

Children & Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday 26 November 2024

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

Councillor Marian Humphreys (Chair)
Councillor Jerry Roodhouse (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Parminder Singh Birdi
Councillor Barbara Brown
Councillor Piers Daniell
Councillor Justin Kerridge
Councillor Chris Mills
Councillor Penny-Anne O'Donnell
Councillor Jill Simpson-Vince
Councillor Tim Sinclair
Phil Johnson – Co-opted Member

Officers

Johnny Kyriacou, Director of Education
Nigel Minns, Executive Director for Children and Young People
Helen Barnsley, Senior Democratic Services Officer
Zoe Mayhew, Director of Health and Care Commissioning
Sophie Thompson, Intervention Data and Project Management Officer
Sarah Tregaskis, Head of School Services and Post 16 Education
Leah Adams, Head of Early Years & School Effectiveness

Others Present

Councillor Kam Kaur, Portfolio Holder for Education
Councillor Sue Markham, Portfolio Holder for Children and Families

1. General

(1) Apologies

Apologies were received from Michael Cowland (co-opted member).

(2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None.

(3) Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes from the meeting held on the 17th September 2024 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

There were no matters arising.

2. Public Speaking

None

3. Question Time

(1) Questions to Cabinet Portfolio Holders

None

(2) Updates from Cabinet Portfolio Holders and Directors

Councillor Sue Markham, Portfolio Holder for Children and Families provided an update on commissioning activity after a request from Councillor Sinclair. It was confirmed that short breaks and respite has now gone out to tender; Other projects will be put out for tender in April 2025 and updates will be provided to the committee when available and appropriate

In relation to Families First for Children's Pathfinder, it was confirmed that it is an initiative aimed at transferring the way support is provided to children and families. It brings together key services to address challenges before they escalate and is tailored to the unique needs for each family to avoid crisis. Central to the Pathfinder approach is the focus on strengthening family resilience and ensuring children's voices, and lived experiences are at the heart of any decision making. The approach will foster trust among everyone.

The Pathfinder also promotes integrated working amongst professionals across health, education, social care, police and community organisations by sharing information, expertise and resources, the programme creates a holistic understanding of each family's needs. While sharing responsibility for the decision making..

Councillor Markham then provided an update in relation to the Warwickshire Safeguarding Children's partnership which is fully embedded alongside family services, police and health services. Teams will be based in localities based on the five districts in borough areas with a real focus on delivering support in the communities, and this change will go live from the 2nd of January 2025. Events to share and explore the partnership work will be launched in January 2025.

It was confirmed that on the 18th November 2024, the Government announced their intentions about children's social care reform in a document called keeping Children Safe, helping families thrive. This is being closely monitored by officers to see what the next step will be; the committee will be kept updated.

The Chair thanked Councillor Markham, adding that it is encouraging to see that there is a

team in place to support children and their families. Thank you for such a comprehensive report.

Councillor Kam Kaur, Portfolio Holder for Education gave an update to the committee in relation to the new Education Programme which went live in June 2024 and replaced the previous SEND inclusion and change programme. It now includes eleven projects that are at various stages of development.

It was confirmed that the resource provision project focuses on increasing the number of specialist resource provisions across the county. The committee noted that there are now sixty new places in the north, south and central Warwickshire and 5 inclusion mentors to offer support to staff and children. The project is on target in all areas for delivery.

It was noted that the project is trialling a framework to increase collaboration and peer-to-peer support between local schools to increase teaching and knowledge to meet the needs of children with send. It is currently focused on the areas of rugby Bedworth and Stratford and forty schools have been recruited to participate in the trail.

In relation to digital infrastructure, Councillor Kaur confirmed that there has been an enhancement to the case management system to improve the education business model.

In relation to early years performance and the new entitlements, the committee was pleased to note that Warwickshire continues to perform slightly above national average with 90% of places now filled. In addition, the admissions team has worked extremely hard to avoid late applications; targeting vulnerable families and 96% applications are now completed on line.

The education team has been developing a new model to reduce exclusions. At a meeting last week, it was confirmed that a new targeted approach will be in place from January 2025.

