

Children & Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday 8 November 2022

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

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

Officers

Chris Baird, Interim AD for Education
Rachel Barnes, Health and Wellbeing Delivery Manager
Shinderpaul Bhangal, Delivery Lead, Voice Influence & Change
Amy Bridgewater-Carnall, Senior Democratic Services Officer
Alison Cole, Senior Joint Commissioner for Disabilities and Autism
Sam Craven, SEND Development Officer
Robert Sabin, Lead Commissioner (Family Wellbeing)
Sharon Shaw, Service Manager, Corporate Parenting
Umar Teerab, Family Support Worker

1. General

(1) Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Jo Barker and Brett Beetham.

(2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

There were none.

(3) Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 September 2022 were approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

2. Public Speaking

No requests were received.

3. Participation Annual Update: Youth Council and Children in Care Council

The Committee received a report which provided an update on the Youth Council and Children in Care Council for the period July 2021 to September 2022.

Shinderpaul Bhangal, (Delivery Lead, Voice Influence & Change) introduced the report and highlighted the work undertaken with the Care Leavers Forum, Children in Care Council, SEND and Parent / Carer Voice. He also updated Members on the new way of working that had come into force in April 2022 and advised that newly recruited staff members were settling in well and beginning to understand their roles and responsibilities.

Shinderpaul Bhangal explained the key areas of interest including a recent Cross Ministerial Board Meeting that took place in July 2021, the Ofsted Inspection of Local Area Children's Service in November 2021 and the positive feedback received from both. Further highlights included:

- Brothers and Sisters Event in April 2022
- Children & Families Conference & Watch Your Words – Improving Language in Care July 2022
- Apprenticeship Guide for Care Experienced Apprentices 16+ August 2022
- Refugee Celebration Week June 2022
- 3 Short Films June 2022
- Warwickshire Youth Conference April 2022
- A recently developed Social Inclusion Charter

Shinderpaul Bhangal explained that without young people's involvement, this work would not be shaped the way it was.

The Chair welcomed a number of representatives from the Youth Council and Children in Care Council who were attending the meeting virtually.

Tom Barker on behalf of the Care Leavers Forum;
Ollie Tessler, Children in Care Council;
Ian Donnachie, IMPACT forum for young people with SEND;
Alice Battersby and Ruth Morley Brown (also known as Wren), Youth Council.

Members noted that the representative from Unaccompanied Young People, Eliza Deng, had been unable to attend and Umar Teerab (Family Support Worker) would update the meeting on her behalf.

Tom Barker addressed the meeting on behalf of the Care Leavers Forum and described his involvement helping to organise a recent trip to Wembley. Other activities he had been involved in included Care Experience Week, which had involved a Surf Challenge, interviewing the next generation of staff and attending a recent Police Panel. Areas that he felt needed improving were consistent mental health support which should be regular and include daily check-ins, help regarding isolation and how young people could be helped to be set up for life with support regarding rights and entitlements.

Ollie Tessler, 12, spoke on behalf of the Children in Care Council. He described a recent trip to the Harry Potter Studios and explained that his favourite part had been the coach trip. Ollie stated that he had enjoyed meeting other young people and making friends, some of whom he was still in contact with and had met up with again. Ollie had also attended the relaunch of the Children in Care Council which had circus themed activities as well as an exercise to write down the things that were important to him. He was looking forward to the Christmas party when he could meet up with the friends he had made previously. In April, Ollie went to the Brothers and Sisters Event which had enabled him to spend time with his two brothers that he did not live with and he was hoping to see them again next year. Ollie felt that areas of improvement could include support with self-harm, more family time, LGBT opportunities and understanding the transition to college.

Ian Donnachie addressed the meeting on behalf of Impact and began by describing the recent work on redesigning the logo. Representatives from Impact had attended a face to face event in August and had been involved in interviewing the second generation of workers. A new project he was involved in was the School Inclusion Charter which would enable individual needs to be looked at, bring SEND issues to the attention of others and support young people more with SEND friendly settings. He was hoping that pushing forward with this work would help to get the message out and described how they were using different social media tools to communicate to young people. He described his experiences at school and felt that more training was needed around SEND needs in schools especially with trauma and mental health.

