

**Minutes of the meeting of the  
Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
held on 18 June 2019**

**Present:**

**Members of the Committee**

Councillors:

Margaret Bell, Mark Cargill, Jonathan Chilvers, Yousef Dahmash (Chair), Corinne Davies, Pete Gilbert, Daniel Gissane, Howard Roberts, Dominic Skinner and Chris Williams.

Cabinet Portfolio Holders:

Councillor Colin Hayfield, Portfolio Holder for Education & Learning

Other County Councillors:

Councillor Izzi Seccombe  
Councillor Richard Chattaway  
Councillor Pam Williams

**Other Representatives:**

Officers:

John Coleman, Assistant Director for Children and Families  
John Edwards, Service manager  
Becky Hale, Assistant Director for People  
Nigel Minns, Strategic Director for People  
Mark Ryder, Strategic Director for Communities

**1. General**

**(1) Apologies**

Councillors Morgan and Wright, and Reverend Elaine Scrivens sent their apologies for the meeting.

Councillor Cargill was in attendance as a substitute for Councillor Wright.

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

None

**(3) Minutes of the meeting held on 12 March 2019**

**Resolved:**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 12 March 2019 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

## 2. Public Speaking

The Chair invited Councillor Christopher Goodwin (Baginton Parish Council), Tom Duckham, Parminder Chahal, Clare Nicholson and Lisa Conway to address the committee on the subject of the Council's Home to School Transport Policy and its impact on Baginton Village. The following points were raised:

- The Council's Home to School Transport Policy had changed from 2018 onward so that parents could now only apply to receive free home to school transport for travel to the closest school to the family home where places were available. If parents chose to apply for a school other than the closest qualifying school they would not be eligible to receive free home to school transport.
- The change to the Council's Home to School Transport Policy had had a disproportionate impact on residents living in communities on the County's border such as Baginton where home to school transport was more of an issue due to distances children had to travel.
- At the time of the policy change 70% of respondents to the Council's consultation had objected to the proposals. This rises to 72.7% when just looking at responses from residents in rural areas such as Baginton.
- Since the policy change Baginton residents had continued to object; a petition signed by 1,400 calling on the council to reconsider the policy had been brought to a Full Council meeting and Residents, Baginton Parish Councillors, Priors Field Primary School Governors and the local vicar for Baginton had all contacted various local politicians about the policy but had not received satisfactory answers.
- Baginton's proximity to 11 schools all of a similar distance from the village meant that the policy had had a particularly large impact. If parents could not afford to pay for travel and had to rely on free transport they no longer had a choice of school. This had resulted in children from one end of the village not being able to attend the same school as friends who lived at the other end of the village for the sake of less than a mile's shorter journey. The new policy also meant that siblings had to attend different schools as older siblings qualified for free transport under the old policy to schools that their younger siblings could now not access.
- Travelling to and attending school together helped build a strong community and fostered social cohesion in the village. This was at risk of being lost by separating children across the 11 nearby schools.
- Baginton had previously had a local school which had been closed in 1976. Several residents who were involved in the closure of the school remember there being an agreement made by the County Council that Baginton children would always be able to attend Kenilworth Schools as their local schools. The Lucy Price Trust had been involved with the running of Baginton School before it was closed and had made substantial efforts to help residents locate evidence of the agreement but to no avail.
- Baginton suffered from traffic congestion and air pollution as it was used by commuters as a rat run and the change in transport policy had resulted in more

children travelling to school by car exacerbating the issue. As well as traffic the additional buses and taxis that had to be provided due to the transport policy also represented an inefficient use of the Council's resources.

- Baginton residents did not feel the Council was fulfilling its duty of care towards the children in the village who felt victimised by the policy that separated them from their siblings and peers. The impact on the mental health of children in Baginton of the disruption caused by the Council's policy had not been considered.

