

Children & Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday 27 February 2024

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

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

Officers

Dr Shade Agboola, Director of Public Health
Helen Barnsley, Senior Democratic Services Officer
John Coleman, Assistant Director - Children and Families
Sarah Cox, Nuneaton Education Strategy Coordinator
Rachel Jackson, Head of Education Strategy and Transformation
Johnny Kyriacou, Assistant Director for Education Services
Nigel Minns, Executive Director for Children and Young People
Sarah Moxon, Performance Analyst
Lou Richardson, Policy Lead
Max Taylor, National Management Trainee
Sarah Tregaskis, Head of School Services and Post 16 Education

1. General

The Chair started the meeting by reading out the following statement –

“Good morning councillors, officers, members of the public. Welcome to today’s meeting of Children and Young Peoples Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the comments that were made at our last meeting which I’m sure you will be aware have resulted in a number of complaints which are currently the subject of an investigation. . It wouldn’t be appropriate for me to make any further comment whilst the investigation is underway, and I am not inviting further comments at this time.

However, I am aware that more information for members of the public about the investigation process can be found on the Council's website in the Democracy section where a page has been added in relation to the investigation in the section relating to Complaints against Councillors.

I would also like to welcome Councillors Parminder Singh Birdi, Piers Daniell and Tim Sinclair who have joined the committee, following the stepping down of Councillors Golby, Hammersley, and Morgan from this Committee."

(1) Apologies

Apologies were received from Michael Cowland, CEO of The Diocese of Coventry MAT.

(2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None.

(3) Minutes of the Previous Meeting

It was agreed that those members of the committee who were not at the meeting held on the 25th January 2024 would not vote on the minutes - (Councillor Penny-Anne O'Donnell who had sent apologies for the meeting and the three new members Councillors Parminder Singh Birdi, Piers Daniell and Tim Sinclair).

A vote was held to approve the minutes as a true and accurate record. Councillor Jerry Roodhouse voted against approving the minutes. The rest of the committee members voted to approve the minutes.

The minutes were approved 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 confirmed, as Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel that there had not been a meeting of the panel since the last scrutiny meeting so there was no update.

Councillor Markham confirmed that she had attended a Loud Mouth session with Councillor Marian Humphries and that it had been very positive. She encouraged all members to attend a session if possible.

Councillor Kam Kaur, Portfolio Holder for Education, confirmed the following –

- the admissions team was preparing for the secondary offer day
- the education sufficiency strategy was almost complete. It would be presented at Cabinet and then full Council.
- the draft education strategy for 2024 – 2029 is being produced with Head Teacher and other providers. It is expected to be ready for presentation at the April meeting of the Cabinet.
- In January 2025, the adult and community learning service was assessed and passed with flying colours. It was noted that this was a great result following the struggles faced by the service during Covid. The service has been accredited for the next three years.

4. Corporate Parenting Panel Update

Councillor Sue Markham, Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel, confirmed that there had been no meeting of the panel since the last Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting so there was no update.

The next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel was confirmed for the 25th March 2024.

5. Quarter 3 Integrated Performance Report

Johnny Kyriacou, Director of Education presented the quarterly performance updates to the Committee, including an overview of the performance for quarter 3 – April to December 2023.

The Committee noted that all the information was available in the report and was presented as part of the full report to cabinet on 15th February 2024. It was noted that 51% of the Key Business Measures relevant to the committee are on track.

The following points were highlighted –

- There has been an increase in the demand on services due to the cost-of-living crisis and the increase in mental health issues. It was noted that this is a national trend.
- In relation to the number of children with a Child Protection Plan, it was confirmed that the number is reducing and moving closer to the target. The number is currently 396 child protection plans in place and the target is 330.
- There has been a 20% increase in the number of referrals to the Front Door Service.
- The total number of Children in Care stood at 693 and this includes Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC). This was confirmed to be slightly higher than

predicted, but lower than both the national figure and Warwickshire's statistical neighbours.

- In relation to the SEND service, it was confirmed that the performance remains on track and is consistently positive.

Councillor Penny-Anne O'Donnell referred to the report and the increases in demand and costs, asking if recruitment and retention of staff were issues. Nigel Minns, Executive Director for Children and Young People stated that recruitment and retention were issues reflected nationally across the public sector and are particularly for local authorities and the NHS. It was confirmed that one key challenge is pay and how staff are rewarded. The appeal of working as an agency member of staff is hard for local authorities to address as the opportunities are different, including how staff work. Agency staff are very expensive.

