

# Children & Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday 20 July 2021

## Minutes

### Attendance

#### Committee Members

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor Jo Barker  
Councillor Brett Beetham  
Councillor Brian Hammersley  
Councillor Marian Humphreys  
Councillor Jill Simpson-Vince

#### Officers

Helen Barnsley, Democratic Services Officer  
John Coleman, Assistant Director - Children and Families  
Sally Nash, Service Manager (Youth Justice)  
Nichola Vine (Strategy and Commissioning Manager, Legal and Democratic)

### 1. General

#### (1) Apologies

Apologies were received from:

Councillor Yousef Dahmash  
Councillor Barbara Brown  
Councillor Pete Gilbert  
Councillor Justin Kerridge  
Mr John McRoberts

#### (2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

No declarations of pecuniary or non-pecuniary interest were made.

#### (3) Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 February 2021 were agreed as an accurate record.

## **2. Public Speaking**

There were no public speakers at the meeting.

## **3. Question Time**

### **(1) Question to Cabinet Portfolio Holders**

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse (Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group and Chair of meeting) asked Councillor Jeff Morgan (Portfolio Holder for Children, Families and Education) whether, as part of the development of the outdoor education strategy, consideration will be given to the creation of a bursary scheme that will allow young people from less affluent households to benefit from outdoor education opportunities.

Councillor Jeff Morgan replied stated that this is an interesting idea that will sit alongside other ideas that work on the strategy will consider. The Council, he stated, is keen to assist young people to enjoy the challenge and fun of outdoor education.

### **(2) Updates from Cabinet Portfolio Holders and Assistant Directors**

The committee was reminded that the OFSTED SEND inspection had been completed and that a report is now awaited.

## **4. Youth Justice Plan 2021-2022**

The Chair welcomed John Coleman (Assistant Director, Children and Families) and Sally Nash (Service Manager, Youth Justice) to the meeting.

Sally Nash opened by explaining that whilst the presentation of the Youth Justice Plan to committee is a routine matter it is also of importance. Youth Justice is enshrined in statute and it is a condition of the Youth Justice Board that in order for Youth Justice Services to receive their funding they must produce an annual plan. The plan must be acceptable to the Board and demonstrate compatibility to the Council's corporate aims and objectives. The plan is owned by the Youth Justice Partnership and by the Chief Officer Board. The overall objectives of the Youth Justice Service are to provide the safest environment as possible and to help young people to be as safe as possible. Youth offending is not a popular topic. Nevertheless, the service has the confidence of the courts and has been able to continue to maintain contact with the courts and young people throughout the Pandemic.

The committee was informed of a number of challenges.

1) Serious youth violence Serious youth violence has grown. It now serves as a golden thread through the work of the Safer Warwickshire Partnership. The overall level of youth violence has not escalated although there have been a number of high-profile cases.

2) Engagement by young people in education, training and employment The Pandemic has had a serious negative impact on vulnerable young people. School age children who do not have

proactive parents have fallen behind on their education. It has been found necessary to realign resources to secure specialist support for these young people.

Whilst case-loads through courts have dropped owing to the Pandemic case loads generally have remained static.

Councillor Jill Simpson-Vince asked about out of court disposals. These were first time appearances but is it a case of “three strikes and you’re in court”? How many of the first offenders are likely to be seen again?

In response the committee was informed that out of court disposal is a multi-agency approach. Decisions regarding when a young person should be required to attend court rest with the police. With Youth Conditional Cautions if a young person does not comply then they will be required to attend court. It was stressed that out of court disposals are a serious sanction. It is not a case of young people “getting away with it” but the aim of the legislation is to keep children out of the court system. Sometimes children do come back into the system, but it remains preferable to manage them away from the courts if possible.

Councillor Marian Humphries welcomed that children are put first adding that it is important to identify and address the reasons behind a child’s behaviour. In response Sally Nash reminded members that these young people are children first and offenders second. There are no excuses for bad behaviour, but it should be recognised that they are children. School, she added, teach discipline but if children are not in school they are not benefitting from this.