Councillor Redford also spoke in support of the resident's representation and stated that he had spoken to the chair of the parish council at the time Baginton School was closed and that he was adamant that there had been agreement that Baginton children would be able to attend Kenilworth schools, two county councillors who had been involved with the closure of the school at the time also confirmed this. Councillor Redford stated that he had spoken to the relevant Portfolio Holder who had stated that the policy was a bit heavy handed and one of the Council Officers who had been involved with the issue had called Baginton a 'unique problem'. Councillor Redford stated that given these comments it was reasonable to question whether Baginton had been treated fairly by the policy and whether the Council had looked at the impact of the policy on rural communities in enough detail. Councillor Redford stated that he felt that the uniqueness of Baginton's situation created by its proximity to 11 schools all roughly the same distance from the village meant that it justified a bespoke solution that would not necessarily set a precedent and undermine the policy in the rest of the county. Councillor Redford asked that the Committee look at reappraising the transport policy.

The Chair invited Mr James Sinnott to speak on the topic of Trinity Catholic School. Mr Sinnott presented an open letter to the council (appendix 1) as well as testimonials from students at the school and a petition with an excess of 1000 signatures to the Committee.

The Chair thanked all the members of the public for making their representations to the Committee.

### **3. Update on Early Help Developments**

John Coleman presented the report which provided an update on the Early Help Action Plan and Early Help Offer.

The Chair welcomed the report stating that the Committee would continue to look at the Early Help Action Plan over the coming year and would invite service users to future meetings.

In response to Councillor Davies, John Coleman stated that the Children and Families Centres contract included providing outreach work. This meant that providers would be going out to the places where young people and families were meeting whether that was community centres or parks and common areas. Outreach work would also involve contacting families who had been identified as being isolated in their homes. The Council also maintained an active outreach programme for youth work. The new structure of the early help offer was focused on building local relationships between practitioners from across services who were working in the same area.

In response to Councillor Gilbert, John Colman stated that he could provide statistics for Bedworth rather than the combined Nuneaton and Bedworth area.

Councillor Bell stated that she felt that the increase in referrals to the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) was a good thing and that it was a sign that awareness of the MASH had increased. Councillor Bell stated that she was concerned that the introduction of Children and Families centres as contact points made the referral pathway less clear and had the potential to undermine the success of the MASH as a single point of entry.

John Coleman responded that the MASH would always provide a single front door for services but the Children and Families Centres would provide an alternative avenue for communication for situations that did not involve a safeguarding concern. Ofsted had criticised the council for over intervening in families lives and this was reflected in the fact that 50% of assessments carried out last year following referrals to the MASH resulted in an outcome of no further action required. The children centres model had a drop in service with no threshold and would provide a more appropriate level of support for families who might have otherwise had a social worker assessment.

In response to Councillor Bell, John Coleman confirmed that feedback from service users would be a core part of assessing the success of the new children centres contract.

Councillor Bell stated that she knew from her experience as a primary school governor that the high threshold for Early Help services meant that practitioners in schools had to deal with large caseloads. Councillor Bell asked if the Early Help offer would do anything to lower the threshold for council intervention and alleviate the pressure on schools.

John Coleman confirmed that the Children and Families centres would not have a threshold for providing help and advice to families. Nigel Minns added that he felt an unintended consequence of the MASH was that the locality links that had existed had been broken. Nigel Minns stated that the council did not want to lose the benefits from having a centralised MASH but was seeking to rebuild those locality links that had been lost.

In response to Councillor Bell, John Coleman clarified that attached families were families that the Council had identified as being in the cohort for priority families. The Priority Families programme only provided funding through payment by result and a 'claimed family' was one for which the council had demonstrated positive results and received funding.

In response to Councillor Chilvers, John Coleman sought to reassure the Committee that there was sufficient capacity within the Children and Families team to deliver the Early Help Action Plan. John Coleman highlighted the Early Help Operations Manager position that was currently being recruited to and the additional funding provided for an Early Help Development Officer role for two years. John Coleman also stated that he felt the three priorities were developing the locality partnerships, understanding the need present in the different localities and developing the Confident Parent Strategy together with Public Health.

