

Children & Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Monday 26 October 2020

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

Councillor Yousef Dahmash (Chair)
Councillor Pam Williams (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Margaret Bell
Councillor Corinne Davies
Councillor Daniel Gissane
Councillor Howard Roberts
Councillor Dominic Skinner

Officers

Helen Barnsley, Democratic Services Officer
Ross Caws, Warwickshire SEND Board Development Manager
Paula Ellis, Commissioning Support Officer
Kim Garcia, Education & Early Years - Strategy & Lead Commissioner
Carl Hipkiss, Development and Analysis Team Manager
Helen Redican, Senior School Improvement Adviser

1. General

(1) Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Jonathan Chilvers, Pete Gilbert and Chris Williams.

Apologies were also received from Duane Chappell, Strategy and Commissioning Manager (SEND & Inclusion).

(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.

2. Public Speaking

None.

3. Question Time

(1) Question to Cabinet Portfolio Holders

None.

(2) Updates from Cabinet Portfolio Holders and Assistant

None.

4. SEND & Inclusion Change Programme

Ross Caws, Warwickshire SEND Board Development Manager, introduced the report to the Committee with a short animation that had been launched at the latest Head Teachers conference.

The Committee was reminded of the proposals set out over the summer 2020 and informed that the report would be an update on those proposals and the work that had been completed so far.

It was confirmed that some projects were still in the early stages of completion but others, such as the monitoring of children not on a school register were underway and up to date. It was confirmed that there were currently 16 children with an EHCP plan not on a school register.

Councillor Colin Hayfield, Portfolio Holder for Education and Learning confirmed that there has been an increase in the number of children with complex needs, and that the complexity of needs is also growing. Councillor Hayfield confirmed that the Council would need to ensure that the investments made would result in better outcomes in mainstream schools.

In relation to promoting inclusion within mainstream schools, Councillor Howard Roberts asked if teachers would receive training and were enthusiastic about promoting inclusion. It was confirmed that training for all school staff was in place but that it would take time to develop fully and embed into schools. It was acknowledged that a better joined-up approach to this training was needed. Some training would be offered for the whole school work-force, not just teachers. Financial pressures were creating tensions about training needs and supporting SEND children but on the whole teachers and schools all want to do the right thing.

It was confirmed that conversations relating to SEND were held at the Head Teachers Conference. While there was some positive feedback, some teachers were defensive and felt that there are problems elsewhere in the system that need to be resolved first. As part of the SEND & Inclusion Change Programme, project groups will be used to engage with schools; there will also be regular contact with the Schools Forum.

The Committee noted that not all projects from the programme had been started. It was clarified that consideration had been given to starting all the projects at the same time, but it was considered that some projects were clearly urgent and that some could not be started before other projects were completed. The Committee acknowledged the efforts made to support all staff

across school environments with training, although some difficulties have been faced with trading services. It was noted that the Change Programme will help set the tone and direction for the service.

Following a question from Councillor Corinne Davies, it was confirmed that requesting feedback from service users is part of day to day practice but it was acknowledged that not all children and young people are able to communicate verbally to offer feedback and that work was underway to identify other options. The Parent/Carer Forum is another way that the service receives feedback. One of the projects is to reconstitute the Forum to ensure broader representation.

Resolved

That the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers and comments on the report.

5. School Budget Deficit Report

Helen Redican, Senior Advisor Learning Improvement presented the report to the Committee highlighting the current financial position of schools with deficit budgets or projected deficit budgets at the end of the summer term 2020 particularly noting those with deficits of above 5%.

The Committee noted that there were 12 schools in Warwickshire with a predicted deficit.

It was noted that Sustainability Action Groups (SAG) offer a challenge and support to schools facing a budget deficit; and that they are chaired by school improvement officers and not financial officers. Officers can offer a shared understanding of the context for each school's deficit.

Following a question in relation to the impact of Covid-19, it was confirmed that this was currently unquantified, but a fuller picture is expected by the time the autumn 2020 review is completed and that it can then be presented to the Committee. Following a question as to whether Covid-19 has had an impact on school budgets, or if the deficit was a result of other ongoing issues, it was confirmed that schools have had additional costs as a result of the pandemic such as PPE supply costs but that some of these would be covered by Central Government. However, it was also noted that National Funding is still an issues for schools that won't necessarily get any easier.

In relation to the challenges faced by smaller and rural schools, it was noted by the Committee that there is currently a consultation underway to add an additional 30 schools to those already identified by the EFSA criteria. In addition, it was noted that a new "small schools' strategy" is being developed and that it will be shared with the Committee when complete.

It was confirmed to the Committee that Warwickshire County Council does not loan money to schools in deficit; however cash advances are occasionally used.

6. Work Programme

The Committee noted the work programme as submitted with the following additions –

Following a question from Councillor Jeff Morgan, it was confirmed that a report in relation to the performance of the Nuneaton Multi Academies Trust's (MAT) performance will be presented to the committee at the meeting in February 2021. The report will focus on the GCSE results which will be confirmed after the Christmas period.

It was agreed that the Head of the Nuneaton MAT will be invited to the meeting with school governor representatives.

It was confirmed that a briefing session in relation to School Sufficiency was being planned for all members to attend.

The meeting rose at 11:32

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Chair