

**Minutes of the meeting of the
Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee
held on 15 January 2019**

Present:

Members of the Committee

Councillors:

Jo Barker, Margaret Bell, Jonathan Chilvers, Yousef Dahmash (Chair), Corinne Davies, Pete Gilbert, Dan Gissane, Jerry Roodhouse, Andy Sargeant and Pam Williams.

Cabinet Portfolio Holders:

Councillor Colin Hayfield, Portfolio Holder for Education & Learning
Councillor Jeff Morgan, Portfolio Holder for Children's Services

Other County Councillors:

Councillor Izzie Seccombe
Councillor Alan Webb

Other Representatives:

Joseph Cannon, Church Representative
John McRoberts, Parent Governor Representative
Rev. Elaine Scrivens, Church Representative

Invitees:

Dr Peter Kent, Chair of the Warwickshire Education Challenge Board
Katherine Walker, Apprentice Young Advisor

Officers:

Shinderpaul Bhangal – Participation Lead, Children and Families
Jenny Bevan- Voice of the Child Research Manager
Jenny Butlin-Moran – Safeguarding Quality and Assurance Service Manager
John Coleman- Assistant Director, Children and Families
Hannah Heath- Business Improvement Officer, Children and Families
Helen King, Deputy Director of Public Health
Marina Kitchen, Service Manager, Innovation and Transformation
Nigel Minns, Strategic Director, People Directorate
Janet Purcell, Democratic Services Manager
Paul Senior – Interim Assistant Director, Education and Learning

1. General

(1) Apologies

Apologies were submitted on behalf of Councillor Chris Williams (Councillor Andy Sargeant was in attendance in place of Councillor Williams) and Sean Taylor, Teacher Representative.

(2) Members' Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None

(3) Minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2018

Resolved:

That, subject to correction to the name of the Government Minister on page 11 to 'Jackie Doyle Price' the minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2018 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

Matters Arising

It was noted that a number of briefing papers had been circulated to members following the last meeting. Members were advised that not all of the officers who had prepared the briefings were present at this meeting and it was suggested that if any member had any questions they should contact the author of the briefing directly or contact Janet Purcell, Democratic Services Manager.

2. Public Speaking

There were no questions from members of the public.

3. Children and Young People's Participation & Engagement Strategy 2019-2023

Katherine Walker, Apprentice Young Advisor, presented the revised Children and Young People's Participation & Engagement Strategy. Katherine explained that her role was to advise staff in the Children and Families services on the best ways to work with and consult children and young people, in particular those within the care of Warwickshire County Council.

Katherine reminded members that the Council has worked with children and young people for many years, including through the Children in Care Council since its inception in 2008, and working together to improve services has always been a feature of how the County Council has operated in Warwickshire and is particularly important given that children and young people are one of the largest groups of service users.

Katherine explained that the previous 2014-2017 Strategy defined participation and created a set of values and standards and was designed to increase awareness of staff and promote positive working practices that listen and act on the views of young people. The strategy had led to pockets of very good practice and some great achievements but there were areas where work was not co-ordinated effectively (which has meant important messages from children and young people have been missed) and the strategy has also not been embedded across the organisation. The new strategy therefore sought to build on the foundation laid in the existing strategy but ensure a consistent and coordinated approach to participation and engagement across the Council. In particular the strategy sets out new priorities and nine work areas where children and young people could be more closely involved with workers to shape future council services.

Katherine added that there is a good network of organisations through which the voice of children and young people can be heard (including the Children in Care Council, MYPs, Care Leavers Forum and Warwickshire Youth Council).

Katherine concluded by reminding members that the Council has made a commitment to put children and young people 'at the heart of everything' it does and that Council's pledge to young people in care and the local offer to care leavers is just two ways of engaging with young people. The Strategy is more robust and will be supported by an action plan, with managers being held to account on how they listen and act on the views of young people and consequently use information to improve services.

Shinderpaul Bhangal added that there has been progress and greater awareness and willingness of staff to engage with young people. The new strategy takes this further and challenge managers across the organisation by asking them what they are doing to engage with young people as part of the work they do and not look at participation as something separate.