Umar Terrab read out the presentation put together by Eliza Deng of Unaccompanied Young People. She felt that the support she had received was good and her mentor had helped her a lot especially during lockdown. She was very pleased with the events that enabled young people to come together and celebrate with lots of people in attendance and awards for any achievement. Eliza had taken part in interview panels, which had helped her confidence and her English to improve. She explained that she had been involved in the 'UASC' film, covering three things – her arrival in the country, the support she received from WCC and how she had integrated into the UK. The film was going to be used in foster care training and even had interest from the Home Office. Eliza felt that more opportunities were needed for young people to learn the English language, learn about the different cultures in the UK and to get an understanding of the laws.

Umar Terrab went on to describe the impact of trauma on unaccompanied young people, many of whom had risked their lives to get to the UK. He felt that more training was needed to understand that the trauma never went away. Many children had family back home who they wanted to support or make contact with and the Home Office process was difficult and lengthy, often taking four to five years to get a response. He reminded Members that until these young people had the correct documents, they had no life and too many were still waiting to hear.

Alice Battersby spoke on behalf of the Youth Council and provided an overview of the conference held in April 2022. 76 participants had attended, splitting into discussion groups with varying issues discussed. She had also attended a Climate Conference in March at Warwick University allowing the Youth Council to express why the issue mattered to them and why it wanted adults to care. The representatives had also met with the Leader of the Council, Councillor Isobel Seccombe, in June to discuss Levelling Up and how it would apply to young people, with their views being fed back to Council. Further work included an intel video on mental health, how to get support for children and families, a politics interview with Councillor Barker and a future interview scheduled with Councillor Rolfe. Wren went on to outline the five main recommendations from the

Youth Conference including Climate Change, Homelessness, jobs and career advice and support, along with accessible mental health and wellbeing assistance. Wren Morley Brown explained that young people did not want to be patronised and how further work could include understanding respectful relationships with practical advice on contraception.

The Chair thanked all of the young people for taking the time to attend and for talking about their experiences. He felt that their presentations had helped to add flesh to the bones of the report and had breathed life into the issues being discussed.

Councillor Gilbert asked Alice Battersby whether Councillors were able to attend the Youth Council and the timing and location of the meetings. He also asked how the subject matter to be discussed was agreed. In response, Alice Battersby advised that the group only had a small number of members and were trying to encourage recruitment of more representatives, especially from the north of the County. Youth Council meetings were held on the first Tuesday of each month and Councillors could be invited to future meetings. She assured the meeting that the Youth Council had full control over the agenda.

Councillor Roodhouse thanked the young representatives for their presentation and recognised the good work being done. With regard to the recommendations, he queried if there was any work that could be done with the Borough and District Councils, especially in relation to their sports and recreational departments. In relation to recommendation 1.3, Councillor Roodhouse queried if a task and finish group was the appropriate wording and went on to ask if Members could do anything to assist young Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers by lobbying government or the Home Office.

In response, the Committee agreed that an additional recommendation could be added.

Councillor Brown agreed that recommendation 1.3 should be amended as the work relating to mental health support would not stop but would continue for as long as it was needed.

Councillor Kaur noted the complex issue of mental health and how it linked to numerous workstreams across the Council. She queried how this work could be reported back in a collective manner and advised that she would raise this at Corporate Board, with a view to it being looked at holistically.

Councillor Kerridge addressed Ian Donnachie and Alice Battersby following their updates regarding social media communications and asked whether a list of the relevant links could be sent to him. In response, Shinderpaul Bhangal advised that these could be available via a central webpage and Alice Battersby explained that the Youth Council was in the process of improving its social media communications.

Councillor Simpson-Vince asked two questions. The first relating to Impact and where Ian Donnachie saw it progressing and the second related to Young Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers and the impact of their resettlement on their mental health.

In response to the first question, Ian Donnachie outlined his aspirations for Impact and how to get young people with SEND needs involved more and getting schools to spread the message regarding the support required.

Sharon Shaw (Service Manager, Corporate Parenting) responded to the second question and agreed that dealing with mental health issues amongst young asylum seekers was challenging as it was not always discussed in their culture and the language barrier often proved to be a problem. However, a one and a half year course was being progressed by staff members and a nurse had been recruited specifically to help support UASCs. Raising the profile of problems such as poor sleep quality and the importance of relaxation was key to enable this to become a more integrated part of life. In addition, the issue had been raised at the Fostering Conference with mental health and past trauma being spoken about. Sharon assured Members that this was an issue that all staff were keenly aware of.

