

Children & Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday 14 February 2023

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

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

Officers

Nigel Minns, Strategic Director for People
Helen Barnsley, Senior Democratic Services Officer
John Coleman, Assistant Director - Children and Families
Chris Baird, Interim AD for Education
Sarah Tregaskis, Service Manager - Education Service Delivery
Becky Hale, Assistant Director - People

1. General

(1) Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Barbara Brown.

(2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None.

(3) Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on the 8 November 2022 were approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

There were no matters arising.

2. Public Speaking

None.

3. Question Time

(1) Questions to Cabinet Portfolio Holders

Following a question from Councillor Jerry Roodhouse, Nigel Minns - Strategic Director (People Directorate), confirmed that the decision made by an academy trust in Nuneaton not to take over the running of the Nuneaton Academy was one that Warwickshire County Council officers were aware of but had not been pre-warned about. It was confirmed that there are now several options available and an update will be given to the committee as soon as officers are aware.

(2) Updates from Cabinet Portfolio Holders and Assistant Directors

Nigel Minns asked the committee to note that the Department for Education (DfE) had published their response to the independent review of children's social care. The DfE will pilot a series of responses over the next 18 months with the view to secure funding. There will be 12 pilots started using the new approach and these will be offered by invitation only. It was suggested to the committee that if Warwickshire County Council is approached and invited that they should accept. The new approaches are likely to be things that happen anyway and the pilots will be funded. It has been a significant review and the recommendations are positive. It was noted that the final response may differ slightly but as soon as a final version is available it will be shared with the committee.

4. Corporate Parenting Panel Update

Unfortunately, due to technical difficulties this item was cancelled. It will be on the agenda for the next meeting on the 26th of April 2023.

5. Council Plan 2022-2027 - Quarter 2 Performance Progress Report

The performance report was presented to the committee by John Coleman -Assistant Director - Children & Families and Chris Baird - Interim Assistant Director for Education Services.

Members were reminded that the new Power BI system that they have access to, shows a live and up to date performance dashboard that is relevant to this committee.

The following highlights were presented to the committee –

- The overall number of children that officers are working with has fallen.
- Officers are successfully working towards more early help support for children.
- The number of Children in Care has reduced. It was noted that this is a big change in the region and is bucking the national trend
- Uptake of placements for 2-year-olds is running at 91% which is an increase and a positive step.

- Placements for 3- & 4-year-olds has also increased

The committee noted that the following performance indicators are not on track –

- In relation to children receiving their 6–8-week health check, it was noted by the committee that there is still work to do in this area and more support is need for health visitors. It was confirmed that there is also a national issue of recruitment in this area.
- In relation to Early Years – the target is 97% and in Warwickshire it is consistently just under 96% but there has been some steady improvement of late. The Committee noted that reported figure is a yearly figure and not a monthly one.
- In relation to suicide rates it was confirmed that the figure is an annual one. There was an increase in young people taking their own life during the pandemic. There has been some improvement but it is representative of the mental health issues in young people. Warwickshire County Council officers continue to work closely with Coventry in relation to suicide prevention.

Following a question from Councillor Jill Simpson-Vince it was confirmed that while in some suicide cases the young person was not previously known to the service, there are always cases where they were known to officers. It was confirmed that there is always a child death investigation for each case which involves reviewing what happened and what can be learnt from it. The safeguarding partnership also review each case. Members of the committee noted that there is very rarely any pattern to the cases. Councillor Jerry Roodhouse raised concerns that the age of those who take their own life seems to be dropping and it was noted that as of the 14th of February 2023, there were 323 children to child protection plans.

Councillor Justin Kerridge asked for clarification in relation to the performance data in relation to SEND; some of the performance data in this report doesn't tally with the information provided with Item 8 of the agenda (Local Area SEND inspection Update). Chris Baird stated that the report in item 8 recognises that there have been improvements in the SEND services but the performance report highlights that there is still a range of issues that are not where officers would like them to be in terms of performance, despite the overall improvement across the service.

Councillor Roodhouse asked why some areas of the report, such as 'child accident prevention' was showing as "not being reported at this stage". Becky Hale - Chief Commissioning Officer (Health and Care) confirmed that she would look into this and report back to the committee but confirmed that joint work in the area is continuing with the NHS and is being actively worked on by council officers. Nigel Minns suggested that the area of reporting may have been stood down during the pandemic due to staffing capacity and will just need to be picked up again but confirmed it will be looked into and the committee updated.

Councillor Marian Humphries asked why, when the issue of health visitor recruitment had been discussed at a previous meeting, did it seem as if no progress had been made. John Coleman confirmed that positive collaboration is now in place and there are multi agencies working together to put a plan in place to resolve the issues.

6. Post 16 participation in Education, Employment and Training performance report 2022

Sarah Tregaskis - Service Manager - Education Services Trading, Development and Delivery presented the report which is an overview of the data for Warwickshire, in comparison with national figures and statistical neighbours.

It was confirmed that the term NEETS refers to young people who are not in education, employment or training. Once identified, officers will work to re-engage with them and help them to progress.

