

# Children & Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday 20 July 2021

## Minutes

### Attendance

#### Committee Members

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor Jo Barker  
Councillor Brett Beetham  
Councillor Brian Hammersley  
Councillor Marian Humphreys  
Councillor Jill Simpson-Vince

#### Officers

Helen Barnsley, Democratic Services Officer  
John Coleman, Assistant Director - Children and Families  
Sally Nash, Service Manager (Youth Justice)  
Nichola Vine (Strategy and Commissioning Manager, Legal and Democratic)

### 1. General

#### (1) Apologies

Apologies were received from:

Councillor Yousef Dahmash  
Councillor Barbara Brown  
Councillor Pete Gilbert  
Councillor Justin Kerridge  
Mr John McRoberts

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

No declarations of pecuniary or non-pecuniary interest were made.

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

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 February 2021 were agreed as an accurate record.

proactive parents have fallen behind on their education. It has been found necessary to realign resources to secure specialist support for these young people.

Whilst case-loads through courts have dropped owing to the Pandemic case loads generally have remained static.

Councillor Jill Simpson-Vince asked about out of court disposals. These were first time appearances but is it a case of “three strikes and you’re in court”? How many of the first offenders are likely to be seen again?

In response the committee was informed that out of court disposal is a multi-agency approach. Decisions regarding when a young person should be required to attend court rest with the police. With Youth Conditional Cautions if a young person does not comply then they will be required to attend court. It was stressed that out of court disposals are a serious sanction. It is not a case of young people “getting away with it” but the aim of the legislation is to keep children out of the court system. Sometimes children do come back into the system, but it remains preferable to manage them away from the courts if possible.

Councillor Marian Humphries welcomed that children are put first adding that it is important to identify and address the reasons behind a child’s behaviour. In response Sally Nash reminded members that these young people are children first and offenders second. There are no excuses for bad behaviour, but it should be recognised that they are children. School, she added, teach discipline but if children are not in school they are not benefitting from this.

Councillor Jo Barker asked if entry level offenders are offending at a higher level. In response the committee was informed that there have been cases of children committing high level offences as their first offence. One child has recently been sentenced to five years imprisonment for their first offence. The Pandemic has seen a number of low level and high-level offences. There has been a gap in mid-range offences, but these are possibly down to policing decisions.

Sally Nash was asked about bespoke parenting initiatives. The committee was informed that recognising that the parents of young offenders have specific needs the youth justice Service has been running a pilot project around this. Bespoke remand accommodation is operated in Warwickshire. This is a fostering service for children awaiting remand.

Councillor Brett Beetham asked for information about re-offending rates. The committee was informed that information on these is two to three years old and is of limited use. Software companies are developing products that will provide real time information. The Youth Justice Service has yet to take this forward having been delayed by the Pandemic. For it to work effectively the police will have to agree to undertaking more real time reporting. Discussions will be needed with the Chief Constable as in other areas of the country this has been a challenge.

Councillor Beetham also enquired about engagement with education. He was informed that in the Youth Justice Service has recognised the value in employing a specialist whose principal focus will be education and the people involved in its delivery. A job description has yet to be drafted.

Councillor Brian Hammersley recognised that children who are not in school become bored and this can lead to them getting into trouble. He asked what local authorities are doing to ensure that children are kept occupied. In reply Sally Nash stated that this is known as “diversion”. The County

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse suggested that scrutiny should have a closer alignment to data and performance.

Resolved:

That the Committee notes the findings of the independent review into Overview and Scrutiny.

## **6. Year End Council Plan 2020-2025 Quarterly Progress Report (April 2020 to March 2021)**

John Coleman explained that the Council is seeking to develop a one data set approach which will be more accessible to people.

A series of highlights were identified.

1. Early Help. The Pandemic has led to a 40% increase in early help provision. More family support workers have needed to be recruited. The main focus has been on mental health support, education and reintegration.
2. An increase in the number of children in care. There has been a significant increase in the number of non-accompanied child asylum seekers in Warwickshire.
3. Disadvantaged children. It is recognised that there is more work to be undertaken with disadvantaged children who are under-achieving. A virtual head teacher role is to be created to support children who are in need. The focus will be on support for the most disadvantaged.

Some pressure areas were highlighted.

1. Children in care continue to provide pressure. There is a need to progress permanency plans.
2. Mental Health issues. Work is continuing with the Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership Trust although this slowed during the Pandemic.

Councillor Brian Hammersley sought assurance that the Council has sufficient capacity to manage its children in care portfolio. John Coleman stated that the Council does have capacity. The biggest issue is with placements. The Family Therapy Team helps to provide stability in placements. There remains a significant pressure for foster carers. The cost of placements has increased during the Pandemic to £3200 per week for a placement in a residential home. To assist in addressing this the Council is investing in the construction of three care homes in addition to the one that is close to completion in Stratford-upon-Avon.

Councillor Jeff Morgan stated that the Council has been doing a good job in difficult circumstances. There remain concerns over CAMHS. The Council is keen to increase the number of domestic placements and it will be a major step forward when the new children's home in Stratford is opened.

The Council is working in partnership with Kent County Council to assist with the accommodation of unaccompanied child asylum seekers. The Council does get financial support with this. It is a topical issue with the government recently announcing additional resources for it. Support is extending beyond that for Syrian refugees to those from other countries such as Afghanistan.

### **9. Minutes Containing Confidential or Exempt Information**

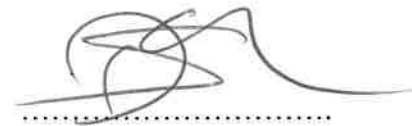
Resolved:

That members of the public be excluded from the meeting for the items mentioned below on the grounds that their presence would involve the disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

### **10. Restricted Minutes from the previous meeting (23.02.2021)**

The restricted minutes of the meeting held on 23 February 2021 were agreed as an accurate record.

The meeting rose at 11.37

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Chair