4. Corporate Parenting Panel Update

Councillor Sue Markham, Portfolio Holder for Children and Families provided an update to the committee on the work of the Corporate Parenting Panel and confirmed that a full report had been made available in the document pack for this meeting and includes the Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum & Voice, Influence and Change Team Update report that was presented at the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel on the 18th November 2024.

In relation to the Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers football team, the committee was pleased to note that the team now has forty players and that the team keeps picking up trophies and soon, may need another pitch!

In relation to the Brother's and Sister's strategy, it was confirmed that the video they created won an award and that Warwickshire is now being asked to share this with other local authorities.

Councillor Markham recommended that members, if they get the opportunity, go and see the Albany Theatre performance "Walk in Our Shoes"; a performance about children in care and their journeys, showing resilience and determination. It is incredibly moving and thought provoking.

It was confirmed that the stability of children in care performance has shown significant reduction which was noted as positive. Regarding the performance of the virtual school, it was confirmed that overall performance remained stable. There has been a rise in the attainment of children in care across the board and it was noted that Warwickshire children in care performed higher than the national average.

5. Quarter 2 Integrated Performance Report

Johnny Kyriacou, Director of Education presented the report to the committee and confirmed that from the Council Delivery Plan's 59 activities, ten are relevant to this committee. It was confirmed that 50% of the ten are currently on track, 30% are currently showing at risk and 20% are complete.

The following points from the report were highlighted to the committee –

The new multi-agency safe guarding groups are now live. Agenda setting is well underway to ensure that the right people are in the right place and information is shared with the right people

There has been notable progress in the five-year plan for capital investment. There is a robust plan in place which maps out how the council will meet the needs of children and young people.

The committee noted that 85% of key business measures are on track (out of 14). It was confirmed that the uptake of early education and childcare entitlements currently at around 87%. It's a consistently strong area of focus for the council.

It was further confirmed that the council has created all the additional class places needed. All additional primary places have been found.

One key setback has been the delay in the opening of the Academy which was due to open and provide alternative provision places for up to sixty young people. It was confirmed that this was a Department for Education project so, although the places are needed, it is currently out of the council's hands.

A further set back in terms of performance has been the percentage of education, health and care plans (EHCP) being completed within 20 weeks. Currently only 22% are being completed within 20 weeks. It was confirmed that 1971 requests for EHCP have been received this year, compared to 1418 last year, an increase of just over 500 around 39%. The highest number of requests was received in July 2024 at 231.

Following a question from Councillor Penny-Anne O'Donnell, it was confirmed that there has been a huge improvement in the performance relating to EHCP annual reviews; currently at 85% completed on time. There is now a specific team in place, and it is having a great impact.

An update in relation to EHCP planned conversions confirmed that while the process could still be frustrating, the team is making good progress. Performance is being measured month to month due to the high demand. The team is working hard against a background of staff shortages. It was confirmed that the headlines in the performance report don't show that there

is no detriment to children. EHCP funding is always back dated so schools can start the provision knowing that they will receive all the funding.

Following a question from Councillor Jerry Roodhouse, Councillor Kam Kaur, Portfolio Holder for Education, stated that sometimes, too much information could be overkill. It is important to note that every officer within the team is doing what they can and working hard. It was noted that everything heard today is linked to the council plan; but if the committee would like deeper information in relation to the strategic view then that is a different road map, but one that can be designed in time.

Following a further question about whether resources currently match the demand, it was confirmed that there are many different stories from children that could be shared from early years until 25 years old. Information that is more targeted and more specific could be presented to the committee, showing a transformation journey.

Following a query from Councillor Justin Kerridge in relation to alternative provision, it was agreed that a member development session on this subject could be arranged. Johnny Kyriacou, Director of Education confirmed that alternative provision is a high priority for us. There has been a spike in exclusions from primary schools and it is an area that is costing the council a lot of money.

It was further noted that the schools in Warwickshire are facing challenging times with children with complex needs and the council is working on bringing everyone together – it is a fragmented system at the moment.

Councillor Tim Sinclair questioned the percentage of Warwickshire County Council Children Homes places that are currently occupied; the performance report shows that it is on track, yet behind target. Nigel Minns, Executive Director for Children and Young People confirmed that the number of children in Warwickshire owned homes is quite low at the moment which can skew the figures. There are children due to be placed in homes tomorrow so the number will change again.