The term “not know” refers to young people whose status in relation to education, employment or training is not known to officers and in some cases, officers are unaware where a young person is because they do not want to engage

The following points were highlighted to the committee –

- Warwickshire’s proportion of young people participating in education and training is higher than that of England, the West Midlands and statistical neighbour average.
- Warwickshire maintained a high level of engagement with NEETS during covid at 94.9%.
- In relation to the types of participation it was noted that most of the young people stay on in Further Education. Some young people go into apprenticeships, and this is slightly under the national average but work is ongoing to improve this.
- The September guarantee for 2021 data shows that the number of Young People in Warwickshire who have been offered a suitable post 16 place (appropriate to their qualifications/needs/experiences) was 98.7% which is higher than the national figure of 95.5%
- The information published annually by the Department for Education (DfE) shows that the number of NEETS in Warwickshire reduced.
- The DfE information also showed the number for “not known” young people has also reduced.
- The committee noted that the majority of NEETS are in the Nuneaton & Bedworth district and 50% of those young people have a vulnerable marker. Officers are aware of the vulnerabilities and working closely with each person.
- It was confirmed that officers are working with the Chamber of Commerce to identify apprenticeship vacancies that would be suitable for Warwickshire Young People

Following a question from Councillor Brett Beetham, Sarah Tregaskis confirmed that since Covid, there has been an obvious change in how officers are able to engage with young people. The mental health support available to young people has increased and this has helped. The support offered isn’t static, and this seems to be working well for Warwickshire.

Councillor Pete Gilbert asked if the data for the Nuneaton & Bedworth district could be split into the two areas. Nuneaton and Bedworth are two different places with different needs and different opportunities and it isn’t always helpful to have just one set of data. It was agreed that Sarah Tregaskis would provide the information for each ward.

Councillor Jill Simpson-Vince asked if officers were always getting placements right after looking at the data in relation to young people who drop out; and if there were enough places in

Warwickshire. It was confirmed that the Post-16 Sufficiency is something that officers regularly look at and refer to the number of pupils coming through schools to ensure there are enough places. There are regular dialogues in place.

Sarah Tregaskis confirmed that the monthly data for NEETS will always show peaks and troughs – for example, every August everyone is NEET as the academic year hasn't started. However, each month, the data shows that Warwickshire is outperforming our statistical neighbours and the national figure. The same young people are not tracked every month due to placements ending or starting or the young person dropping out. Officers are working on sustained destination and it was agreed that further information on this would be provided to members.

Councillor Marian Humphries stated that the report highlights the brilliant work that is being done by officers at Warwickshire County Council to help young people to get ready for the road ahead. The committee wished it to be noted that officers are doing a fabulous job.

7. Children's Change & Transformation Fund Update

John Coleman - Assistant Director - Children & Families gave a summary to the committee of the investment plan for Children's Change and Transformation over the last three years.

Confirmation of the investment plan was given, including information in relation to the funding from the Department of Education and where the council had worked with Leeds City Council on the Warwickshire Family Value project.

The committee noted from the report that the impact of the work had been very positive and noted that more children are now receiving help earlier. Over 150 professionals from across Warwickshire took part in the Early Help Summit in January 2023 to explore future developments in this area.

It was noted that robust and effective support to families has led to fewer families starting and entering care processes; approximately 55% of cases are now diverted away. There has also been a marked increase in supporting children to live with families with Special Guardianship Orders.

It was confirmed that the Change and Transformation programme will be reviewed and evaluated over the next 12 months. Every quarter officers will meet with parents, carers and children. The full research report will be available after that but the council does have a lot of the data already.

John Coleman continued and stated that there are still things that need improving within the service such as the stability of placements. There are fewer children in care but there are not enough foster carers or placements. The committee noted that there is a continuous improvement plan in place that will sustain the cultural change and improvements.

Following a question from Councillor Brett Beetham, it was confirmed that the Caring Dads Programme (working with fathers in order to change controlling, abusive and neglectful behaviours) is in place and has been positively received by those taking part. It has positively

impacted 158 children and young people. The programme will continue as there are now enough officers to support it.

Following a question from Councillor Brian Hammersley in relation to becoming a foster carer, and how some people seem to be put off by how hard it appears to be, John Coleman confirmed that there is a really good package in place for Warwickshire in a competitive market. Warwickshire offers psychological support every 6 months as well as financial support. There is national guidance to follow and there has to be an assessment by a social worker. It was noted that the process can take up to three months. Councillor Hammersley asked if fostering could lead to adoption which was confirmed by John Coleman but it was noted that it doesn't always have to lead to adoption and it was important that those wanting to be foster carers were aware of that.

8. Local Area SEND Inspection Update - For Information Only

The report was included in the agenda pack for information purposes. Members of the Committee were asked to forward any comments or questions to the report author or Helen Barnsley in Democratic Services.

9. Nuneaton Education Strategy update - For Information Only

The report was included in the agenda pack for information purposes. Members of the Committee were asked to forward any comments or questions to the report author or Helen Barnsley in Democratic Services.

10. Work Programme and items on the Forward Plan

The Committee noted and agreed that updated work programme.

Items for the work programme and future meetings of the committee will be discussed at the next Chair & Spokes meeting which will be held on 29 March 2023 @ 10am. The meeting will be held virtually via Microsoft Teams.

11. Any Other Business

Following a question from Councillor Justin Kerridge in relation to adding budget information to the performance report, Nigel Minns - Strategic Director - People Directorate agreed that some financial information could be added to reports. However, some budgets within Children and Families are extremely complicated and it would be impossible to provide an accurate breakdown for a report.

Committee members were reminded that there are three member development sessions booked for them in relation to SEND. The Chair shared the dates and times with committee members and asked that, where possible, they attended all three sessions (or as many as they could.)

12. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 26 April 2023 at 2.00 pm.

This meeting will be held at Shire Hall, Warwick.

The meeting rose at 12:05pm

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Chair