Councillor Jo Barker asked if entry level offenders are offending at a higher level. In response the committee was informed that there have been cases of children committing high level offences as their first offence. One child has recently been sentenced to five years imprisonment for their first offence. The Pandemic has seen a number of low level and high-level offences. There has been a gap in mid-range offences, but these are possibly down to policing decisions.

Sally Nash was asked about bespoke parenting initiatives. The committee was informed that recognising that the parents of young offenders have specific needs the youth justice Service has been running a pilot project around this. Bespoke remand accommodation is operated in Warwickshire. This is a fostering service for children awaiting remand.

Councillor Brett Beetham asked for information about re-offending rates. The committee was informed that information on these is two to three years old and is of limited use. Software companies are developing products that will provide real time information. The Youth Justice Service has yet to take this forward having been delayed by the Pandemic. For it to work effectively the police will have to agree to undertaking more real time reporting. Discussions will be needed with the Chief Constable as in other areas of the country this has been a challenge.

Councillor Beetham also enquired about engagement with education. He was informed that in the Youth Justice Service has recognised the value in employing a specialist whose principal focus will be education and the people involved in its delivery. A job description has yet to be drafted.

Councillor Brian Hammersley recognised that children who are not in school become bored and this can lead to them getting into trouble. He asked what local authorities are doing to ensure that children are kept occupied. In reply Sally Nash stated that this is known as “diversion”. The County

Council is investing heavily in more youth work and the Pandemic has seen virtual youth clubs being run. In addition, small grants have been made available to community groups to help keep young people occupied.

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse stressed the need to maintain the preventative agenda. John Coleman reported significant falls in the level of alcohol and drug abuse and the number of young people carrying bladed weapons as a result of early intervention initiatives. With the Priority Family initiative, it is possible to claim payment by results. Warwickshire has seen a 100% return.

Councillor Jill Simpson-Vince asked about “county-lines” and whether there are differences in approach depending on whether the offender is to the east or west of Warwickshire. The committee was informed that there are information sharing agreements with partners the aim being to prevent offending. Much cross-border work is police driven. Courts reflect local communities and whilst there are sentencing guidelines they are not always applied consistently. An agreement exists already to the west as it is recognised that offenders are using the train line from Birmingham down to Leamington. In time there may be agreements to the east with Leicestershire and Northamptonshire but presently the focus is on the West Midlands.

With county-lines it is important to appreciate that the children involved are not making their own choices.

John Coleman emphasised the need to ensure that information is shared freely between partner agencies. Police forces work in different ways and it is important to ensure that these differences in approach do not get in the way. Information comes from children who have been missing but who have returned home. If they have been interviewed in Warwickshire it is important to ensure that the outcome of that interview is shared with the home authority.

Councillor Jeff Morgan welcomed the discussion regarding the role of the youth service. In response to a question regarding “early help” the committee was informed that an early help assessment includes a section on “potential to commit crime”. The Priority Families initiative also considers this. Although the age of criminal responsibility is 10 years young children will, if not supported, continue to move into crime. Early interventions have the potential to change behaviours and demeanour.

Resolved:

That the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee approve and Support the 2021/22 Youth Justice Plan. Associated actions will be tracked and monitored by the Youth Justice Chief Officer Board in line with the requirements of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.

## **5. Update on Scrutiny Review**

The Chair welcomed Nic Vine (Strategy and Commissioning manager – Legal and Democratic) to the meeting. The key elements of the published report were set out to the committee. It was explained that a consultant had been commissioned to undertake the review and that her findings had been very positive. A series of recommendations had been developed for how scrutiny could be improved at the County Council.

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse suggested that scrutiny should have a closer alignment to data and performance.

Resolved:

That the Committee notes the findings of the independent review into Overview and Scrutiny.

