

Children & Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday 27 September 2022

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

Councillor Yousef Dahmash (Chair)
Councillor Jerry Roodhouse (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Jo Barker
Councillor Brett Beetham
Councillor Barbara Brown
Councillor Peter Gilbert
Councillor Brian Hammersley
Councillor Marian Humphreys
Councillor Justin Kerridge
Councillor Jill Simpson-Vince

Portfolio Holders

Councillor Jeff Morgan, Portfolio Holder for Children & Families
Councillor Isobel Seccombe, Leader of the Council

Officers

Nigel Minns, Strategic Director for People
John Coleman, Assistant Director - Children and Families
Jo Davies, Service Manager (Practice Improvement)
Isabelle Moorhouse, Democratic Services Officer

1. General

(1) Apologies

Councillor Kam Kaur (Portfolio Holder for Education)

(2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None.

(3) Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Councillor Brett Beetham noted that he was yet to receive any information of the breakdown he requested on the Voice of Warwickshire survey.

Councillor Marian Humphreys queried whether there was an update available for the pilot

scheme where teachers were given manuals to cope with the causes of disruptive children. Nigel Minns (Strategic Director – People) stated that ‘Lost at School’ pilot was based on work by Dr Ross Green. It was going ahead with 34 schools and was going really well; it included collaborative training and proactive solutions model which included guidance for teachers. It is designed to address the root causes behind challenging behaviour.

The minutes were approved as a correct record.

2. Public Speaking

None.

3. Question Time

(1) Questions to Cabinet Portfolio Holders

This was covered in 3(2)

(2) Updates from Cabinet Portfolio Holders and Assistant Directors

Councillor Jeff Morgan (Portfolio Holder – Children & Families) informed the committee that the children’s home in Stratford had not opened yet because Ofsted had not conducted a site visit. All DBS checks had been approved and it was ready to open. The second children’s home will be in Leamington and will be decorated and cleaned after the current tenants move out. The third home will be in East Nuneaton. A possible fourth children’s home would be in North Warwickshire and would be for children with disabilities.

John Coleman (Assistant Director – Children & Families) added that they had learnt lessons from opening the Stratford children’s home and it was the first one Warwickshire County Council (WCC) opened since 1986. The registered manager had already been appointed for the Leamington home and it had been advertised for the Nuneaton home. All homes will be open by December 2023.

Councillor Isobel Seccombe (Leader of the Council) informed the committee that there were two processes with admissions. One is the change from children going up to schools with older pupils e.g. children going from primary school to secondary school. This went better this year than the previous year. The other admissions process is the in-year admissions which is when children move schools but this not being because of their age e.g. when a child within the county wants to move schools to another one or a new child in the county needs a school placement. These kinds of admissions are done throughout the year and they stay fairly static each year. In March 2022, the Council moved to a new online admissions system which will be beneficial in the long term. 11 out of 26 staff members in the admissions team left by summer 2022 and the team leadership did not raise the time delay issue of the system and moved on too. Vacancy data was not sent it by 1/3 of Warwickshire’s schools and they were closed during the summer holidays so they could not provide this data.

When the Leader and Portfolio Holder were made aware of these problems the Leader requested daily updates. The team worked hard to clear the backlog despite the phones ringing and lack of staff. The Council has a legal requirement to place children within 14 school days which was met for everybody as school holidays do not count in these dates. Councillor Seccombe requested a report into the project to investigate what went wrong.

In response to Councillor Barbara Brown, Councillor Seccombe stated that the team was not fully staffed but the system was working now.

In response to Councillor Jill Simpson-Vince, Nigel Minns said that the admissions team had been working long hours under a lot of pressure to deal with the in-year admission issue that the service they should be able to provide had slipped. These standards should return to normal now for schools with other queries. Councillor Seccombe requested that any issues schools had during this period should be fed back to her.

Following a question from Councillor Jo Barker, Nigel Minns said that these issues arose because there was a change in code for admissions from central government, so the new system was implemented to accommodate this new code, as well as the reasons raised earlier. There were 8000 in-year admissions last year and there were 1600 in August 2022.

In response to Councillor Jerry Roodhouse, Councillor Seccombe said that the report will be fed back to CYP OSC as well as Resources OSC (as the admissions team sat within the Resources Directorate). The Chair noted that the material effect of the admissions team was felt within this OSC.

Councillors Humphreys and Seccombe praised the hard work done by the admissions team to clear the backlog.

In response to Councillor Brian Hammersley, Councillor Seccombe said she did not know if any asylum-seeking children impacted the admission numbers. Councillor Morgan said that Coventry dealt with this more and supply teachers would go into hotels hosting them to teach them. It was noted that there were similar hotels in Stratford and Rugby. The Home Office ran these hotels and managed them all differently education-wise. John Coleman said that refugee families were encouraged to apply for school/nursery admission placements normally.

