

# Children & Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday 25 February 2025

## Minutes

### Attendance

#### Committee Members

Councillor Marian Humphreys (Chair)  
Councillor Jerry Roodhouse (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor Barbara Brown  
Councillor Piers Daniell  
Councillor Justin Kerridge  
Councillor Chris Mills  
Councillor Jill Simpson-Vince  
Councillor Tim Sinclair

#### Officers

Helen Barnsley, Senior Democratic Services Officer  
John Coleman, Director of Children and Families  
Rachel Jackson, Head of Education Strategy and Transformation  
Johnny Kyriacou, Director of Education  
Zoe Mayhew, Director of Health and Care Commissioning

#### Others Present

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

Andy Mitchell – Local Democracy Reporter

### 1. General

#### (1) Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Penny-Anne O'Donnell.

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

None

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

It was noted that there had been an amendment to the attendance at the meeting held on the

26<sup>th</sup> November 2024 to include Phil Johnson – co-optee member of the committee.

The minutes were then agreed as a true and accurate record. There were no matters arising.

## 2. Public Speaking

- 1) Mr Gurpreet Dulay attended the committee to speak to members, confirming that he had last attended 8 months ago.

Mr Dulay stated that he still had concerns in relation to a number of stage two complaints that he feels shows the council has a culture of failure, not a culture of learning. He stated he felt compelled to come to speak to the committee again.

Mr Dulay stated that there had been a failure on the part of a social worker and statutory visits relating to visiting a parent in their own home. He added that to not complete a home visit where they would see him and his child together was not acceptable; especially given that they then have a duty to complete a report.

He finished stating that the situation is a culture of failure. It is unacceptable.

Nic Vine, Head of Legal and Governance & Deputy Monitoring Officer confirmed that Mr Dulay's concerns have been heard but that the correct place for them is through the complaints process.

The Chair thanked Mr Dulay for attending and advised him to follow the route highlighted and the correct procedure has been advised by the legal team.

Councillor Justin Kerridge raised concerns in relation to the public speaker; acknowledging that this may not be the appropriate place to raise concerns, but the speaker's view of the council is not one that he recognises. John Coleman, Director of Children and Families confirmed that he will be following up on all the concerns raised and that officers have been working with him for some time. It was agreed that a briefing would be provided to members of the committee.

- 2) The Chair confirmed that the committee has received questions from a member of the public in relation to the procurement of short breaks and respite for children with disabilities.

As the procurement has yet to conclude, and bidders have not yet been contacted regarding the result it was confirmed that it would be inappropriate to raise and/or answer the questions in a public forum given that to do so could impact on the process.

It was noted that the procurement activity will conclude shortly, and officers and the Portfolio Holder will then be able to respond to the member of the public. Officers are preparing a response, and it will be sent as soon as practicable following award of the contract.

### 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 & Families, provided the following updates to the committee –

- 1) Following the July Cabinet meeting, the West Midlands regional framework for fostering is progressing well. Phase one went live in December 2024.
- 2) In relation to the redesign of CAHMS, it was confirmed that things are progressing well and officers are working closely with key stakeholders.
- 3) Councillor Markham reminded the committee of The Family Information Service (FIS), and how it is important for members to understand what the team does behind the scenes. FIS works not only with children in care, but also works closely with their families. The service signposts families to services that support the council's statutory duty. There is accessible information for all parents/carers.

It was confirmed that there is an online information officer who supports work and investment in the webpages to ensure accurate and up to date information. There has been a recent investment in text to speak reading and translate information to allow residents whose first language isn't English.

The committee noted that there is a FIS weekly e-letter with 8826 subscribers, Councillor Markham confirmed that she receives the newsletter, and it is worth reading. It was recommended that members of this committee sign up.

There is also a FIS helpline available from Monday to Friday, (am to 5pm that can be accessed via email or freephone. The service takes up to 60 requests a day. In addition to people calling in for self-referrals, police, children's social care and schools have all reached out to this service.

It was confirmed that Jo Rolls, service manager for FIS is due to retire. Councillor Markham wished it to be noted that thanks go out to her for all that she has done.

