

Children & Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday, 29 September 2020

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

Councillor Yousef Dahmash (Chair)
Councillor Pam Williams (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Margaret Bell
Councillor Jonathan Chilvers
Councillor Corinne Davies
Councillor Peter Gilbert
Councillor Daniel Gissane
Councillor Howard Roberts
Councillor Dominic Skinner
Councillor Wallace Redford

Officers

Helen Barnsley, Democratic Services Officer
Nigel Minns, Strategic Director for People
Shinderpaul Bhangal, Qualifications and Credit Framework Assessor
John Coleman, Assistant Director - Children and Families
David Jones, Delivery Lead Non Social Worker Operational Manager
Sharon Shaw, Service Manager - Corporate Parenting Service
Calvin Smith, Service Manager (Safeguarding & Support)
Paul Spencer, Senior Democratic Services Officer
Carla Young, EIS Targeted Support Youth Worker

Others Present

Tarwender Atkinson (Warwickshire Children in Care Council)
Georgina Hopwood (Warwickshire Youth Council)
Elizabeth (Beth) Nelson (Warwickshire Children in Care Council)
Adam Ratcliffe (Warwickshire Youth Council)
Mawgan Stinchcomb (Warwickshire Youth Council)

(1) Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Chris Williams. Councillor Wallace Redford replaced him for this meeting.

Apologies were also received from Liann Brookes-Smith, Associate Director of Public Health.

The following co-opted members also sent apologies –

- Joseph Canon (Church Representative)
- Rev. Elaine Smith (Church Representative)
- Sean Taylor (Parent Governor Representative)

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

None.

(3) Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as true and accurate. There were no matters arising.

(4) Minutes of the meeting held on 23 July 2020

The minutes of the meeting held on the 23 July 2020 were agreed as true and accurate. There were no matters arising.

2. Public Speaking

None.

3. Question Time

(1) Question to Cabinet Portfolio Holders

Portfolio Holders were unable to attend the meeting due to an extraordinary Cabinet meeting.

(2) Updates from Cabinet Portfolio Holders and Assistant

None.

4. Young People's Participation and Engagement Strategy

Shinderpaul Bhangal, Team Leader – Participation, introduced the report with details participation from March 2019 to September 2020 with focus on the Engagement Strategy and highlights of the engagement undertaken by the Council with Young People.

Five priority areas for Children and Young People were identified as follows –

1. Keep Healthy
2. Be Safe
3. Have Fun and Do Well
4. Take Part
5. Think About Your Future

In addition, three emerging priorities have been identified –

1. Environment
2. Safety
3. Service for Young People

The Covid-19 crisis impacted the services provided to children and young people. The Committee noted that the roll out of new technology across Warwickshire County Council has allowed for new ways of working such as virtual meetings. These were not always popular with children and young people who prefer face-to-face meetings. The Committee considered that this was due to isolation being a concern for many children and young people.

The Committee noted the other examples of working during the Covid-19 crisis including –

- Food parcels delivered to young people most in need
- Baby gift boxes for new care experienced young parents
- Video messages about Covid-19 and support for mental health/wellbeing by young people for young people
- Online quizzes, cooking classes, bingo, Netflix film reviews by young people
- Young people taking part in online WCC interview panels
- Young people participating in online national and regional conferences,

The Committee was introduced to five young people from the Children in Care Council (CiCC) and the Warwickshire Youth Council (WYC) who had been invited to the meeting to give their views on engagement and participation and to answer questions from the Committee.

Beth Nelson (CiCC) stated that while virtual meetings are better suited to her lifestyle, face-to-face meetings are preferred. They are less formal and allow her to meet up with friends and staff to have proper conversations, hot drinks and a chat. Virtual meetings have tended to be much more formal.

Tarwender Atkinson (CiCC) stated that she liked both virtual and face-to-face meetings; although there can be more issue with virtual meetings such as technical issues. Online meetings can be more restrictive; genuine conversations are easier face-to-face.

Adam Ratcliffe (WYC) told the Committee that has a Young Carer with a parent who is shielding, it was very hard not to get the time away from home to speak to friends and staff about issues or concerns. It is much harder to have a private conversation on-line.

Following a question from Councillor Jonathon Chilvers in relation to the leaving care transition, Beth Nelson replied that her experience had not been a positive one and that she had no preparation for what would happen once she turned 18 years old. Tarwender Atkinson agreed that support for leaving care should be started earlier than 16 or 17 years old to give young people a chance to properly plan for their future. The Committee noted the comments in relation to mental health and the impact poor preparation can have; as well as the additional impact of Covid-19 on those going through the leaving care process. Beth Nelson confirmed that she was very well looked after and cared for while she was in foster care and then suddenly found herself on her own with no support and no one to relate to.

