

Children & Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday 26 April 2023

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

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

Officers

Helen Barnsley, Senior Democratic Services Officer
John Coleman, Assistant Director - Children and Families
Laura Greenacre, Delivery Lead Education Traded Services Development
Nigel Minns, Strategic Director for People
Nici Scott-Moylan - Team Lead Attendance Service
Sarah Tregaskis, Service Manager - Education Service Delivery

Others Present

Councillor Kam Kaur, Portfolio Holder for Education

1. General

(1) Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Jo Barker, Councillor Barbara Brown and Councillor Marian Humphries.

Apologies were also received from Councillor Jeff Morgan, Portfolio Holder for Children & Families.

(2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None.

(3) Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes from the meeting held on the 14th of February 2023 were agreed as a true and accurate record. There were no matters arising.

2. Public Speaking

There was no public speaking.

3. Question Time

(1) Questions to Cabinet Portfolio Holders

There were no questions to the Portfolio Holders.

(2) Updates from Cabinet Portfolio Holders and Assistant Directors

Councillor Kam Kaur, Portfolio Holder for Education provided an overview to the Committee in relation to Primary School Places. On the 17th of April 2023, offer letters were sent out via electronic letters, with less than 90 sent out via post. It was confirmed that robust planning and support from ICT meant that parents/carers received guidance to accept offers made.

The Committee noted that 500 calls were received on Offer Day with 90% answered – an increase from last year. Following a question in relation to unplaced offers (offers made for a school that was not a preferred choice), it was confirmed that only 1% of offers were unplaced but that every child had a place in a Warwickshire school. It was agreed that Councillor Kaur would send out further information as a briefing note

John Coleman, Assistant Director - Children & Families confirmed that there had been a recent inspection focused on the services for young people aged 16 to 25 years old. The final report is due to be published on the 9th of May and will be shared with the Committee. It was noted that there are no further inspections expected until the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) in 2024.

4. Corporate Parenting Panel Update

Councillor Jeff Morgan (Portfolio Holder for Children & Families) sent his apologies for this meeting so this item will move to the meeting on the 19th of June 2023.

5. Quarter 3 Integrated Performance Report Quarter 2 2022/23

John Coleman, Assistant Director - Children & Families presented the performance report to the Committee who noted that 11 targets were currently on track, with 5 targets not on track.

The following highlights were presented –

- The target for Child Protection is on track.
- Children in Care is also on track. Warwickshire has the lowest number of children entering care in the region. The Committee noted that there is a lot of work in supporting families so that they can safely care for their children.
- The 6-to-8-week health care check remains an area on concern. The performance is not on track
- Warwickshire saw 86 conceptions to under 18s which is a reduction of 10 from 2020. This is slightly above the National average. The Committee noted that the data is not the most up to date but were reassured that officers were working on being in a position to present more up to date information.
- The Committee was happy to note that performance in relation to NEETs was continuing to improve.

In relation to education, Nigel Minns, Strategic Director People Directorate confirmed that while performance in this area is not on track, members of the Committee have been made aware of the issues and are aware of the improvement plan that is in place. It was confirmed that recent data shows a significant improvement in this area. In particular, in relation to the issues of summer 2022 and school placements, the new system is now working well and is having a positive effect.

Following a question from Councillor Brett Beetham, it was confirmed that there had been an overspend of the budget within the Children and Families Service area. Officers are currently reviewing the data but believe that the main area of the overspend is in relation to staffing and agency costs and the cost of residential care. The Committee noted that these costs were not in relation to the number of children in care but in the cost of each placement. It was agreed that there will be a more detailed report at a future meeting.

John Coleman Assistant Director - Children & Families confirmed that opening of council owned children's homes will reduce costs for the service. In addition, the homes will provide knowledge and reassurance that good quality care is being provided and at a reduced cost to the Council. There will also be a reduction in the use of external foster placements which will also result in savings to the council.

It was confirmed that there are more resources in place for Early Help services with a high number of families receiving support. Officers are determined to focus on this area of work and are aiming for continuous improvement. It was noted that there is a waiting list for early help support, but members were reassured that families are kept regularly updated with progress and will receive some level of support every week.

Following a question from Councillor Justin Kerridge, Nigel Minns confirmed, in relation to the 6-to-8-week health checks and the use of additional staff that progress was being made but it was down to the banding of NHS staff in developing a wider workforce. Members learnt that local authorities can only record a health check visit as complete by qualified health visitors. Commissioning arrangements are currently being reviewed and an update will be provided to the committee.

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse asked for further information in relation to NEETs and the recent Cabinet discussion around apprenticeships. Sarah Tregaskis Service Manager - Education Services Trading, Development and Delivery was able to confirm that officers from the leaving care team are supporting all young people into positive destinations and that this does include NEETs. Councillor Kam Kaur, Portfolio Holder for Education confirmed that the figures for Warwickshire County Council relating to NEETs are better than the National average and that she would send the information to elected members via email. It was agreed that the promotion of the work being done by officers could be better and that this is an area that officers will continue to look to improve in.