In response to Councillor Pete Gilbert, Councillor Seccombe said the review should include if working from home affected staff ability.

Following a question from the Chair, Councillor Seccombe agreed to find out the time frame of the review.

4. Children and Families Workforce Strategy Review (including Social Worker Health Check)

Jo Davies (Service Manager (Practice Improvement)) summarised the two reports:

- There was a national shortage of social workers
- 5000 social workers left the profession in 2021
- National vacancy rates in 2021 went up 7% which was the highest in the 5 years
- Social workers employed by agencies increased by 3%
- Local Authorities/Trusts in the West Midlands were experiencing difficulties recruiting social workers, especially more qualified ones
- This resulted in a competitive employment market with employers using additional payments to employ or retain social workers

- This has been made more difficult because of the current economic climate
- WCC focused on showing how good the Council was to work for by reducing caseloads and making them manageable, investing money in professional opportunities for social workers and improving the quality of supervision and career development opportunities
- They focused on supporting social workers in their career by launching the Children and Families Academy which provides development opportunities across the workforce and prioritises the practice model of social work progression
- In May 2021 two new roles were introduced (Level 5 social worker which models decision making and social work practice and Enhanced Team Leader which focuses on strategic leadership and management responsibilities). Both have a competitive salary for the region and have been positive developments
- Team leaders needed more training opportunities around their leadership so they commissioned a programme that all team leaders have attended and a monthly strategic group where they focus on workforce strategy
- The two main sources of data are the Local Government Association (LGA) who do an annual health check and the DfE (Department for Education)
- The annual health checks monitor performance standards against people's perceptions of those standards. WCC performed well with schools in a strong and clear social work framework that was recommended with Ofsted
- They recognise the availability of support and supervision for social workers who felt they had the time/opportunity for their professional development
- WCC identified five days a year for each social worker to support their CPD development, some will be mandatory and some for their own professional development, More work was being done around this
- The survey had 90 questions and were scored between 0-100. They were then triangulated and scored against nine different themes
- WCC scored well against eight themes and they one the scored worst on was Covid-19 related (73% satisfaction rate); this was caused by changes in Public Health. The survey was done December 2021
- The other area of information received is the annual return to the DFA which is done annually in September. The data included a three-year profile around agency staff, vacancy and absence because they are indicators of the overall health of WCC's workforce and average caseloads. This includes the ranges within the West Midlands as well as the national ranges
- WCC reduced their agency usage and were below the regional and national averages as well as their workloads, vacancy rates were stable, turnover rates were 1% lower than the regional average
- The amount of newly qualified and level 3 social workers remained stable too but there was a reduction in level 4 social workers, some were internally promoted
- There was a marginal fall in level 2 social workers
- The plan is for 20% of WCC's social worker workforce to be newly qualified, 30% experienced social workers and 50% advanced social workers
- 51% of their social workers were level 3 which was higher than desired, but it was difficult to retain more experienced social workers
- Recruitment activity was continuing with HR colleagues and this focused-on progression and the reduction in caseloads
- However, an average case load for the year masks some fluctuations between teams and demand at different times of year which caused some social workers to feel that their

caseloads were not manageable. Work was being done to mitigate this as it affected retention

- There was a lot of consistent recruitment over two years with success but there was less success with getting more experienced social workers. There were a lot of social media campaigns and analytics about promotional media promotional stuff working with marketing colleagues. This is a cheap form of promotion and positive
- A new team leader job role with a regional competitive salary attracted some good external applicants and demonstrated the importance of ensuring salaries were in keeping regionally
- CYE retention rate improved by 10% since May 2021, this coincided with the Academy's launch. This showed it was valuable and showed the focus on coaching/supportive relationships so they can embed their learning in practice
- A policy around a minimum CPT time and a good induction will be embedded
- Work was done with HR colleagues around making learning activity programmes to make it more manageable for social workers and managers to oversee the complex social worker training programme
- There was good recruitment for level 5 posts internally who were appointed but more external candidates were wanted. They wanted to do less casework and more social work education. This was a problem because of the demand
- There was a lot of ongoing activity with the Strategic Workforce Group who have a comprehensive plan that looks at recruitment and retention. WCC received an investment, and they appointed a person within children and families and next year they need to identify how they will sustain that level of activity once they have returned to a more generic service
- WCC needs to provide more opportunities for a dedicated social work programme for experienced social workers and have the capacity for them to attend that training for their progression through a centralised appraisal process
- There was a social work apprentice scheme where WCC grows their own social workers. It has five apprentices over a three-year course. Some complete this and they are continuing to roll it out alongside other national schemes
- They started the commissioning of recruiting 25 social workers from abroad to work for Warwickshire by doing some targeted work about people who want to relocate and remain in the UK
- The development framework will be reviewed for family support workers and they were offering more training and mentoring around practice supervisors who work with social worker students
- They planned to keep supporting these students so they can advance their career by working for Warwickshire
- The Academy will offer social workers in family facing roles the opportunity to engage in research and contribute to social work education regionally. They will develop a performance dashboard to see what difference the academy made in terms of social work progression, CPD days etc.
- Celebrating successes was important so often letters and emails of appreciation were sent by the leadership team recognising their work. This was also done with awards
- A Wellbeing Day was introduced so social workers could have a selfcare day. There was also counselling support and coaching on life improvement

