

**Minutes of the meeting of the
Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee
held on 12 March 2019**

Present:

Members of the Committee

Councillors:

Margaret Bell, Jonathan Chilvers, Yousef Dahmash (Chair), Corinne Davies, Jerry Roodhouse, Chris Williams 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 Izzi Seccombe
Councillor Alan Webb

Other Representatives:

Invitees:

Dr Peter Kent, Chair of the Warwickshire Education Challenge Board
Samren Reddy, Warwickshire Youth Parliament
George Towl, Warwickshire Youth Parliament
Charity Miller, Children in Care Council
Umar Teerab, Leaving Care and Asylum Seeking Service

Officers:

Shinderpaul Bhangal, Participation Lead, Children and Families
Jenny Butlin-Moran, Safeguarding Quality and Assurance Service Manager
Hannah Heath, Business Improvement Officer, Children and Families
Cheryl Jones, Specialist and Targeted Support - Area Team Leader
Helen King, Deputy Director of Public Health
Tom McColgan, Senior Democratic Services Officer
Paul Senior, Interim Assistant Director, Education and Learning

1. General

(1) Apologies

Councillor Barker, Councillor Gilbert, and Sean Taylor (Teacher Representative) sent their apologies for the meeting.

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

None

(3) Minutes of the meetings held on 15 January 2019 and 30 January 2019

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meetings held on 15 January 2019 and 30 January 2019 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

Matters Arising

Councillor Morgan stated that he would ask officers to provide Councillor Roodhouse with a timeline for when the All Ages Autism Strategy would be updated which had been requested at the previous meeting.

2. Public Speaking

There were no questions from members of the public.

3. Children and Young People's Presentation on Participation

Samren Reddy (Warwickshire Youth Parliament), George Towl (Warwickshire Youth Parliament), Charity Miller (Children in Care Council), and Umar Teerab (Leaving Care and Asylum Seeking Service) spoke to a presentation on Children and Young People's participation in developing the Council's policies and local decision making (appendix 1).

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair thanked the Young People who had presented the report for giving up their time to speak to the Committee and welcomed the work they had undertaken to enhance the services available to children and young people across the County.

Councillor Davies asked if there was a way the Council could help promote the views of young people and the work of the organisations mentioned in the report to schools.

Councillor Hayfield responded that he would be happy to request that the 'Heads up' newsletter which was regularly sent out to schools by the Council include a section written by young people. This could be a way of keeping senior school staff informed of the issues raised by young people.

Councillor Roodhouse stated that he had heard anecdotally that head teachers often did not read Heads Up and asked if there was any evidence as to its effectiveness as a communication tool.

Paul Senior responded that Officers had recently surveyed schools and nurseries and had received some very positive feedback about Heads Up which could be shared with Members in due course. Paul Senior emphasised that Heads Up was not the only vehicle through which the Council could promote the important work highlighted in the presentation to schools.

Councillor Hayfield stated that the presentation highlighted a wide range of priorities that had been identified and was concerned that having such a broad scope could lead to resources being spread too thin and ultimately limit what could be achieved.

Cheryl Jones responded that the Young People Engagement Strategy had only been adopted in the last six months and so the priorities and areas of work listed in the presentation were still fairly new. She stated that over the coming months young people would be working to set SMART targets for the outcomes identified in the presentation. Charity Miller stated that she felt the Children in Care Council had achieved a significant improvement in the support offered to children in care and care leavers by the Apprenticeship Hub.

Councillor Bell welcomed the good work that had been done around improving the support offered by the Apprenticeship Hub and asked if there was any learning about how the young people had approached improving that service that could be applied to other areas.

Shinderpaul Bhangal responded that the work with the Apprenticeship Hub had started 12 months previously with conversations with young people leaving care about the issues they faced when joining the work force. The issues raised by these young people had not necessarily been recognised by the Hub and they had now adapted their service to support young people. This model of listening to young people in the first instance and then involving them in the coproduction of service redesigns was something that could be applied in other areas.

Councillor Morgan stated that he agreed that hearing directly from young people and seeing case studies was a powerful way to spread understanding of the support young people needed. Councillor Morgan stated that he had heard Charity Miller speak at the Care Leavers Covenant for Local Businesses and asked what feedback there had been from the business present.

Charity Miller responded that several local businesses including Holiday Inn and the Chamber of Commerce had made offers of provide work experience placements and mentoring support following the Care Leavers Covenant event.

In response to Councillor Chilvers, Shinderpaul Bhangal stated that Volunteering Matters would be helping to support a mentoring scheme initially targeting young people leaving care with a focus on getting young people employment ready. Charity Miller stated that she felt Councillor Chilvers was right when he said it was important to keep care leavers who had been through the system involved with mentoring as they were better equipped to understand a child in care than a social worker or adviser who had never experienced the care system. Shinderpaul Bhangal also confirmed that young people were remunerated when they undertook work for the Council at a standard rate of £30/day.