John Coleman, Director of Children and Families confirmed that there is currently a specific programme at Warwickshire County Council around growing our own Social Workers including an apprenticeship scheme for current family support workers. The programme aims to have approximately 50 apprentices working towards becoming Social Workers.

The Committee noted that officers know where some of the issues are with retention and that is around child protection and court work which can be extremely difficult. There is wrap around support for workers, including counselling for the emotional impact. A new process has been introduced with an additional £3k salary for those roles. It was confirmed that 10 people have already be appointed which means a reduction in the use of agency staff. Officers are approaching college students to encourage them to apply to the council once they have finished their studies.

Following a question from Councillor Chris Mills in relation to obesity in children, it was confirmed that this on the increase and in particular in Year 6 children (10 to 11 years old). Shade Agboola, Director for Public Health confirmed that Warwickshire is still below the national average in this area but that this risk of obesity is going up; perhaps as a result of the impact of the pandemic. It was confirmed that this area has been prioritised as a key objective for the team over the next 12 months. The Chair requested a briefing note on the pathways for obesity and it was confirmed that a guide will be circulated to the committee. It was noted that referrals are often to a bespoke, local service.

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse raised concerns that the number of hospital admissions in relation to self-harm are increasing and asked if data was being analysed to identify any emerging trends in order to create a better understanding of service demands. Shade Agboola confirmed that a briefing note in relation to this had been shared with the Committee and that updated data was currently no available due to a change in the reporting methodology. It was noted that the national information currently being used was leading to Warwickshire appearing to be at a higher level but that once the new methodology is in place, the improved comparable data is likely to show an improvement in Warwickshire's performance.

Nigel Minns continued, stating that predictive analytical information is an area for the council to develop but it has been found to be unreliable in some areas. It was confirmed that the council has specialists looking at a range of tools and that a briefing note would be produced for the committee. Councillor Kam Kaur, Portfolio Holder for Education added that real time and

targeted data are areas that the council is working on and improving. The work underway involves working with system users to make sure that they get the best out of each system. It was confirmed that this work will be completed soon and will not take years. Following a question from Councillor Tim Sinclair, it was confirmed that there are peer groups that the council is part of, with other local authorities to discuss how technology can be best used in each authority.

Resolved

That the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers and comments on the Integrated Performance Report for Quarter 3 2023/24 contained within this Report and Appendices.

6. Outdoor Education and Learning Strategy 2022 Progress Update

Sarah Cox, Place Based Co-ordinator confirmed to the Committee that she was very new to the post, and thanked Sarah Tregaskis, Head of School Services & Post-16 Education for attending the meeting as support.

Sarah Cox confirmed that the Outdoor Education and Learning Strategy was not about the direct delivery of services but about enabling schools to develop their own outdoor education programme.

The following points were highlighted to the Committee –

- 43% of schools in the county have now engaged meaningfully with the strategy. This includes primary, secondary and special schools.
- An online event took place in June on ‘Why Teach Inside?’, with 25 attendees.
- Opportunities for future sessions have been identified, which include promoting webinars available from the National Education Nature Park and Eco-Schools.
- Since April 2023, there have been 635 views of the Homepage for the website. The next highest number of views is for the Education Visits page (at 464 views), followed by the webpage on Grants and Funding (at 257 views).
- The Committee noted that the website is kept up to date but that it could benefit from more promotion and that this is something that the team is currently working on.
- With reference to the current delivery plan, it was confirmed that 34% of the actions have been completed. 38% of the actions are in progress and will progress after recruitments has been completed. The delivery plan will be refreshed after recruitment.
- A number of schools have applied for funding support for wildlife gardens and sensory gardens.

- Working with wider partners such as libraries and country parks has been completed and this means that improved offers to school are now underway.

The Chair thanked the officers for the report adding that it was an excellent report and that the enthusiasm of officers could be seen during the presentation.

Following a question in relation to how Councillors could support the programme, it was confirmed that the majority of the information is on the website and that the information is kept as local as possible so referring schools and others to the website is the best support at this point.

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse asked if there were any links to work with the district and borough councils, or Public Health. Adding, that he felt the report was very positive, especially the sustainability of the programme. It was confirmed that some work had been completed with local leisure providers but that it would perhaps be worth officers re-establishing contact with the district and boroughs.