In response to the Chair, John Coleman stated that he could provide a briefing note on the sites mentioned in the report which had been identified for Children and Families Centres but which had not yet opened.

Councillor Gissane congratulated officers on Warwickshire's Priority Families performance which put it as the 15th best performing authority in the country and asked what Warwickshire could learn from the best performing authorities and how officers planned to reach the target of reaching the top ten by 2020.

John Coleman stated that improving gathering of data from practitioners to put in claims to the priority families programme for work the Council was doing would help to drive performance as Warwickshire was doing the work successfully and in a timely manner and it was important to ensure that this was being reported correctly.

In response to Councillor Gissane, John Coleman stated that the feedback report prepared by the Ministry of Communities, Housing and Local Government mentioned in the report had been provided to Warwickshire but had not been published publicly and that officers could provide a copy to members.

In response to Councillor Pam Williams, John Coleman stated that there was a number of avenues through which families could directly get advice including the Family Information Service (FIS) who had seen a 250% increase in their workload. Work was also being undertaken to improve information available through the council's website. The message that would be going out to children and families once the Children and Families Centre contract went live would be that the centres would be place to go for information.

In response to Councillor Chilvers, John Coleman confirmed that there were 36 Family Support Workers who would transfer to the new service and as part of the TUPE process where these support workers were located would be looked at. John Coleman stated that currently there was some mismatch between the number of support workers and the level of need in an area which needed to be addressed. The workload of the support workers would be tracked to make sure it is manageable.

In response to Councillor Skinner, John Coleman stated that the Early Help offer was all age but the specific focus of the Children and Families Centres was the first 1001 days of a child's life. John Coleman highlighted the good work done by the targeted youth work team and stated that a further briefing could be provided to members or councillors could meet with the team. An Early Help Commissioner post was being recruited to and part of their role would be to ensure that commissioned services were working effectively with the early help offer and expanding what was available for young people in the Children and Families centres especially around mental health and wellbeing.

The Chair proposed two additional recommendations:

That the Committee:

3) continues to formally monitor progress made against the Early Help Action Plan

4) commits to inviting service users to speak at future meetings to discuss the impact of the changes to the Early Help Offer

Members agreed unanimously to the updated recommendations.

In response to Councillor Chilvers, the Chair stated that he agreed an update on the action plan in about 6 months seemed appropriate.

### **Resolved**

That the Committee:

- 1) Comments on the Early Help Action Plan and the Early Help Offer; and
- 2) Notes progress in relation to Children and Family Centres and the Priority Families Programme.
- 3) Continues to formally monitor progress made against the Early Help Action Plan
- 4) Commits to inviting service users to speak at future meetings to discuss the impact of the changes to the Early Help Offer

#### **4. One Organisational Plan Quarterly Progress Report: April 2018 to March 2019**

John Coleman introduced the report and invited questions from Members.

In response to the Chair, John Coleman stated that social worker recruitment and retention continued to be an issue the Council was paying particular attention to. Recruitment had improved and the last year had seen an increase in the number of experienced social workers staying with the county. A new social worker retention strategy was also expected to be launched in the coming weeks. Case load targets had not been met but had improved significantly. John Coleman was hopeful that caseload targets would be met in the next year as the Council was recruiting above establishment to account for annual trends in social worker numbers that saw numbers fall and thus caseloads increase around spring time each year.

In response to Councillors Gissane and Gilbert, John Coleman stated that exit interviews were carried out with social workers and the information provided by employees who had left was informing the retention strategy being put in place. John Coleman also stated that he stayed in touch with social workers who had left the county and made it clear that they would be more than welcome to return to Warwickshire. The Council was also exploring whether greater secondment opportunities could be offered with neighbouring authorities to allow social workers to gain a wider range of experience without having to leave the county. The Council was also looking to make it easier for social workers to move teams within the county. John Coleman stated that the pattern of social workers leaving the county mirrored the national picture in that most of those leaving were either leaving the occupation completely or going to work for an agency where they could expect a higher wage. John Coleman also highlighted the elements of the new retention strategy that helped to improve social workers' mental health and wellbeing such as counselling, adopting the Schwartz Rounds model of peer support and providing wellbeing days.

