

Children & Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday, 28 January 2020

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

Councillor Yousef Dahmash (Chair)
Councillor Corinne Davies
Councillor Peter Gilbert
Councillor Daniel Gissane
Councillor Howard Roberts
Councillor Dominic Skinner
Councillor Chris Williams

Officers

Liann Brookes-Smith, Associate Director, Public Health
John Coleman, Assistant Director, Children and Families
Hayley Good, Strategy and Commissioning Manager, Education
Marina Kitchen, Service Manager, Children and Families
Nigel Minns, Strategic Director for People
Paul Spencer, Senior Democratic Services Officer
Sophie Thompson, Intervention Data and Project Management Officer

1. General

(1) Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Margaret Bell, Jonathan Chilvers and Pam Williams, from John McRoberts (Parent Governor representative) and from Ian Budd, Assistant Director, Education Services.

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

None.

(3) Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 September 2019 are approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

2. Public Speaking

None.

3. Different Futures - Two Year Report

It was reported that Different Futures worked with birth parents who were no longer able to care for their child due to adoption or kinship care. Dedicated project workers offered a two-year support programme, with the option to access aftercare for an extra year if that support was still required. They sought to address individual needs to improve the current situation for the clients such as housing/homelessness, debt, mental health issues, drug/alcohol issues and employment. This assisted clients to become able to provide care for any future children.

The project coordinator and three project workers were funded by the County Council. The end of year 2 report provided a high-level overview of key performance data. The appointment of a third full time project worker, would allow the project to work with more parents across the county. The financial implications were reported, including the end of year savings for years one and two, which were cost avoidance rather than cashable savings. The annual report would be distributed across partner organisations and through wider circulation.

Questions and comments were invited, with responses provided as indicated:

- The Chair commented that the statistical data was positive and to be congratulated.
- It was confirmed that the savings shown in the report were cost avoidance savings for the County Council. There would be further time and savings for the police, courts and health services, amongst other agencies.
- The additional project worker would give further capacity. The £44,000 investment was expected to yield a further £300,000 of cost avoidance savings.
- There was a continual dialogue with clients and one of the conditions concerned using long-term contraception.
- Information was sought about the potential numbers of families requiring assistance. It was projected that there would be about 36 cases for the next two-year period. Previously, there were approximately 120 cases per year.
- Individual, tailored support was often required and some was specialist, with long waiting times. A fund had been established to commission some of the specialist support, where this was required.
- The longer-term aims of the project were discussed. Some clients had decided not have further children. For others, the intensive support had helped to improve their lifestyles, mental health and housing security, as well as giving them a clear understanding of why their children had been removed previously. They would be asked to undertake a pre-pregnancy assessment and would be better equipped to raise children in the future.
- It was confirmed that the cost avoidance savings were year on year.
- Understanding the overall cost avoidance and time savings for other agencies would be useful. This information could be sought for inclusion in future annual reports.
- It was confirmed that after the two-year programme there was the option to access aftercare for an extra year if that support was still required. However, the aim of Different Futures was to help people to be independent.

Resolved

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the 2018-2019 Different Futures end of year two annual report and the progress made against respective strategic priorities.

4. Update Children's Social Care Cultural Change

The Committee received a presentation from John Coleman, Assistant Director, Children and Families. The presentation covered the following areas:

Children and Families Transformation – Restorative Practice

- Overview, circles, restorative conversations,
- Working WITH children, young people and their families and partners
- Working towards safe uncertainty

Children and Families Transformation:

- Programme management approach of phased changes
- Timeline

Restorative Approaches in Warwickshire

- Our values
- Our restorative tool: the pathway to change
- What this means for supporting children (child in need)
- What this means for protecting children (child protection processes)

Costs and Benefits

- Current costs of the transformation process
- Benefits – experience of customers, partners and staff;
- Reducing bureaucracy;
- Improving outcomes for the service

Children and Families Transformation – Next Steps

Questions and comments were invited, with responses provided as indicated:

- It was questioned if comparable performance information was available for other local authorities. Restorative practice was a model being implemented by other authorities, with evidence that earlier support and prevention work was reducing service demand. However, each area had differing demands and issues, so direct comparison wasn't possible.
- The Portfolio Holder for Education & Learning praised the initiative, the benefits to families and for staff. The documents showed that 7,500 hours of time had been saved. It was questioned how this time was being utilised and whether it gave a financial or capacity saving. The time saved would make caseloads more manageable for social workers, who were then able to spend more time with each family, to build positive relationships. In the longer-term, this could help to manage demand for services.

- Formal information sharing amongst agencies was discussed. There were child protection strategy meetings where agencies met formally to share information, but this process could be used more efficiently. Where appropriate a formal case conference also took place. Officers explained the revised working arrangements which sought to avoid previous duplication, with all agencies now sending information to the family ahead of the formal conference, which was a significant change. This was acknowledged as the best way forward, but provided tighter deadlines, as there were only 15 days between the strategy meeting and child protection conference.

Resolved

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the presentation.

5. Closing the Gap

This item was introduced by Sophie Thompson from Learning and Performance Administration. It was reported that academically, Warwickshire was a high achieving county at key stage 4. However, it reflected the national pattern that disadvantaged pupils performed at a lower level. This situation had remained unchanged despite a variety of initiatives.