Councillor Brett Beetham asked for clarification of the work being done in relation to SEND education needs assessments. Nigel Minns was able to confirm that the figures are improving and continue to be on track / The biggest challenge to officers is the increase in demand in this area but that there has recently been some additional funding made available. The Committee noted that regular updates on this matter will be brought to the meetings and that officers understand the importance of it.

In relation to a question about the new youth centre proposed in Bedworth and the risks now associated with it, the Committee learnt that major defects had been discovered on site that had not been evident during the initial surveys. The commitment to open a youth centre in the area was still very much with officers, but it must be the right building. The council's property service team is undertaking surveys at the moments and officers will report back once they have been completed.

Councillor Jill Simpson-Vince asked officers for reassurance in relation to school places, and that spaces were being offered in suitable and local schools. It was confirmed that the closest school to a family is always a priority and officers do not want to be asking parents/carers to travel long distances. Members were reminded that children who go to school outside the county mean that they are eligible for home to school transport which is an additional cost to the council. It was agreed the information relating to the average travel distance for this cohort of children would be sent through to the Committee.

6. Outdoor Education and Learning Strategy progress report

The report was presented to the Committee by Sarah Tregaski -Service Manager - Education Services Trading, Development and Delivery and Laura Greenacre - Delivery Lead – Education Services Development.

It was confirmed that the strategy was launched in June 2022 and so far has been very well received. It was also confirmed that the budget has been approved from three years.

The following points were highlighted –

- There has been an upward trajectory with engagement with more schools engaging
- There are 92 different organisations subscribed to the newsletter
- Officers are working to identifying good practice and share with colleagues
- 60 professionals attended a recent online training session with very positive feedback. Attendees stated that they feel more confident providing outdoor education in their own available space.

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- Officers have plans in place for the next two academic years with additional plans to identify further spaces that can be used.
- There are three potential schools that are interested in being champions for the strategy.

Following questions from Councillor Pete Gilbert and Councillor Jerry Roodhouse in relation to potential additional providers for the strategy, it was agreed that officers would contact the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme and local commercial providers of outdoor activities. It was noted that officers have been in touch with colleagues at the District and Borough councils to look into how they would work with Warwickshire County Council.

Councillor Pete Gilbert commented that while it was good news that the strategy was in place for an additional year, it should really be a continuous offer from the Council. A commitment from members of the Committee was agreed that they are committed to the outdoor strategy and that the impetus must be maintained.

It was noted that schools can use the webpage to keep up to date with what was on offer across the county. Officers agreed that more could be done to encourage more use of the website as well as doing more to encourage local businesses to come forward to promote their services on the site. Following further discussions in relation to the website, officers agreed to look into the possibility of adding search filters for the type of activities on offer. It was agreed that the addition of filters may make the site more user friendly.

Councillor Jill Simpson-Vince asked for clarification in relation to the measure of success, which is mentioned in the report, asking officers how this was going to be evidenced. It was agreed that future reports would include a clearer presentation of the measure of success.

The officers thanked the Committee for all their comments and feedback stating that it had been very positive for them all.

The Chair agreed with the earlier comment from Councillor Pete Gilbert in relation to the need for the strategy to continue beyond the agreed three years.

7. School Attendance Performance Report - 2021/2022

The report was presented to the Committee by Sarah Tregaskis, Service Manager - Education Services Trading, Development and Delivery and Nici Scott-Moylan - Team Lead Attendance Service.

It was confirmed that the report covered the last academic year up to the 21st July 2022. The data was published by the Department of Education on the 16th March 2023. The Committee noted that since the Covid Pandemic there had been significant disruption to school attendance in Warwickshire, and nationally. It has been identified as a high priority for officers/

It was confirmed that the Attendance Alliance is working with council officers on getting children back into school on a regular basis. The joint approach is focusing on all schools and academies. Members noted that officers are collaborating closely with John Coleman, Assistant

Director - Children & Families and Marina Kitchen, Service Manager for Early Help & Targeted Support Services.

It was noted that the overall school absence rate had increased from 4.7% to 8.1% in Warwickshire. Prior to Covid, performance in this area had always been in line with statistical neighbours and nationally. The current review involves looking at why recovery from covid has been slower in Warwickshire in relation to attendance. Members learnt that North Warwickshire has the highest percentage of non-attendance in Warwickshire, and Warwick District has the lowest percentage.

The Chair commented that there has been a lot of concern about the recovery from covid and that the report highlights this.