Councillor Jill Simpson-Vince thanked Councillor Markham, adding that it sounds like FIS is an amazing service and that it is really making a difference. Following a question from Councillor Simpson-Vince in relation to follow up calls to see how families are doing after they have reached out, as it is a very brave thing to do, to ask for help; it was confirmed that if the issue is solved, advice given etc during the initial contact, then families are always told that they can call again if needed. If the issue isn't solved in the first instance then follow up are always carried out.

Councillor Justin Kerridge confirmed that he has used the service, as a councillor and

personally. He added that they have always been fantastic and always gone the extra mile.

Councillor Markham thanked Councillor for his comments, adding that it is nice to hear from someone who has used the service.

Councillor Kam Kaur, Portfolio Holder for Education provided the following updates for the committee.

- 1) In relation to Education strategy and transformation, it was confirmed that there are currently 10 live projects; and that a positive impact is starting to emerge. Councillor Kaur thanked all the schools that have come forward. There was an initial target to work with 231 schools and this has now been exceeded.
- 2) The committee noted that there has been a reduction in children attending special schools. This was one main reason for resource provision and the take up of this from mainstream schools.
- 3) There has been superb engagement across the board with early years and school effectiveness. The committee were pleased to hear that this project is building momentum.
- 4) Regarding admissions, planning for secondary offer day is under way. Councillor Kaur expressed her gratitude to all schools for their cooperation in advance in order to meet the anticipated demand. There were only 10 late applications this year, in previous years this has been between 200-300.

Councillor Tim Sinclair asked if the committee could have a deep dive into resource provision and add it to a future work programme; asking if there could be work to look into the experience of schools, parents and children that have been involved – perhaps a year on. Councillor Kaur added that it could be possible to invite a headteacher to come and talk to the committee. Phil Johnson, co-opted member of the committee added that the headteacher of his academy would gladly attend and agreed to share contact details.

#### **4. Corporate Parenting Panel Update**

Councillor Sue Markham, Portfolio Holder for Children & Families provided an update on the work of the Corporate Parenting Panel. The highlights included –

- 1) All Warwickshire owned children's homes are Ofsted registered. Cherry Tree has been rated good in all areas. Acorn lodge n Leamington Spa was also rated good in all areas.
- 2) Regarding the stability of children in care over the last 12 months, the committee was pleased to note that there has been a fantastic improvement.
  - For 2024 as of 31/12/24, there were 744 Children in Care – including Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children.
  - 2 or more placement moves in 12 months reduced by 1/3

- 2 or more Social Worker changes dropped from 300 to 135
  - Mid-Year school moves dropped from 410 to 254
- 3) It was noted that 90% of Children in Care at the 31.12.24 had had a completed health assessment in the previous 12 months
  - 4) There was one really good news story reported to the committee. One of the Children in Care young footballers has been selected for the Great Britain American Football team.

## 5. Quarter 3 Integrated Performance Report 2024/25

John Coleman, Director of Children and Families presented the report to the committee stated that there had not been much movement since the last quarter but over the year, there has been continued improvement and notable positive performances across the board.

Notable highlights from the report included -

- Attendance of children with ECH attending mainstream school is now at 37% highest since 2018; this is a very significant factor
- Really positive that the Warwickshire children's homes are open and have children placed. The final certificate was received yesterday for Oak House so that can now start to progress.
- In terms of challenges; the provision at Teleton Academy (an alternative provision academy); we have no control over things at the moment and we have raised this multiple times with the Department for Education to ask what they are doing about the situation.
- EHCP completed in 20 weeks – progress is happening and work in ongoing for how it can be improved.
- The budget – education service is slightly underspent at this point. Overspend in Children and Families is at 7.2%; that's predominately the cost of residential care and is less than it was this time last year. Having our own homes will contribute to the overspend reducing.

Johnny Kyriacou, Director of Education echo how pleased we are with the overall positive performance across the county and how much we are doing.

Following the comments in relation to the Teleton Academy; this alternative provision is much needed in Warwickshire and at this point has been delayed for many years. Unfortunately, at this point we can't see when it might happen. AS previously mentioned, it is outside our control, it is down to the Department for Education. We are now looking at a different approach which is to open up Coleshill Pod as an alternative local provision, with an outreach service. We would then look to extend this around the county.

Regarding the EHCP indicators, although we aren't meeting the deadlines of 20 weeks, no child will be disadvantaged as a result of this as the funding is backdated and the support is in place

while that happens. The team will be increasing with additional staff and a team redesign. We will also be linking in with partners.