In response to Councillor Chilvers, Samren Reddy responded that he felt the support offered to young people at schools was dependent upon staff being available to deliver it and that if schools were not able to provide a dedicated careers advisor the support that could be offered to pupils suffered. Samren Reddy felt that if schools could build stronger links with local business there could be collaboration to support pupils in building skills and transitioning into work.

Councillor Hayfield and Councillor Morgan offered to meet with young people along with senior officers to identify where the Council could help to achieve the outcomes identified in the presentation made to the Committee.

Councillor Chattaway encouraged the presenters to go back to their respective organisations and produce a list of their priorities and the outcomes they wanted to see the Council support. Councillor Chattaway stated that as the Leader of the Labour Group at Warwickshire County Council he would then be happy to bring the document to Full Council to be debated by all 57 Members.

Councillor Roodhouse noted the comments by Umar Teerab around self-harm and bullying and the self-harm figures reported in the One Organisational Plan later on the agenda. Councillor Roodhouse proposed that the Committee form a Task and Finish Group comprised of Members of the Committee as well as young people to scrutinise in more detail the reasons behind the relatively high levels of self-harm reported in Warwickshire.

The Chair welcomed the call for a group to review self-harm and confirmed that the details and scope of the group would be discussed at the next Chair and Spokesperson meeting.

Resolved

- 1) That the Committee promotes the contributions of children and young people as models of good practice to ensure that the Strategy is embedded, monitored and reviewed by Warwickshire County Council departments and key stakeholders;
- 2) That children and young people are invited to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on an annual basis to report back on how they view progress against the themes listed in the Participation and Engagement Strategy 2019- 2023 and that Full Council be recommended to receive a similar update annually also; and
- 3) That the Committee requires clear milestones to be identified from the Participation and Engagement Strategy 2019-2023 and reported back on a 6 monthly basis.

4. Warwickshire Education Strategy

Paul Senior, Dr Peter Kent and Hannah Heath presented the Warwickshire Education Strategy. Paul Senior apologised that the report had been sent to members as a late paper after the publication of the agenda. The report had been delayed as officers were awaiting an announcement from Government on the outcome of a funding bid which the Council had made for a new alternative provision free school. Paul Senior reported that the Department for Education (DfE) had announced that Warwickshire had been awarded funding for a new alternative provision free school.

Councillor Hayfield stated that he felt the aspects of the strategy that fell under WE2 and WE3 were progressing well and saw WE1 Early Years and WE4 Employability and Skills as where the real challenges lay. Councillor Hayfield stated that the 2019/20 budget had included additional funds for Early Years provision and stated that developing an improved early years offering would have a positive knock on impact as a child progresses through the education system. Councillor Hayfield referred to the comments made by the young people in the previous item about employability and skills which showed that while there was a lot going on there was more linkage to be done.

Councillor Roodhouse echoed Councillor Hayfield's comments about the challenges in WE1 and noted the various Council strategies that sat within Early Years and asked what officers felt was missing from these strategies that had limited their success.

Paul Senior responded that the Council had appointed a Strategic Lead for early years and was developing an Early Years Strategy which would be brought back to the Committee in due course. Paul Senior stated that having a single strategic lead officer would bring the coherency to Early Years that it had previously lacked. The Strategic Lead Officer could ensure the right governance arrangements were in place, design out any duplication, and provide a single point of contact for external partners and agencies. Paul Senior also stated that a Careers Strategy was due to go out to consultation shortly and he would welcome the input of all members into the consultation.

In response to the Chair, Dr Kent stated that he felt head teachers had bought into the importance of careers advice and employability but the work schools were doing independently would be much more powerful if it were part of a joined up strategy.

Councillor Morgan welcomed the more holistic approach taken by officers and stated that as portfolio holder for Children's Services he would continue to push for this as felt a broad approach was needed to improve the Early Years offer.

Councillor Roodhouse noted that there was no centrally held fund for WE2b Closing the Gap and that Pupil Premium was identified as the funding source for schools. Councillor Roodhouse asked if officers could provide any detail about the amount of funding available and how this compared to the expected level of demand.

Paul Senior stated that the Council and its partners took a locality based approach which did not just look at education but examined the barriers to learning and wellbeing to families in that locality. This approach was exemplified by the Nuneaton Strategy. The Alternative Provision Free School would enhance this offer and the Council was also revising the Fair Access Protocols to be more reflective of the locality partnerships and better enable escalation.

The Chair noted that Councillor Roodhouse did not feel that Officers had answered his question and asked that Councillor Roodhouse put the question in writing to Officers after the meeting and asked Officers provide a full written response.

In response to Councillor Chilvers, Paul Senior confirmed that young people would be involved in the coproduction of the Careers Strategy. Paul Senior stated that he chaired the Employability and Skills Board which had representation from organisations across the County including schools, colleges and the university. Dr Peter Kent added that schools were keen to engage with students to bring in coproduction and this had been discussed at a recent meeting of the Challenge Board. The engagement with pupils at individual schools would supplement the engagement with representative organisations such as the Youth Council.