## **6. Year End Council Plan 2020-2025 Quarterly Progress Report (April 2020 to March 2021)**

John Coleman explained that the Council is seeking to develop a one data set approach which will be more accessible to people.

A series of highlights were identified.

1. Early Help. The Pandemic has led to a 40% increase in early help provision. More family support workers have needed to be recruited. The main focus has been on mental health support, education and reintegration.
2. An increase in the number of children in care. There has been a significant increase in the number of non-accompanied child asylum seekers in Warwickshire.
3. Disadvantaged children. It is recognised that there is more work to be undertaken with disadvantaged children who are under-achieving. A virtual head teacher role is to be created to support children who are in need. The focus will be on support for the most disadvantaged.

Some pressure areas were highlighted.

1. Children in care continue to provide pressure. There is a need to progress permanency plans.
2. Mental Health issues. Work is continuing with the Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership Trust although this slowed during the Pandemic.

Councillor Brian Hammersley sought assurance that the Council has sufficient capacity to manage its children in care portfolio. John Coleman stated that the Council does have capacity. The biggest issue is with placements. The Family Therapy Team helps to provide stability in placements. There remains a significant pressure for foster carers. The cost of placements has increased during the Pandemic to £3200 per week for a placement in a residential home. To assist in addressing this the Council is investing in the construction of three care homes in addition to the one that is close to completion in Stratford-upon-Avon.

Councillor Jeff Morgan stated that the Council has been doing a good job in difficult circumstances. There remain concerns over CAMHS. The Council is keen to increase the number of domestic placements and it will be a major step forward when the new children's home in Stratford is opened.

The Council is working in partnership with Kent County Council to assist with the accommodation of unaccompanied child asylum seekers. The Council does get financial support with this. It is a topical issue with the government recently announcing additional resources for it. Support is extending beyond that for Syrian refugees to those from other countries such as Afghanistan.

It is difficult to keep track of outcomes for unaccompanied asylum seekers. Some children, particularly those from Asia, do go missing. Within around five days they will have been picked up by human traffickers. Working with the police these young people are usually found in other parts of the county. The key is to get them safely into foster placements before they can be taken. Young asylum seekers are often keen to engage in the education process. This presents its own challenges as there is usually a language barrier to overcome. The Council is keen to work with local colleges to provide long term courses as opposed to the short ones currently offered to asylum seekers. In response to a question from Councillor Brian Hammersley the meeting was informed that generally when a child makes the journey to the UK, they lose contact with their families. If they have a relative who is already in the country efforts will be made to unite them. However, families rarely manage to follow on behind children.

There is a backlog of asylum claims. In order to address this Immigration officers are invited to the Myton Road centre to administer claims. A challenge that success in this area presents is that once a claim for asylum has been settled the government ceases its funding for that individual. However, the Council considers that it would be wrong to cease any kind of support immediately, so it continues to provide when there is no additional funding to do so.

Councillor Marian Humphries welcomed the references to holiday activities and food. In Atherstone there is a boxing club run by the police. This provides a useful means of engaging with young people. John Coleman explained that the Council has invested heavily in youth workers. Sessions will be offered to young people across the County every day of the summer school holidays. Support is to be provided to any young person who may struggle with engaging in the sessions.

Resolved:

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- 1) notes the progress of the delivery of the Council Plan 2020 - 2025 for the period as contained in the report.
- 2) requests that a briefing note regarding support for asylum seekers be produced and shared with all members.

## **7. Work Programme 2021 - 2022**

The work programme for the committee was agreed.

## **8. Date of the Next Meeting**

It was noted that a special meeting of the committee was to be held on Tuesday 27 July 2021 to consider a call-in.

## **9. Minutes Containing Confidential or Exempt Information**

Resolved:

That members of the public be excluded from the meeting for the items mentioned below on the grounds that their presence would involve the disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

## **10. Restricted Minutes from the previous meeting (23.02.2021)**

The restricted minutes of the meeting held on 23 February 2021 were agreed as an accurate record.

The meeting rose at 11.37

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Chair