Members raised the following points:

- There is more that political parties can do to encourage young people to participate in a meaningful way so that their voice is heard.
- It is important to 'follow through' on engagement. A good example of this is co-production of services, as happened in the development of the local offer for care leavers.
- How to reach young people who are not attending a youth club (particularly as there are fewer clubs), or who live in rural areas where there are transport issues, but also how to reach those who may not wish to join the Youth Council or meet in a formal setting. Shinderpaul advised that young people who wish to attend meetings but who do not have access to transport are picked up by staff. There are other ways to engage with those who do not wish to attend meetings, for example some are reached on a one to one basis through referrals from a case worker. They may also wish to engage just on specific issues and will be advised when that is being discussed so that they can input, including putting in views in writing. Katherine added that she now chaired the Children in Care Council and that she had feedback that many young people do not like formal meetings. She was therefore looking at less formal methods of engagement, such as workshops, one to ones, email etc. to ensure that young people are listened to in the way they want to be listened to. Shinderpaul advised later in the meeting that video conferencing was not something they had explored as a method of engagement but social media was being developed. In particular 115 young people were signed up to a Facebook page for care leavers which provides a way of engaging and disseminating information.
- The issues raised by young people are the same issues they have raised many times (for example lack of transport) which is frustrating for young people and raises the question of whether they are being listened to and whether things can be resolved. Shinderpaul advised that it is important to distinguish between types of issues. For example transport is a national issue and young people have lobbied and continue to lobby government on this. There are other issues

that are about the Council's services but which may require resources (for example allowing young people to have more time with their case worker). There are also issues that can be more easily addressed such as clarifying information on young people's rights and entitlements. As a result of issues raised by young people, there is currently a review of what young people receive on leaving care and how they can be supported (for example in obtaining home furnishing, access to grants). Young people also regularly attend the Children and Families leadership team.

- It was suggested that the Committee review the Action Plan when it is available, which should include timescales. Jenny Bevan advised that meetings had been held with operations managers on how they can deliver on the young people's priorities (one or two in the first year) with a view to the action plan being completed by the end of March. An annual review will take place in November to ensure the actions agreed in year one have been taken forward. For example, the aim is to include a young person on all recruitment panels and progress on this will be monitored across the five years.
- The report identified that there had been some situations where work had not been coordinated properly. Jenny Bevan advised that this was being tackled through the establishment of a Participation Advocate Network, which was open to anyone who wished to be involved, sharing the actions across a range of people but in a coordinated fashion. As participation grows the need for resource grows and this has happened with the introduction of young advisors.
- Mental health is the top priority for young people. Marina Kitchen advised that young advisors have been assigned to work on joint transformation and will have a voice on this issue.
- Councillors on the Corporate Parenting Panel attend the Children in Care Council and more recently the Care Leavers Forum.
- Children who are going through the fostering process need to be more involved in the decisions that impact them. John Coleman advised that social workers are now being provided with resources for them to use in engaging with young people and the young advisors are developing a training course they will be delivering to social workers, teachers and others. In addition google forms are being used as a simple way to ensure feedback from children, parents and carers is integrated.
- There are a lot of services that do not think to link with the youth parliament or young people generally in the design of their services (e.g. libraries, roads). John Coleman assured the meeting that this is being looked at with managers across the County and it is also for members to think about the view of young people in the policies they consider. The seven young advisors are available to provide the young people perspective. In addition shifting the culture is best done through promotion of successes including new co-production of services.
- It is important to reach children who are not on the radar, part of a group. Jenny Bevan advised that the service is reaching children in schools as they develop policies, for example in the development of the SEND strategy.

- Young advisors are now being used to recruit other young people to participate. For example the recent meeting of the Care Leavers Forum had 15 young people from very different backgrounds and experiences.

Resolved

- (1) That the Committee welcomes the Strategy, including its inclusion of Child Protection and Children in Need.
- (2) That the Committee promotes and facilitates the participation of children and young people with Warwickshire County Council and its partners, where possible.
- (3) That the Committee receive reports (including the views from young people) on progress of the Action Plan.