Sharon Shaw, Service Manager - Corporate Parenting confirmed that a lot of work is based on the views of young people and thanked the young people for their comments. It was noted that there has been a significant increase in young people “staying put” in foster care after they turn 18 years old in order to provide more support. A new project is due to start where the leaving care transition is started with young people at 14 years old. Sharon Shaw confirmed that officers are aware there is a lot of work to do in this area but that many improvements have already been made.

Following a question from Councillor Corinne Davies, Beth Nelson told the Committee that while she felt that the mental health services provided by the Council are good, the waiting times are terrible and that it took a long time for her to get the help she needed, during which time, her mental health got worse. The Committee noted Beth’s suggestion that it could be beneficial for young people to be able to share their experiences, to get more involved and share ideas between themselves.

Following a question from Councillor Pam Williams about young carers, Adam Ratcliffe stated that group sessions for young carers would be beneficial, especially if the sessions could be held face-to-face with social distancing; even if they were small groups it would allow young carers to get out of the house and learn life skills.

Shinderpaul Bhangal acknowledged that change does take time to filter through the system but that the service was in a much more positive place than 18 months ago. The service can learn a lot from the children and young people who can help shape the service moving forward.

Sharon Shaw asked that it be put on record how proud officers were of the young people who attended today’s meeting; they were confident and articulate in sharing their views and experiences as well as being very open to being involved in discussions in the future. Councillor Dan Gissane added his thanks acknowledging that it had been valuable for the members to hear their views. Councillor Dominic Skinner also agreed that listening to the views of all the young people was exactly what members needed to hear. He thanked them for being

It was agreed that an update on the points discussed would be presented at a meeting in twelve months’ time. The Committee thanked all the young people for their attendance and look forward to welcoming them back to meetings in the future.

Resolved

The Committee note the positive contributions that children and young people (C&YP) have made towards the progress of the Participation and Engagement Strategy 2019-2023.

The Committee consider a cross party group to include children and young people with relevant experience to give impetus to specific priorities raised by children and young people from the Children in Care Council and the Warwickshire Youth Council that require more traction.

7. Council Plan 2020 – 2025 Quarterly Progress Report: April 2020 to June 2020

Ian Budd, Assistant Director – Education Services presented the report for the period April 1st, 2020 to June 30th, 2020 was considered and approved by Cabinet on 10th September 2020.

The following points were highlighted to the Committee –

- Education Services are holding weekly meetings with Headteachers to check in on staff well-being. Feedback on the meetings has been positive from all involved.
- Following a question from Councillor Corinne Davies in relation to young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) it was confirmed that contact had continued throughout lock down via telephone or video calls. Many NEET young people identified over the summer months were no back in a school environment.
- Case work is still underway with children not yet back in school or registered as being home schooled.

Following the circulation of a briefing note in relation to the Education Sufficiency Annual update, it was agreed that a full report will be presented to the Committee at a future meeting (date to be agreed).

Resolved

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers and comments on the progress of the delivery of the Council Plan 2020 - 2025 for the period as contained in the report.

5. Council Plan 2020 – 2025; Progress Report

Resolved

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers and comments on the progress of the delivery of the One Organisational Plan 2020 for the period as contained in the report.

7. Child Protection

Calvin Smith, Service Manager - Children's Safeguarding & Support presented the report which provides an update on the Child Protection Service and the steps that have been taken.

The Committee noted that the service identified a need for improvement two and a half years ago in order to align with statistical neighbours and themed audits were introduced. The goal of the audits was to improve the experience for children and families and to become the best Child Protection Service in the country.

The Committee was asked to note Table 4 (page 7 of the report) showing the proportion of children who became the subject of a child protection plan for a second or subsequent time. The Committee also learnt that some children had been on plans for too long; and they could not be taken off the plans as the council had not completed assessments.

Following a comment from Councillor Jonathan Chilvers that the report was a positive read due to the improvements that had been made to the service. It was acknowledged that not all cases are the same with children presenting with a need for different and complex assessments.

Following a question from Councillor Pam Williams in relation to allegations made against foster carers, it was confirmed that the process had not yet been audited but that it was on the plan moving forward. It was noted that other investigations may be happening following an allegation, such as criminal investigations.

Resolved

That the Committee note the updated report detailing Child Protection Performance in Warwickshire.

That the Children & Families service will continue their programme of themed audits, focusing upon any areas of practice where we perform below our statistical neighbours. The next audit to focus upon understanding and resolving our relatively high numbers of repeat child protection plans.

The meeting rose at 13:10

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Chair