In response to Councillor Gissane, John Coleman stated that if a looked after child was admitted to A&E or came into contact with other emergency services a report was sent back through the MASH which would then be referred to the allocated social worker. Foster carers also had a duty to report any incidents to the Council. In response to Councillor Chilvers, John Coleman stated that he would be happy to arrange for members to meet with social workers to discuss retention.

In response to Councillor Roberts, John Edwards confirmed that the Council did collect data on absenteeism and that it could be provided in future reports or as a separate briefing. John Edwards also stated that the link between absenteeism and exclusion was not as high as might be expected. The Chair requested that officers provide a note outlining school attendance rates in Warwickshire looking back over the last five academic years.

Councillor Gissane sought assurance from officers that the integrated disability service (IDS) was not facing any further reduction in budget.

John Coleman responded that the overspend referenced in the revenue budget was largely caused by direct payments as the amount of children receiving payments had increased. Mark Ryder stated that the council aimed to achieve the savings needed in the area by increasing in county provision of services and providing more education to pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools rather than any reduction in provision.

Councillor Gilbert asked how the council reached communities that may be less willing to engage with services to ensure that they weren't missed in the data reported to committee.

Mark Ryder responded that for some harder to reach communities such as the traveller community there was a specific resource aimed at improving engagement. The Council did monitor numbers not in employment, education or training and tracked children missing education or attending schools on a reduced timetable.

In response to Councillor Roberts, Nigel Minns stated that there was no register of children being home educated and if a parent chose to home educate for whatever reason there was very little the Council could do to influence this.

In response to Councillor Gissane, John Edwards stated that if an academy was under performing the Government had two courses of action open to it; either to offer additional support to the academy or to remove the school management and re-broker the academy to find new operators.

## **Resolved**

- 1) That the Committee considers and comments on the progress of the delivery of the One Organisational Plan 2020 for the period as contained in the report.
- 2) That Officers arrange for members to meet with social workers to discuss retention.

## **5a. Questions to Cabinet Portfolio Holders and Officers**

In response to concerns expressed by Members, Councillor Hayfield stated that there were a number of issues at Trinity Catholic School including the management of the school's finances which had resulted in the school running a very large deficit. The Council had offered advice to the school about its finances which the school had chosen to not follow and as a last resort the Council had asked the Regional Schools Commissioner to remove the governing body and put an interim executive board in place. The Catholic Diocese had supported this action. Councillor Hayfield sought to provide assurance to Members that Ofsted still rated the education provided by the school as good. Councillor Hayfield stated that he could provide a briefing note to members with more information.

Councillor Gissane asked Councillor Morgan to investigate the causes for the lengthy referrals times into CAMHS. Councillor Gissane reported that he had heard anecdotally that CAMHS psychiatrists had capacity and that it was other factors such as admin issues that were responsible for the long waiting lists. Councillor Gissane's question was noted by officers in Councillor Morgan's absence and sent to him in writing after the meeting.

In response to Councillor Chilvers, Councillor Hayfield stated that Baginton's location did make it unusual as it was surrounded by a number of schools all a similar distance away from the village however the impact of the policy change was not confined to Baginton. Councillor Hayfield stated that the home to school transport policy stated that the Council would provide free transport to school if the nearest school was further away from a child's home than the qualifying distance. If parents chose to apply for a school that was not the closest school the onus was on them to provide transport. John Edwards added that at the time of the policy change there were around 700 year 7 pupils accessing free transport and around 180 of these pupils would not have been eligible for free transport under the new policy.

Councillor Hayfield stated that he understood that the change in policy was tough on the parents in Baginton affected by it but that the council had to be consistent in the application of its policies.

## **5b. Updates from Cabinet Portfolio Holders/Heads of Service**

There were no updates

## **6. Work Programme**

Members noted the work programme as tabled.

## **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 24 September 2019, Shire Hall, Warwick.



The Committee rose at 12:20 p.m.

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Chair