4. Achievement of Warwickshire Children and Young People in National Tests in 2018

The Chair advised members that it had not been possible for Marion Plant, Chief Executive of the Midland Academies Trust, to attend these meeting but that efforts were being made to arrange a meeting with her.

Paul Senior, Interim Assistant Director of Education and Learning, introduced the report by reassuring the Committee that Warwickshire's education system has a lot of strengths and that, whilst there are gaps and room for improvement, there are many positives. He also reminded members that the education system is not just about the schools and the settings but it is about the whole system including the role of children social care, adult social care, youth offending service, health and all of the components that play a role in the achievement of young people. The challenge for Warwickshire is to now go from good to outstanding and targeting the areas that need to improve. Paul added that there is an ambitious co-produced Education Strategy and there is now a collective responsibility to ensure a successful implementation of the Education Strategy.

Paul introduced Dr Peter Kent, head teacher of Lawrence Sherrif School and chair of the Warwickshire Education Challenge Board who is an advocate of the Education Strategy and is supporting the Council in taking this forward.

Dr Peter Kent added that the Education Challenge Board promotes a 'school led self-improving system' based on an understanding that improving performance across the County is a responsibility that all schools have. The Board brings schools together, across all sectors and phases, to work together to find solutions for issues facing individual schools, and in particular issues around school improvement.

The Board has been in place for nearly three years and the focus has shifted from focus on individual schools to increasingly focussing on strategy that will have an impact on a range of schools. Funding from the National Strategic School Improvement Fund is being used to focus on ways of closing the gap in attainment, and ensure teaching schools work together and are heading in the same direction.

Peter added that there has been buy in to this approach from all types of schools across the County.

Paul Senior added that sector-led improvement is the key to success and in Warwickshire there are some outstanding leaders and schools that can take this forward and the role of the Education Strategy is to close the gap.

The following areas of concern were identified:

Pupil Premium

There is the continuing problem that Pupil Premium is not being claimed in schools. Paul Senior agreed that this is an issue and that there is potentially a £1.4m gap. Paul assured the meeting that this is being addressed and Dr Peter Kent added that at a recent head teacher's conference, Sir John Dunford gave examples of how this is being successfully tackled in other areas and there are approaches that may be applied in Warwickshire.

Schools where performance has decreased

The total figures of attainment are very good but there are schools which are not achieving good results. Members expressed particular concern regarding the performance of the MAT schools as the Committee had been given assurance last year that the performance would be improving. Members expressed concern that this showed a lack of understanding regarding what is happening in these particular schools. Members asked what was being done to intervene and what role the Regional Schools Commissioner had in ensuring improvement.

Paul Senior advised that there were on- going conversations and that he would be meeting with the Regional Schools Commissioner the next week. Paul added that the local authority's role is to challenge and support schools wherever possible and that, although the relationship with academies is different, the Regional Commissioner is keen to work with the Challenge Board in finding solutions. It was also noted that a Nuneaton and Bedworth school improvement strategy is in development.

Members expressed concern that action is needed quickly and, although the Council may not have direct power, asked what can be done to influence change.

Paul Senior advised that there needs to be an analysis of what is and is not working well and a strategy developed focused on Nuneaton, recognising that education alone is not the solution. Paul added that the right stakeholders (including families) need to be involved and that members need to be included in developing the strategy.

It was agreed that members be provided with a breakdown of figures for schools in Nuneaton and also an indication of the percentage of children who go on to do 'A' levels in each town and the retention rate on courses. Councillor Margaret Bell also asked that the proposed Nuneaton and Bedworth School Improvement Strategy cover Hartshill School as it is one of the Midland Academies Trust schools, although it is North Warwickshire.

Coasting Schools and vulnerable groups

Councillor Colin Hayfield, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Education and Learning, highlighted that the report was overall positive with 90% of schools good or outstanding but it did mean that 10% were not and there were areas across the County of low performance. In addition there were only a small proportion of outstanding schools and some schools have not been inspected for a while and it was therefore difficult to judge how well they were doing. Councillor Hayfield concluded that there is work to do on both those schools that were under achieving and those that could become outstanding.