In response to the Chair, Jo Davies said that local authorities who did retain their social workers did so because they offered large financial incentives. John Coleman added that a review into this showed the social care market was not working because these local authority incentives. WCC

avoided them because social workers did not stay if they were being more money elsewhere. The review recommended that the DfE implement a national pay structure. The DfE will publish their response to the review in December 2022 and it was believed they would implement this pay structure. WCC had less agency staff than the national average but this was expensive (£20,000 more than a normal social worker) but this went to the agency not the social worker.

In response to Councillor Morgan, Jo Davies said a six-day training programme was implemented for team leaders to support the person they supervised and help understand the children they were supervising too. They were also given coaching sessions in their progression as a team leader.

Councillor Gilbert suggested some financial discretions to maintain good social workers. He expressed his concern with the idea of a national pay grade because of the difficulty of the job role in being a social worker. In response to Councillor Gilbert, John Coleman said their priority was to provide the flexibility for internal staff members to progress and have discussions with them on how to do this. However, they wanted to show experienced social workers that they could advance and not need to step away into a managerial role. Most people leave the authority because they are leaving the social worker profession altogether (Covid-19 accelerated this nationally) or to be an agency social worker (even though this was more difficult). The increased cost of living added to the difficulty of retention. Jo Davies added that some social workers left and returned to WCC.

In response to Councillor Beetham, John Coleman stated that agency social workers cost the authority £2.6 million in 2021; WCC was working with an agency who specialise in recruiting social workers from abroad and this would cost £125,000 for 25 social workers, plus salary. The agency trains them on UK legislation and supports them to relocate to Warwickshire. There will be 25 social workers over two years. When advertising job roles in Warwickshire, a lot of applications come from South Africa and it was difficult to carry out background checks for international applications. This had been done twice successfully without the agency. The Wellbeing Day is a day where the social worker does something for the community e.g. volunteering at Dogs Trust, planting trees etc. WCC oversee this so they know what they do on the day.

In response to Councillor Hammersley, Jo Davies informed that it took between one to three years to get a social worker qualification with the option to get an additional masters in two years. Once qualified that have one year where they learn on the job and are assessed and supported. At the end of this year they have a portfolio defined by Social Work England that says whether they met the standards to become a experienced social worker (level 3). WCC's aim is to advance this with training and an assessment period with courses that would lead to a salary increase. Requirements are defined by Social Work England about what different levels of social workers are required and there is a new standard on being qualified for more than five years in a programme, but details were not available on this yet. There was proactive succession planning with WCC being encouraged for student social workers to work at and continue their career in. John Coleman added that there were 68 social worker vacancies in WCC and 36 were agency staff. There are always 30-40 vacancies

Following a question from Councillor Humphreys, Jo Davies stated that there was there was an emphasis on CBD training especially through the Academy. They were looking at getting sustainable funding for the academy and they had a dedicated pot of money to use for leaders and practitioners to attend training events. WCC is also part of the West Midlands Regional Teaching Partnership to work with universities to support social work education in the region. There were monthly supervisions with team leaders to ensure they were doing the right thing.

Councillor Roodhouse noted that the BI dashboard should help with greater transparency with how the team was doing, especially with the Academy. There could be something internal within the Academy to monitor its progress. In response to Councillor Roodhouse, Jo Davies stated that the '5+' was a new measurement of how long somebody had been a social worker for. The Academy do a mixture of roles because there had been limited experienced social workers in the teams it supported with individual casework, doing assessments, supporting social workers etc. As the teams grow, the Academy will do less of this. The aim was for the Academy to be solely focused on training, based on what the workforce needed. John Coleman added that the apprenticeship scheme was successful in hiring and retaining different kinds of social workers. The Academy needed to be developed to become more multi-disciplinary, so everyone was equally focused on. Following a supplementary from Councillor Roodhouse, John Coleman stated that colleges were worked with for the apprenticeships as well as schools for people who want to be social workers. Career advancement was a good way to maintain student social workers. The '5+' years measurement was brought in because one possible recommendation of the care review was that only social workers who were qualified for five or more could deal with child protection cases which would put a lot of pressure on WCC and other local authorities nationally.