The Chair queried if mental health difficulties were being experienced across the board and officers confirmed this was a national problem and Warwickshire was not alone. Multi-disciplinary teams were aiming to appoint mental health workers but the county still had ten young people struggling to find somewhere to live.

In response to a question from Councillor Humphreys, it was confirmed that Impact was looking to recruit from the northern part of the County. Sam Craven (SEND Development Officer) reported that the Care Experience Celebration had been very positive with many young people attaining a good education and having felt they had received a good service from WCC.

Councillor Gilbert felt that whilst social media was a positive communication tool it could also have a negative impact. He wanted the young representatives in attendance to have the confidence to communicate if they did not agree with decisions being made and assured them that multiple members could be approached if necessary. He felt that their experience in education should be shared along with more ideas as to how to improve processes in the future.

The Chair thanked everyone for attending and proposed that the recommendations be agreed, subject to an amendment to the wording of 1.3 and an additional recommendation ensuring continuing work with the District and Borough Councils.

Resolved

The Committee resolved that:

- 1) the positive contributions that children and young people (C&YP) have made to support improvements to WCC services be noted;
- 2) the changes to the Participation Team and expansion of responsibilities be noted;
- 3) a Working Group on Mental Health & Wellbeing be established so members of the Youth Council, Forum for C&YP with SEND, Children in Care Council and Care Leaver Forum can meet on a quarterly basis with 2-3 members of the C&YP OSC Subcommittee;
- 4) a rota is agreed where elected members attend bimonthly the Youth Council, Forum for C&YP with SEND, Children in Care Council and Care Leaver Forum; and
- 5) the Youth Council, Forum for C&YP with SEND, Children in Care Council and Care Leaver Forum will be invited to attend the C&YP OSC Subcommittee on an annual basis to present their annual report on the actions/achievements and key messages to Members
- 6) officers continue to work with the Borough and District Councils, especially in relation to exploring opportunities for young people through their sports and recreational departments.

4. SEND Update

The Committee received a verbal update on the SEND Written Statement of Action from Rachel Barnes (Delivery Lead, Change Hub Lead) and Chris Baird (Assistant Director, Education Management) who advised that a full update report would be delivered to the next meeting. Rachel Barnes reported the positive feedback from a recent meeting with Department of Education and NHS England, advising that the Team had been commended for the pace of movement of work, the visible progress against key areas of concern and the shared aspirational vision being displayed. Members were advised they would be sent a link to the full report after the meeting and a press release had been sent out the previous week which include a positive statement from the Department of Education and NHS England on the work carried out so far.

The key areas of progress were summarised and included:

- Improvements in co-production – working with parent carers and young people, leading to deep culture change
- The team were encouraged to continue developing the working relationships with health partners
- Understanding impact of work and articulate what will be different in the future
- All areas of work were 85% on track, with no work in the red and 11 flagged as amber (15%), actions and mitigations in place;
- The wait for an autism referral had reduced considerably to 195 weeks and now on trajectory set;
- Referrals for autism diagnosis was up 70% on those originally forecast with analysis ongoing to understand the reasons;
- Referrals for girls had increased and pre-school children;
- A positive autism conference in April 2022 and a further two events were being arranged
- Published information advice booklet for neuro divergent people – to be shared with communities
- Recommission of community support services for autism progressing well & due to go live in April next year;
- Emotionally based school avoidance project had also started, looking at attendance issues in schools

Area 2 of the report dealt with Young People and parent carers with support of the officers Sam Craven, Elaine Lambe (Chair of Parent Carer Forum), and Shinderpaul Bhangal, who were thanked for their work. Officers had held a series of co-production workshops, with support of CONTACT, a charity for disabled children and families. Another key area had been to deliver restorative practice training for all staff in SEND, with over 75% having received the training to date. This was also being extended to schools and health colleagues.

Social Care and Health had produced a Community Strategy as part of the Integrated Health System work but it was recognised that more was needed to integrate co-production. There had been a significant increase in communication and engagement using newsletters, Facebook page, forums and webinars, the links to which would be shared with Members after the meeting.