The committee noted that the admissions service continues to perform strongly after a challenging period a few years ago. High standards are now business as usual. This is very welcome news.

Councillor Tim Sinclair commented on the good performance information and thanked officers for their continued hard work. Councillor Sinclair raised one question in relation to the performance figures for the EHCP's completed in 20 weeks. The information shows steady improvement from 16%, 22% and then 30%; but the report shows that overall, it is "declining"? The Chair responded that although service performance is improving there has also been a continual increase in the number of referrals coming in and that is why the target hasn't been achieved. Johnny Kyriacou added that the backlog has been a concern but it needs to be included in the data to give the full story. Following a second question, it was agreed that a further report looking in more detail to the process would be beneficial and a deep dive report would be added to the future work programme.

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse asked a question in relation to the residential care homes and the reduced spend, asking if the potential increase in energy costs etc had been taken into account. Will savings continue in view of this? John Coleman confirmed that savings may be unachievable in this financial year, but savings would be made.

The Chair thanked officers for the report adding that it is important everything is joined up and presented together in the report to understand that it isn't always standalone issues.

## **Resolved**

That the Committee considers and comments on Quarter 3 2024/25 organisational progress against the Council Delivery Plan, performance, management of finances and risk.

## **6. Warwickshire Education Strategy Performance Update**

Rachel Jackson, Head of Education Strategy and Transformation presented the report to the committee and confirmed that it would be an update on the 2024 -2029 strategy where members saw a draft version.

It was confirmed that the draft version had been seen by Cabinet in April 2024 and Council in July 2024. In October 2024 the Education Conference was launched. Officers are now looking for feedback on the report and how it was presented, what it includes and how it was received.

The priorities from the strategy were confirmed as follows –

- 1) Priority one: Best Start - To secure the very best start for all children in the county.
- 2) Priority Two: SEND and Inclusion - To encourage ambition, create opportunity, and support all learners to be the best they can be.
- 3) Priority Three: Sufficiency and Admissions - To ensure that Early Years, school and post 16 places are provided in the right place at the right time.

- 4) Priority Four: Strong System - To operate as strong systems leader across the county to strengthen, influence and develop high quality, inclusive education provision that is accessible to all.

It was confirmed that the strategy is bolstered by more focused, bespoke strategies. The sufficiency strategy was approved last year, the SEND strategy was approved in December 24, the early years integrated plan was approved at The Health and Wellbeing Board in September 24 and the outdoor education strategy was approved in 2022 but it continues to be developed and improved.

It was noted that a 5<sup>th</sup> Strategy regarding school effectiveness had been due to be launched last year but been paused due to the changes in OFSTED ratings; it is now expected in October 2025.

Following a question from Councillor Tim Sinclair, it was confirmed that the delivery plan is aligned to key business measure as well as our own local indicators. Everything within the document is aligned to a measure.

Councillor Justin Kerridge thanked the team for the wonderful things that they are achieving and went on to ask if children receive support in order to prevent missing school days. It was recognised that the landscape for children and young people, and their mental health has changed over recent years. It was confirmed that there is training, and support provided to teachers to help children attend schools.

Phil Johnson, co-opted member of the committee raised concerns that not every child entitled too is accessing free school meals. John Coleman, Director of Children and Families added that officers share that frustration but that there is now a process in place to contact parents whose children are eligible and helping with the application. This will be done through the Family Information Service (FIS) team. We are proactive with these parents.

## **Resolved**

That the Children & Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee notes the progress of the implementation of the Warwickshire Education Strategy 2024 – 2029 and its associated Delivery Plan.

## **7. Work Programme and items on the Forward Plan**

The work programme was discussed, and it was acknowledged that not all current members may be on committee after the election on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025.

However, it was agreed that it was important that topics including resource provision, Continuing Health Care, EHCP processes and the CAHMS redesign (RISE) should remain on the work programme for the June 2025 meeting and beyond so that they are not lost.

It was confirmed that due to the Pre-Election Period, which starts on the 21<sup>st</sup> March 2025, the scheduled meeting for the 8<sup>th</sup> April 2025 has been cancelled.

## **8. Any Other Business**

## 9. Date of Next Meeting

The meeting rose at 11:31

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Chair