Recommendation

That the Children and Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee (the Committee) considers and comments on Quarter 2 2024/25 organisational progress against the Council Delivery Plan, performance, management of finances and risk in relation to those areas within its remit.

6. School Attendance in Warwickshire

Sarah Tregaskis, Head of School Services and Post 16 Education presented the report to the committee, providing an update on school attendance across Warwickshire; since the Pandemic, there has been a focus on attendance nationally and locally. The committee noted that there has been a change in need and experiences that children bring to school.

It was confirmed that national rates post covid were concerning but there is now an increase in school attendance both nationally and within Warwickshire. It is recognised that there is not

one size fits all in relation to school attendance and officers are working to understand the barriers to attendance and identify the most appropriate support for each family.

The key messages from the Department for Education's statutory guidance are that improving school attendance is everyone's business and improving attendance should be built on existing early intervention support. Children transitioning between schools is another area of focus.

Absence rates are showing trends for particular groups, both nationally and in Warwickshire; Year 11. This cohort were in Year 6 during covid and were transitioning from primary to secondary; and their Year 7 was also severely impacted by the pandemic; up until Year 8.

It was noted by the committee that evidence suggest that fining parents doesn't reduce absenteeism; it won't change the behaviour. Officers need to work to understand the absenteeism. However, it was noted that fining does have a place – e.g. unauthorised leave of absence (holidays). Holidays are a parental choice, so some penalty notices are produced. The committee was asked to note that one factor for parents taking children out of school for holidays is clearly the economic climate at the moment and the fact it can be cheaper to go on holiday outside traditional school holidays.

The following points from the report were also highlighted to the committee –

- There has been an increase in applications for home education. 316 referrals for elective home education since September. This is a national trend
- The Children's Wellbeing Bill is a proposal for a national register of children out of school which will improve visibility for all agencies involved.

Following a question from Councillor Piers Daniell, it was confirmed that an annual report in relation to unauthorised absence and the number of children known to the council could be brought to the committee. The data can be broken into age group with the reason for elective home education. Families electing for home education are all contacting to ensure they understand what is required of them and what support is available to them.

It was then confirmed that there has been a national debate for a long time in relation to school holidays. Local authorities set term dates, but academies don't have to comply with those dates. What holiday companies charge is out of the council's control. Local authorities tend to try and work together on holiday dates because some families may have one child in primary school in one area, and a second child in a different area.

Councillor Tim Sinclair noted that some home educating families are doing fantastic jobs. Sarah Tregaskis confirmed that as part of statutory duties the team will make annual visits to all home educating families. Some families will refuse the annual visit and there are no national guidelines on this. Warwickshire teams do work to build strong relationships with the families. An offer a report covering home educating families and the work done by the team was made.

There was a discussion in relation to the data available to the team and it was confirmed that currently, data is lagged by two terms. The comparable data through the school portal is

accessible three times a year. It was confirmed that since September 2024, officers have been able to access data that is just two weeks lagged. The school's portal (WOND) can provide information on how schools are performing, and the schools can see this. The figures are moving in the right direction. Schools can view statistical neighbours and geographical neighbours. Good practice is regularly shared and is blended into the approach across Warwickshire.

There is an attendance charter being used in Sheffield and Warwickshire is currently exploring this as an option. All agencies involved with a charter would pledge three things that they would do to support families. Sheffield's charter included a pledge of support from the housing team.

Resolved

That the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers and comments on:

1. the changes taking place in Warwickshire to support school attendance and those opting for elective home education; and
2. the latest data published by the Department for Education (DfE), in relation to attendance and the wider education landscape

7. School Outcomes Report – Early Headlines including Virtual Schools

Leah Adams, Head of Early Years & School Effectiveness presented the report to the committee and confirmed that today's report is a preliminary report; and extensive report is due to be presented to the committee at the meeting in April 2025.

The committee noted that work is continuing in relation to the levels of engagement across the county. The team currently works effectively with thirty-three academies across Warwickshire. It was noted that seven academies have 100% of their schools in Warwickshire; and all but one are secondary schools.

