account when developing the framework and delivery plan.**

7 SEND Alternative Provision Ofsted Inspection Outcome

The report was briefly introduced by Kathryn Davis, Director of Education and Skills, and questions were welcomed.

The Committee thanked Kathryn for the report and the entire team on the time and effort committed and congratulated the result of the inspection.

During debate, the following was clarified for committee:

- That the Council was not resting on its laurels and would continue to look for improvements.

Resolved

- **To welcome the good partnership working acknowledged by the inspection report and the resulting support for children and young people.**

8 **Affordable Schools Strategy**

The Chair advised that as the Committee had received an in-depth pre-meeting briefing on this subject, that the Committee would move straight to questions.

The Committee welcomed the affordable schools programme as clearly valued by the schools that participate. The pre-meeting briefing was described as one of the best the Committee had received and thanked officers for all the work committed to a great strategy

It was clarified that there was a strong focus around attendance and overcoming barriers experienced by disadvantaged children.

Resolved

- **To note and welcome the work being undertaken to reduce inequalities in schools.**

9 **Rapid Scrutiny Report - Out of County Education**

This rapid scrutiny was set up to consider the impact on children from Wiltshire having to go to school out of county.

John Hawkins led on the scrutiny and briefly introduced the key findings and recommendations in the report.

Kathryn Davis assured the Committee that they would produce a report responding to the findings and recommendations of the Rapid Scrutiny, and that the Council is committed to supporting all children in Out of County Education.

Resolved

- **To approve the recommendations of the Rapid Scrutiny.**

10 **Rapid Scrutiny Report - Educational Performance Outcomes**

The second Rapid Scrutiny Report looked at performance outcomes in education. As lead member of the group, The Chair summarised the key points:

- The group considered current performance data and trends; however the focus of the scrutiny was to select data that would be presented to the committee in the future.
- The group were keen to see data presented in a way that would be easily understood and self-explanatory to support effective scrutiny.
- The group were also keen that the report would enable committee members to relate the results of disadvantaged groups against average performance.

- In terms of presentation, the committee were advised that they would see that a lot of recommendations were made all intended for ease of comprehension.

The chair thanked officers for their collaborative approach and providing the evidence to support the scrutiny.

Resolved

- **To approve the recommendations of the rapid scrutiny report**
- **To request that the report is separated to primary and secondary schools.**

11

Regular updates

11a Safety Valve update

The Chair notified the Committee that they had been provided with the following documents: an Update, the Dashboard, a programme overview (for DfE) and a Sustainability Plan. He then invited Ben Stevens to introduce the update.

Overall, the Safety Valve programme had been RAG rated Amber/Red. This is because, while the project activity was mostly on track, the impact had not been felt yet. The system was now 650 EHCPs ahead of the forecast, and this was showing as a £43.2m overspend against a £28m budgeted overspend.

Therefore, officers had worked on redrafting the plan, which would be submitted to Cabinet for approval. Extending the length of the Safety Valve agreement, and adjusting the deficit limits in it, were not steps that the council could take unilaterally and, if Cabinet agreed the plans, then there would need to be further discussion with the DfE. The council should not expect the DfE to increase the contribution they were making as part of the Safety Valve agreement.

An evidence-led approach has been taken to ensure the level of quality support did not decrease, with an ambition to achieve similar data milestones to statistical neighbours for metrics like EHCNA requests, robust decision making, and ceased plans.

Eight short-term interventions had been developed to move Wiltshire towards a new target system by April 2026. The language around these interventions has begun to evolve as they are developed but, detailed in Appendix 3, these are:

1. Addressing poor practice in schools
2. Faster support before the statutory process
3. Early Years Early Support Plan
4. Additional post-16 ceasing
5. Celebrating success through pre-16 ceasing
6. Improved decision-making
7. Mid-phase step down out of Independent Sector Placements
8. Growing capacity through Assistant Education Officers

Without this April 2026 milestone being met, balancing the SEND budget in Wiltshire would become impossible.

The Committee thanked Ben for the update, but expressed grave concern at the situation Wiltshire Council found itself in. The Committee also noted the contradictory nature of Government policy, asking for a reduction in EHCPs and spending levels, whilst also pushing EHCPs as the answer to the many needs expressed by young people.

During debate, the following was clarified for committee:

- The number of special school places was constrained by the physical space and capacity of the limited number of special schools in the county.
- Mediation, Appeals and Tribunals were a concern, whilst ensuring this concern was balanced with supporting the parents and children affected.
- Ongoing conversation is used to identify challenges school leaders are facing as the Council asks them to make inclusion more mainstream.
- The DfE would not be providing any additional funding above the number already agreed at the point where Wiltshire Council joined the Safety Valve program.

Resolved

- **To note the report and amendments to the plan.**
- **To continue to receive an update on the safety valve programme at every committee meeting.**

11b School Ofsted Judgements

The written report was briefly summarised and noted.

11c DfE Changes - Update from Department for Education

The written report was briefly summarised and noted.

12 Schools Forum

The written report was noted.

12a Corporate Parenting Panel

The written report was noted.

13 Directors' update

It was noted that Canon's House had received an overall grade of Good from Ofsted, and the full outcome would be brought to the Committee.

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

There was no update.

15 **Chair's update**

There was no update.

16 **Overview and Scrutiny Activities Updates**

There was no report attached as the committee had received two rapid scrutiny reports as main agenda items.

The Chair updated the Committee that there was a task group underway on mental health support for children and young people and a rapid scrutiny of youth homelessness was scheduled for 23 January.

17 **Forward Work Programme**

Resolved

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

18 **Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Children's Select Committee will be on 11 March 2025.

19 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

20 **Glossary**

(Duration of meeting: 10:30am – 13:05pm)

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