Councillor Pete Gilbert commented that questions were raised about some of the decisions made by Warwickshire County Council and the Government in relation to the covid response. The data in the report suggests that members were correct in asking the questions at the time. Councillor Gilbert added that should there be a 'next time,' lessons must be learnt.

The Chair added that the information in the report suggests that those who are most vulnerable have been the worst affected. Sarah Tregaskis responded that there is still a lot of data that needs to be unpacked, and that the data is coming direct from the schools. Nici Scott-Moylan added that moving forward will involve a lot more collaborative working in order to get support to the most vulnerable as soon as possible. County officers are working to maximise a multi-agency approach to improve outcomes for children.

The Chair questioned how much was known at the time; for example, information on which children weren't logging in for lessons, or didn't have IT provisions must have been available. Sarah Tregaskis responded that the data in the report was for the last academic year, when there was still a high number of covid cases. During the primary lockdown, officers were working closely with schools. But it was an unknown period of time and a lot of lessons have been learnt that will be taken forward.

The Committee noted that more up to date information is now available that suggests that there has been an improvement in attendance across Warwickshire. The Department of Education will now provide termly information. The Committee was asked to concentrate on the work that was currently underway, while not losing sight of the historical data.

Councillor Kam Kaur – Portfolio Holder for Education told the Committee that there had been a recent Head Teacher conference with over 100 attendees. Attainment and attendance had been a key focus and it was confirmed that there is a high level of multi-agency work underway to ensure that work keeps going in the right direction. It was also confirmed that there is a current task and finish group at the Council in relation to attainment.

Councillor Brian Hammersley thanked the officers for the details in the report and in particular the absence codes used. Councillor Hammersley raised concerns about the impact of pupils being honest about the reasons for non-attendance. In addition, the issue of holidays, and parents taking children out of school during the school term because they cannot afford to go away during the holidays. Sarah Tregaskis confirmed that children being taken out of school during term time for holidays is a national issues, especially in view of the current cost of living

crisis. Warwickshire County Council works closely with schools and other agencies to address this and there has been an increase in referrals to fine families who do this.

Nici Scott-Moylan responded to the comment in relation to the use of absence codes and confirmed that all schools are legally bound to record morning and afternoon attendance for each pupil. It was confirmed that the coding of the most vulnerable children is a key area of focus. There are many systems in place nowadays for recording attendance. Warwickshire County Council work to offer support and guidance to schools and academies to try and get everyone on the same page.

Following a question from Councillor Jerry Roodhouse in relation to getting further analysis on the data, it was confirmed that officers are currently reviewing it and that the Department for Education have produced a new tool – Wonde – which will allow officers to access live data. Currently, 82% of schools in Warwickshire have signed up and officers are in contact with those who haven't to encourage them to do so. There will be a lot of data available via Wonde that officers will be able to review to gain a better understanding of the issues schools are facing.

Concerns were raised by Councillor Jill Simpson-Vince that some schools are still risk adverse as in if you have any germs, please don't come in. Councillor Simpson-Vince asked if there was any information in relation to this. It was confirmed that with more parents being able to work from home since the pandemic, it was often easier for them to keep children at home if required to, without the need to have to find childcare.

Sarah Tregaskis confirmed that schools received guidance from Public Health in relation to Step A, Norovirus and Chicken Pox and that there was a marked increase in absences after this. It was noted that different academy trusts take different approaches.

To finish, it was confirmed to the Committee that the collaborative approach that officers have in place will be so important moving forward. not just within the council but also with agencies and partners outside the council. It is a different way of working and working together is going to be crucial.

8. Work Programme

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

Councillor Brett Beetham requested a report in relation to child exploitation in Nuneaton and Bedworth following recent coverage in the local news. John Coleman, Assistant Director - Children & Families suggested that a briefing note would be more appropriate in the first instance due to the sensitive nature of the topic and live operations currently underway which the council needs to be sensitive of. It was agreed that a briefing note would be sent to members of the committee.

The agenda for the next meeting of the Committee on the 13th June 2023 has the following items (in addition to the standing items including an update from the Corporate Parenting Panel and the Performance Report) –

- School Admissions Review to include update on transfer offers and in year arrangements

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- Children & Family Centre Updates and Strategic Direction

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 23 May 2023 @ 10am.

The meeting will be held virtually via Microsoft Teams

9. Any Other Business

The Chair encouraged all members of the Committee to attend member development and training sessions that are relevant to the Committee –

- OFSTED - How schools are inspected – 27th April at 2pm
- Overview Session on Education Services – 17th May at 2pm
- Children & Families - a brief overview (including Corporate Parenting) – 7th June at 10am
- Education Services (SEND) – Session 3 – 27th June at 3pm (members were reminded that they do not have to have attend the previous sessions to go to the session in June)

10. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday 13 June 2023 @ 10am

This meeting will be held at Shire Hall, Warwick.

The meeting rose at 15:50


Chair