Councillor Hayfield stated that schools needed to ensure that they were attuned to the local job market and the skills gaps that existed therein in order to be able to provide pupils with the skills that would most improve their employability. Councillor Hayfield stated that he felt there was sometimes a mismatch between the skills which were needed in the local economy and those being taught in local schools. Councillor Bell stated that she felt that schools in North Warwickshire were particularly disconnected from the local industry and pupils were coming out of school both lacking the skills and the ambition to go into the more senior logistics and engineering positions that were available. Councillor Bell felt that schools needed to do more to reach out to business to give young people an insight into the opportunities on their doorstep and what they needed to do to be able to take advantage of them.

In response to Councillor Bell, Paul Senior stated that he was acutely aware of the specific issues in the Nuneaton area which required specific localised action which was why he had commissioned the Nuneaton Strategy. Paul Senior stated that he had had conversations with the Regional Schools Commissioner about the challenges in Nuneaton and reported that the Midlands Academy Trust had agreed to join the Nuneaton Strategy.

Councillor Morgan welcomed the development of the Nuneaton Strategy and the Midlands Academy Trust's participation but stated that he felt the solution to the issues with the underperformance of schools in Nuneaton may lie with OFSTED and the Regional School Commissioner.

In response to Councillor Davies, Paul Senior stated that the Council had a statutory duty to provide sufficient nursery places for children in the County. The Early Years Strategic Lead was working with nurseries to ensure that there would be capacity and Government was due to make an announcement on nursery funding which the Council hoped would be positive but was also looking to secure funding through over avenues.

In response to Councillor Davies, Paul Senior stated that it was in the Council's interest to open the alternative provision free school as soon as possible and he would bring a detailed timeline back to the Committee once it had been prepared.

Resolved

That the Committee note progress made to date with implementation of the Warwickshire Education Strategy

5. One Organisational Plan Quarterly Progress Report – April to December 2018

Paul Senior and Jenny Butlin-Moran presented the quarterly update report.

In response to Councillor Bell, Jenny Butlin-Moran clarified that the report showed that Warwickshire was not performing in line with its statistical neighbours meaning that there were more Child Protection Plans being issued than would be expected given the characteristics of the County. Jenny Butlin-Moran stated the Council was working to reduce the number of Child Protection Plans it issued by considering whether alternative approaches could be taken to ensure a child's safety. The Council was implementing new restorative practices to try and reduce the use of protection plans to cases where they were absolutely necessary. The Council was also taking a similar approach to looked after children where the budget overspend was being addressed by ensuring that the right interventions were used at the right time. When circumstance meant that a child had to remain in the care of the local authority the Council was trying to reduce costs by increasing the use of internal foster care which tended to carry a much lower cost than if a child was cared for outside of the County.

Councillor Morgan added that he felt increasing the amount of foster care within the County was the best way for the Council to provide the highest standard of care while also reducing costs. Councillor Morgan also highlight the work done to place a small number of children in care at boarding schools which had yielded very positive outcomes for the young people involved and compared favourably in terms of cost to external foster care.

In response to Councillor Pam Williams, Jenny Butlin-Moran stated in 93.9% of cases a Child Protection Conference had been initiated from the statutory requirement of 15 working days. Jenny Butlin-Moran stated that the target had to take into account the particular circumstance of the child and the family and in some cases it was appropriate not to go within 15 working days. Jenny Butlin-Moran also clarified that placement stability was improving in Warwickshire. Continued improvement was dependent upon the recruitment of foster careers to ensure there were sufficient places available. Placement stability was a complex issues and a move did not necessarily lead to a negative outcome.

In response to Councillor Davies, Jenny Butlin-Moran stated that while the County had not been successful in bidding for funding to provide social workers based at schools work was being done to create a more direct link between social workers and schools.

In response to Councillor Davies, Helen King stated that while the overall picture in Warwickshire was of falling rates of teenage pregnancy there was significant local variation. Helen King stated that additional work had taken place in Nuneaton and Bedworth through a partnership approach which provided more services for young people such as providing contraceptives and Relationship and Sex Education programmes. Paul Senior added that the work outlined would feed into the Nuneaton Strategy mentioned earlier in the meeting.

6a. Questions to Cabinet Portfolio Holders and Officers

Alternative Provision

In response to Councillor Bell, Councillor Hayfield stated that alternative provision had previously been focused on Pupil Referral Units which the Council had decommissioned. Alternative provision was currently commissioned from a variety of sources that provided alternative offsite venues for learning. The new free school would add to the alternative provision offer and provide an additional route for escalation.

Dyslexia Provision

In response to Councillor Roodhouse, Councillor Seccombe stated that there were a number of childhood issues like dyslexia and the Council always sought to support children and give them the best chance in life despite any challenges they may face. The Council did not discriminate positively or negatively against any particular disorder.

7. Work Programme

The Chair stated that there were two outstanding items to be added to the work programme which had been suggested by Councillor Barker; Compass and support for talented children.

Councillor Bell requested that the Nuneaton Strategy be added to the work programme.

8. Any Urgent Items

There were no items of urgent business

9. Date of next meeting

It was noted that the next scheduled meeting would take place at 10.00 am on 18 June 2019, Shire Hall, Warwick.

The Committee rose at 12:20 p.m.

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Chair