Councillor Barbara Brown commented that it was nice to see how the strategy had progressed and how it continues to move forward. Following a question from Councillor Brown in relation to the collection of feedback, Sarah Tregaskis confirmed that work is underway on a feedback kit that can be sent to schools and that it will include a self-evaluation and participation tool kit.

Resolved

That the Children and Young Peoples Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the progress of the Warwickshire County Council Outdoor Education and Learning Strategy 2022 as outlined within its Delivery Plan 2023-2024.

7. Warwickshire Futures - looking ahead to 2030/40

Max Taylor, National Management Trainee presented the report to the Committee and confirmed that Lou Richardson, Lead Commissioner - Corporate Policy & Strategy and Sue Robinson, Business Intelligence Service Manager (Strategic Research) were also present to support and answer any questions.

It was confirmed that the purpose of the report was to understand and systemically assess future trends and impacts on Warwickshire County Council. The approach taken was to look at the best practice and research across all local government. It was also confirmed that the report is not intended to be a complete list of all issues that the council may face. It will be continually monitored and assessed.

The report commented that from 2030 onwards the issues and themes likely to be facing Warwickshire may include societal change, community & health and environment, climate & infrastructure. The specific considerations for the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee were identified as –

- a) Changing living situations
- b) Emerging health issues
- c) Increasing diversity

- d) Mental health challenges
- e) Future skills

The report highlighted that Warwickshire County Council would need to consider moving forward, including the following –

- Tailoring of services to changing needs
- Increased uncertainty – greater local choices
- Shifting public expectation and perception
- New ways of working, including through technology such as Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Councillor Penny-Anne O'Donnell thanked the officers for the report which she found fascinating. In addition, and in relation to the emerging health issues, she thanked the officers for the information in relation to the issue of vaping. Councillor O'Donnell also commented that the issue of loneliness in children, especially those who may already be vulnerable, may be as a knock-on result of the pandemic. She thanked officers for identifying all the concerns and the needs to ensure the appropriate skills are in place for the future.

Councillor Tim Sinclair added his thanks for the great report and requested that the information relevant to the Committee be circulated as a separate document. It was agreed that Max Taylor would compile the relevant information and circulate it to all members of the Committee after the meeting.

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse echoed the previous comments about the excellent report and that the requested information would be very much appreciated.

Councillor Roodhouse asked if any work had been done to include the point of view of children and young people; and asking for their views. Adding that walking in their shoes could help the council plan. John Coleman, Director of Children and Families thanked Councillor Roodhouse and agreed that it could be beneficial. It was agreed that with the Youth Council Elections coming up, it would be an ideal time to ask for their points of view. Councillor Penny-Anne O'Donnell agreed with Councillor Roodhouse, adding that the council must make sure to reach young people who may feel that their voice isn't being heard; such as those who are not attending school. Rachel Jackson, Head of Education and Strategy Transformation confirmed that work on the education strategy that will be presented at the meeting of Cabinet on the 11th April 2024, and that narrowing the gap is an area of focus that ensures the council is working with the right people in the right places. It was confirmed that an update would be provided to the Committee at the June meeting.

Councillor Izzi Seccombe, Leader of the Council added that devolution and the opportunities this could create, would help provide and support a skills agenda. Councillor Seccombe confirmed that imminent announcements are expected in relation to the Devo 2 deal and that the committee would be kept updated. Councillor Seccombe added that it is crucial that every child is given the chance to shine with their unique set of skills.

Following a question from Phil Johnson, Co-optee and Chair of Stockingford Local Governing Body, it was confirmed that carer advice is offered to all children in Year 7 (11 to 12 years old) and that this makes up part of all OFSTED inspections. Warwickshire County Council has a

statutory requirement to avoid young children becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training) and this is done through work with secondary education providers and colleges. It was noted that apprenticeship numbers in Warwickshire are higher than midland and national figures.

Resolved

That the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

1. Notes the trends and themes highlighted in the ‘Warwickshire Futures 2030/40’ and ‘Warwickshire in 2030 and beyond’ reports and considers how they may relate to ongoing and future policy development; and
2. Considers the Committee's current work programme in light of the Warwickshire Futures work.

8. Work Programme and items on the Forward Plan

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

The Chair asked that if members of the Committee had any requests for topics to be added to the work programme for future meetings, they should contact Helen Barnsley, Senior Democratic Services Officer.

9. Any Other Business

None.

10. Date of Next Meeting

It was confirmed that the next meeting will be held on 9 April 2024.

The meeting will be held at Shire Hall, Warwick.

11:26 meeting closed.

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Chair