For the first time in several years, the gap between poorer pupils and their peers at GCSE had stopped closing. The 'Closing the Gap' project was established in January 2015 in response to the challenge of closing the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers in Warwickshire. A table showed the attainment gap at various academic stages and recent trends over time in the gaps at these key stages.

The Closing the Gap project was reviewed in summer 2018 to evaluate the progress made. The project board concluded that the impact of the work could not be measured with headline data, because of ongoing changes in assessments. However, without the work of the project, the gaps might be larger.

Research showed that disadvantaged learners often faced multiple barriers. The board monitored progress in a number of areas, which were set out in a further table within the report and covered: school improvement, SEND and inclusion, economy and skills, public health, education entitlement team, children looked after, school governance, poverty strategy, widening participation in higher education and early years.

Sophie Thompson referred to the board's key projects and current focusses. These included the use of different measures to assess the gap in attainment. She spoke of the Nuneaton Education Strategy, work with admissions to afford priority to disadvantaged pupils and tracking pupils through to their GCSE examinations. Achieving a good level of development was discussed, especially the gaps identified in pupils at reception school age and how those pupils made progress through to the end of primary school. Evidence showed that this gap was not addressed.

A verbal update was provided on the Department for Education (DfE) monies secured for a Strategic School Improvement Fund. This had provided for £500,000 for two years from 2017 to 2019. Work had been undertaken through six teaching schools in Warwickshire and the University of Warwick on leadership development, work with governors, boys' reading and maths problem solving. Support was provided to 35 schools. The assessment of the work undertaken was rated

positively both throughout the project and afterwards by the DfE. An outline was given of the impact of the project, its positive outcomes and ongoing development of the initiatives embedded into schools. There had been limited performance information to date, so continued monitoring of impacts would take place.

Councillor Hayfield considered this to be an important strand of work that had been well led. Where attainment gaps were identified, it seemed difficult to address them. It was not understood why the various initiatives were not improving academic success for the cohort. It was not just about specific schools in deprived areas. However, it was disproportionate in terms of children looked after and there was a role for the County Council as corporate parents. Addressing the gap during early years education seemed to be the key. It was probable that the position would be worse without the initiatives implemented.

Questions and comments were invited, with responses provided as indicated:

- A member agreed that addressing this issue in early years education was important, as was finding appropriate measures to monitor pupils' improvement. Effective communication between primary and secondary schools was needed. In terms of further education, there was a need for quality apprenticeships for those who were not likely to undertake college or university education and to give equality of opportunity. Addressing the difficulties associated with environment, the roles of the school, head teachers and those of parents were all referenced. It was also important to recognise that the majority of pupils achieved good academic results.
- Officers confirmed the transition work underway to simulate dialogue between subject leads at primary and secondary schools. The schools that were most successful in closing the attainment gap had demonstrated a belief throughout all their staff in every pupil and their potential to succeed.
- A member referred to the increase in diagnosis of autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). He spoke of the difficulties those children often experienced in school and potential for people to go on to have successful businesses or employment.
- Reference was made to phonics, the method for teaching reading and writing by developing learners' phonemic awareness. In some Warwickshire schools, optional classes were offered. These were funded by the school and had assisted the children participating in them. There was a challenge in getting some parents to participate. The member asked how the County Council could encourage parents to take up the offer of the optional classes where there were available. An outline was given of the various initiatives to support children with ADHD and autism and to support and train teachers. The closing the gap work was targeted at disadvantaged pupils, but there were multiple factors which impacted on pupil attainment. Through the Nuneaton Education Strategy, a holistic approach was being taken with innovative approaches, some of which were outside the school setting, including work with families. Reference was also made to a specialist seven-week course delivered through George Eliot Hospital, which had yielded good results, but this course was expensive and therefore had a low take up from schools.
- In Nuneaton, there was a geographic split across the town in academic attainment levels. Parental support was a key aspect and there was a noted deterioration when pupils moved into secondary education and there was less parental contact. These aspects could have been explored in more detail in the report. Some families had limited expectations and raising them would be welcomed through initiatives like 'aim higher'. Educating parents was accepted as a key issue. Additional funding had been secured by the University of Warwick

through a national collaborative outreach programme. Resources were targeted at areas where there were good GCSE results, but a lower number of pupils going on to higher education. This initiative comprised a mentoring scheme, a scholar's programme and a bursary towards higher education at the University.

- There had been a significant reduction between 2016 and 2017 in numbers of 16/17 year olds not in education, employment or training. This reduction from 660 to 410 was the biggest reduction in the West Midlands region. Members were concerned however about subsequent opportunities, reiterating the need for good employment prospects.

Resolved

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the report and the initiatives being taken to close the attainment gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils in Warwickshire.

6. Question Time

(1) Questions to Cabinet Portfolio Holders

None.

(2) Updates from Cabinet Portfolio Holders/Heads of Service

None.

7. Work Programme

Members noted the work programme as submitted.

8. Any Urgent Items

None.

9. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would take place at 10.00a.m. on 11 February 2020 at Shire Hall, Warwick.

The Committee rose at 11.45a.m.

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Chair