A further piece of work focused on disagreement resolution with a target to reduce tribunals by 20%. This target was not being met nationally or locally at the present time with a SEND resolution officer being recruited and letters being revised to make them more reader friendly.

There had been a number of positive quotes regarding 'co-production' in the report. Areas 3 and 4 of the report covered the newly created School Inclusion Charter and workforce development, including training in mental health being rolled out to 36 schools.

Section 5 of the report related to the local offer which had been relaunched last year and was being actively promoted.

The Chair asked for clarification on the figures indicating a 70% uplift in autism figures and was advised that this would be shared with Members after the meeting. Rachel Barnes advised that partners were undertaking the analysis but the situation had been made more complicated following a cyber attack on NHS systems recently.

In relation to the autism training, 80 schools to date had taken up the training in addition to those who had participated last year. The aim was for all schools to take up the training.

In response to a question from Councillor Hammersley, Rachel Barnes advised that the target referral time as provided by NICE was thirteen weeks. It was not yet known if there was a backlog as a result of the Covid lockdown but more analysis would be carried out once the report was delivered in February 2023.

Members noted the importance of robust leadership in schools that worked alongside their governors to manage disruption to other students. The Chair highlighted the rising number of children with SEND and queried why this might be. He asked officers to look into studies in the UK and abroad which may provide theories on this.

Councillor Hammersley queried teaching methods compared to a number of years ago and raised a concern that the situation was snowballing.

Councillor Gilbert gave an explanation of employing individuals with learning difficulties, who provided a valuable contribution to the working world. He felt that small businesses had the ability to support school leavers and mentor them in the working world. He hoped that society was identifying conditions properly and not straining already stretched resources.

Councillor Roodhouse described the changes that had taken place since academisation had come in and Warwickshire had not managed to establish its relationship with schools as yet. He recognised that the autism spectrum was vast and noted the importance of identification and resources. He was mindful that some of this may fall to the Educational Attainment Task and Finish Group to look at but reminded members that the county did not have as much power over schools as in previous years.

Councillor Humphreys provided an example of the successful implementation of coping strategies in relation to a primary school child known to her. She stressed that the management of his condition and the support given to his mother had been vital but had taken one and a half years to put in place. She welcomed the schools charter and hoped this would be put in place swiftly to help children.

The Chair thanked officers for the update, which was noted.

5. Work Programme

Councillor Kaur advised that an update on the Nuneaton Education Strategy should be available for the February meeting and a briefing on the SEND change programme would be provided before it was submitted to the committee.

Councillor Kerridge queried when a rota would be produced for members to attend the panes and was advised that this would be actioned after the meeting.

Councillor Morgan advised that the Council had commissioned an independent report into the Children and Families Centres, the results of which should be received by January. It was hoped this could then be reported to the meeting in February 2023.

In response to a question from Councillor Gilbert, officers agreed to liaise with the representatives of the youth groups who could then circulate dates of meetings and forward the relevant invitations.

6. Any Other Business

Councillor Morgan, Portfolio Holder for Education, provided an update to the meeting. He advised that officers and members were trying to raise the profile of the Corporate Parenting Board and he hoped to provide the committee with a standing update item on their progress at each meeting. The Corporate Parenting Board had received an overview of the celebration event held in June along with the film mentioned by Umar Terrab earlier in the meeting. He was delighted that the Board received regular updates on the success of the football team.

Councillor Morgan summarised the information gathered in the performance data item, advising that Sharon Shaw would be able to provide further information on request. The data showed that the Council currently had the lowest number of children in care since November 2021, with fewer teenagers and special guardianship orders being utilised. With regard to the Local Offer for care leavers, Everyone Active was providing fee gym and swim memberships to all care leavers and children in care. He gave an overview of the progress being made with the children's homes, with one in Leamington, Stratford and Nuneaton in the pipeline. One of the properties was ready, with officers awaiting a visit for Ofsted sign off.

Councillor Morgan encouraged members to attend the Corporate Parenting Board which had suffered from low attendance recently. Councillor Gilbert expressed his preference for in person meetings and it was noted that a regular update would be provided to this Committee.

7. Dates of Next Meeting

The future meeting dates were noted.

The meeting rose at 12:40