It was confirmed that from the 1st September 2024, the overall effectiveness grade was removed and that meant that some schools in the county went without an OFSTED inspection. This has led to the team reporting on a new measure; that is looking at the proportions of schools who have not received a sub-judgement and then tracking the schools who are under performing in relation to school outcomes. This is a very comprehensive way of reporting to the committee how all the schools are doing.

In relation to section three of the report, it was noted that work on the school effectiveness strategy has been paused because of changes that are due in respect of OFSTED and potential changes within the Department for Education. The committee was pleased to note that although work on the strategy has been paused, the team is still working closely with stakeholders and academies to build and maintain close relationships.

In relation to the School Approach Team, Leah Adams confirmed that work is underway to move away from responding to a crisis; to trying to get to know the schools earlier, before any

concerns are raised and therefore preventing crisis. The team is working to join up with other agencies to get a better understanding of how the school works before they need extra support with attainment. One thing that, as a local authority, council officers can do, is provide data and information that schools can use to improve performance.

In relation to section four of the report, it was confirmed that most of the Early Years settings in Warwickshire have been rated Good or Outstanding by OFSTED. There is a wide range of diversity across the settings, and some significant challenges for our quality standards and safeguarding team to ensure that all children are being reached so this is positive news to report. In addition, it was noted that there are early indications for improvement because of the positive work being done in connection with early intervention for speech and language that will help to close attainment gaps.

In relation to exclusions, alternative provision and severe absenteeism, it was noted that the team has moved into a model of working that is at a more local district and borough level. This provides clearer data intelligence for the team to be able to work with; and allows smoother interactions with difficult or challenging conversations. The team has two meetings to enable this; one is purely about the data and identifying areas that need to be address and then the second meeting will be a direct feed at a more local level to see the right people about specific, local issues.

In relation to the Virtual School, it was confirmed that the outcomes were positive this year and there is a lot of work underway to further improve relationships and get teams working even closer together. This will result in making services more stable, offering a more stable placement for a child.

Councillor Penny-Anne O'Donnell thanked the officers for their report and commented that it had been good to see the non-silo approach to education. Councillor O'Donnell asked what success would look like for Warwickshire and it was confirmed that it will be reflected in collaboration with other agencies, and creating positive outcomes to help close the gap. There are plans for lessons learnt activities; with the lived experiences of children and families at the heart of it.

Following a question from Councillor Jill Simpson-Vince in relation to key stage 2 results, it was noted by the committee that there are no concerns about the quality of the schools in certain areas; however, it was further noted that there are some complex issues involved in areas in Rugby. Officers are working very closely with colleagues linked to SEND and inclusion; and partnership meetings are being used as an area to focus on this. Members were invited to attend partnership meetings if they felt they would be helpful, and it was agreed that members would appreciate being part of some meetings.

It was confirmed that the school effectiveness offer has allowed officers to provide a nuance relationship across all schools. Teachers can see what support is available and which teams will rally around them; this will enhance already positive relationships.

It is clearer for academies; where leaders have been very welcoming in the provision of the data available to them and the support they get. The best way forward for the children in the strength of the relationships we are creating.

Councillor Tim Sinclair asked a question in relation to the potential new gradings for OFSTED inspections. It was confirmed that designs for a 'report card' are currently being investigated and that there may be as many as ten sub-judgements. There is also a lot of research in to the definition of vulnerable learners to focus on how inclusive school settings are going to be for these learners.

The committee noted that there is a lot still to confirm, but it will be in place by September 2025. Training and information for members will be provided nearer the time.

The Chair thanked all the officers involved for the report stating it had been fantastic to see such enthusiasm across the teams and from the members.

Recommendation

That the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider and comment on the performance of primary age children in Warwickshire's state-funded schools in statutory national tests.

8. Work Programme and items on the Forward Plan

It was agreed that a report covering Speech and language therapists (SALT) assessments & EHCP assessments will be added to the work programme

The Committee noted and agreed the updated work programme and items on the Forward Plan relevant to the remit of the Committee.

9. Any Other Business

The Chair thanked everyone who had taken part today – it has been a really positive, engaging meeting.

10. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on the 25th February 2025 at 10am.

The meeting will be held in Committee Room 2, Shire Hall, Warwick

The meeting rose at 12:35

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Chair