In response to Councillor Barker, John Coleman said they made their good pension scheme public, but most social workers hired were aged between 25-35 so they were not focused on their pension. Agency social workers had no pension or protection covers e.g. sick pay. Following a supplementary from Councillor Barker, John Coleman confirmed there was an option for sabbaticals and three social workers abroad said they planned to return to WCC if they returned to the UK.

In response to Councillor Justin Kerridge, Jo Davies said they were aiming to improve diversity in the workforce with the HR team. Recruitment videos were doing showing the diverse workforce. John Coleman added that he wanted to do something similar to what the police cadets do by working with young people who may want to become social workers.

In response to Councillor Brown, John Coleman noted that the demand for services had increased so they tried to increase Early Help staff to resolve this problem so family could get help earlier on. There were strategies to move resources around these areas and adapt to increasing caseloads. Following a supplementary from Councillor Brown, John Coleman stated that they had multi agency teams cross county. They either had a mental health, domestic abuse, and or substance misuse worker; North Warwickshire's team recently got a child psychologist. The Youth Justice team had probation workers too. The National Care Review said that all agencies should join a council-led coalition based in children's services. The multi-agency teams had reduced children in care by 1/3 because parents had been given early access to mental health help.

In response to Councillor Gilbert, John Coleman stated that the National Care Review suggested a regional bank of social workers, but this was attempted before and it was an expensive failure for the local authorities involved. Nigel Minns added that 15% of the country's social workers were agency staff because they get paid more. He stated it would be more beneficial if there were pay grade restrictions for agency staff. If there was a bank it could be possible to recruit permanent staff from.

Councillor Seccombe noted that finances would need to be focus on and at the time there was not enough staff for this bank. She suggested that working with the voluntary sector could help with this.

(1) Annual Social Work Health Check

This was covered in section 4.

(2) Children and Families Workforce Strategy Review

This was covered in section 4.

5. Performance Progress Report Quarter 1 2022/2023

John Coleman noted that there are 22 performance measures for CYP OSC and all of them were on track apart from six. Full details were in the report.

In response to Councillor Roodhouse, John Coleman said that the third party spend was not met because the original plan did not happen, but this was not being amended by reducing costs with building rentals. Maximising income is, when children there is a statutory duty for health services to contribute towards a care package. For children in residential care, the local CCG (clinical commissioning group) would make a financial contribution towards that package. In the past this was not utilised so more work with the health centre was being done. Contributing towards these costs made it possible to increase income. The education safeguarding training target had not been met because most of that is free as it partly paid by schools or the private sector where there was a target of £50,000. Elements of these income targets have been met.

In response to the Chair, John Coleman said there were more children on CPPs nationally because of national cases and rising awareness. A lot of auditing was done around this around the north of Warwickshire around domestic abuse issues. There were also more children needing support during the current economic climate. Work was being done differently to children at risk of CSE in a multi-agency way without a CPP. Councillor Simpson-Vince noted that it was important not to miss anything while trying to get this back on target.

Following a question from Councillor Simpson-Vince, Nigel Minns stated that some targets like the Early Help one would be met because of the work being done. However, targets like children of a EHC plan (education, health and care) would be more difficult to achieve because progress was slower because they had to stay at their placed schools. It was important to get the right help given at the right time which would be done by increasing resources to mainstream schools.

In response to Councillor Humphreys, Nigel Minns stated that there was a national health worker shortage, roughly 6-7000 in the UK. A recovery plan was in place to look at alternative approaches and one of these approaches is to change the skills mix so they use a different range of people who can do these visits to enable them to get the capacity needed. However, this meant anyone who was not a health visitor who carried out a visit did not count towards the national statistics. Following a supplementary from Councillor Seccombe, Nigel Minns said this target could be changed from the national to a local one to provide a clearer target.

In response to Councillor Kerridge, John Coleman noted that the number of children entering care had reduced by 1/3 because of the early support for the families keeping children safe. These

reports are now aligned to the Council Plan, and it showed the ones that were not on track and what the plan was to get them back on track.

6. Work Programme

Councillor Kerridge requested an update on the children and young family centres. John Coleman informed the committee that an independent review into these centres was imminent and will include the location of the centres. The outcome of this review could be presented at February's or April's meeting. Councillor Kerridge asked for the providers to provide outreach to the local areas. John Coleman agreed for feedback from this to be shared with the committee.

Councillor Morgan requested that an update on the Virtual Schools be put on work programme for February.

7. Any Other Business

Councillor Kerridge requested more clarification on how money was spent in each area in relation to the Council budget.

A discussion followed on paper copies of papers at meetings.

8. Date of Next Meeting

8th November 2022 at 10am

The meeting rose at 12:46

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Chair