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse proposed that there be a strategy for tackling not just those schools identified as not performing well in Nuneaton and in other areas, but also to address those schools defined in the report at 'coasting.' He added that more information and discussion is needed on how to approach the challenges highlighted in section 9 in relation to performance of vulnerable groups. Councillor Roodhouse proposed that the 'Closing the Gap' item proposed for the September meeting be the key focus of that meeting so that a detailed scrutiny may be undertaken and should address in particular the concerns around the three areas of poor performing schools, coasting schools and vulnerable groups

Social workers in schools

John Coleman supported the views put forward that engagement with families is important in tackling performance and in addressing issues that are barriers to pupils learning. For example the placing of social workers in schools has been proved to be effective and, although Warwickshire was unsuccessful in a bid for Department for Education funding for this, it was still an area that was being explored for the MAT. In addition Education and Learning and Children and Families services were looking at ensuring their systems identified those vulnerable learners to ensure a more joined up approach across the country.

Alternatives to academic education

Members reiterated the need to ensure young people obtain life skills and to recognise that many learn and acquire their education (including reading and writing) whilst acquiring practical skills. This is an area that the views of young people should be heard.

Paul Senior agreed that there are many pathways to achievement and that attainment in tests is just one of those. The success of authorities should be measured by how well they treat their most disadvantaged and vulnerable. Warwickshire has a good Education Strategy but it must be implemented effectively. Paul added that he supported the use of social workers in schools as being part of the solution.

Resolved:

- (1) That the Committee recognises that the overall results for Warwickshire are good but is disappointed with regard to the following three areas:
 - the disparity in performance across the districts and boroughs

- the number of coasting schools
- the challenges in relation to the performance of vulnerable groups.

(2) That the Committee has input into the Nuneaton and Bedworth Schools Improvement Strategy.

(3) That the Committee undertakes a review of the challenges identified in the report including what actions are and can be taken to drive improved performance in coasting schools and to address the issue of performance of vulnerable groups.

5a. Questions to Cabinet Portfolio Holders and Officers

The All Age Autism Strategy

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse asked Councillor Jeff Morgan when the new All Age Autism Strategy would be produced.

Councillor Jeff Morgan responded that he would reply as soon as possible.

Social Worker Retention Policy

Councillor Johnathan Chilvers asked how the success of the policy will be measured. Councillor Jeff Morgan responded that the staffing was almost at full capacity but that the focus was now on retention. John Coleman added that the measure will be based on the % of staff leaving monthly and length of time staying in Warwickshire (with a view to increasing this from the current average of three years to four or five). This will be reported to members.

Councillor Dan Gissane asked what is being done to encourage social workers to stay in the area.

John Coleman responded that there are good links with the universities and encouragement of student placements with Warwickshire being one of the few authorities using Frontline which enables a fast track into social work regardless of degree. The County Council can also offer assistance with settlement costs.

Breakdown of test results Nuneaton and Bedworth

Councillor Peter Gilbert asked for a breakdown of results for primary and secondary schools for Nuneaton and Bedworth as separate towns where possible.

Councillor Colin Hayfield responded that he will provide this.

5b. Updates from Cabinet Portfolio Holders and Assistant Directors

Councillor Jeff Morgan, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Children's Services, updated the Committee on the number of children with child protection plans which now stood at 389, which was below that of statistical neighbours.

6. Work Programme

The following items were suggested for the work programme:

- What we do to support talented children
- COMPASS – on their role in the School Health and Wellbeing Programme.

7. Any Urgent Items

There were no items of urgent business

8. Date of next meeting

It was noted that the next scheduled meeting would take place at 10.00 am on 12 March 2019, Shire Hall, Warwick.

9. Reports Containing Confidential or Exempt Information

Resolved

That members of the public be excluded from the meeting for the items mentioned below on the ground that their presence would involve the disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

10. Celebrating the Achievements of Young People in Warwickshire

Members asked what lessons officers took from the case studies and how these were applied to developing services. Paul Senior advised that lessons are learned and that he would consider what would be appropriate to circulate to the Committee to demonstrate this.

The Committee rose at 12.30 p.m.

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Chair