

Children & Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday 17 September 2024

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

Councillor Marian Humphreys (Chair)
Councillor Parminder Singh Birdi
Councillor Piers Daniell
Councillor Justin Kerridge
Councillor Chris Mills
Councillor Jill Simpson-Vince
Councillor Tim Sinclair
Councillor Jenny Fradgley
Phil Johnson

Officers

Johnny Kyriacou, Director of Education
Nigel Minns, Executive Director for Children and Young People
Helen Barnsley, Senior Democratic Services Officer
John Coleman, Director of Children and Families
Zoe Mayhew, Director of Health and Care Commissioning
George Shipman, Head of Safeguarding Communities

Others Present

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

Andy Mitchell - Press

1. General

(1) Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Jerry Roodhouse (Vice-Chair), Councillor Jenny Fradgley is for Councillor Roodhouse.

Apologies were also received from Councillor Barbara Brown and 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 18th June 2024 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

There were no matters arising.

2. Public Speaking

Sam Farr spoke to the committee in relation to her 12-year-old son who has special education needs. Sam started by saying that three minutes is not enough time to highlight the failings her family has faced from the education system.

“My 12-year-old son who since birth has had multiple surgeries and hospital stays, attended mainstream primary and secondary schools where he sat outside the classroom with 1-2-1 supervision. In year four, his case was due to be heard at a higher needs panel, but this did not happen for two years and eventually it was decided that a specialist placement should be sought.

In February 2023 when high school placements were announced, my son did not get one. I had questioned the content of his plan on numerous occasions; 17 schools had received information that my son was in nappies and could only manage two hours at school. This was not true. I was told this information was historic but relevant, but the plan suggested this was the current situation.

I requested a reassessment of his needs. It was declined. I appealed. The tribunal date is a year away. I then received contact from the legal team who wanted to reassess his needs. I feel this was rushed; there were no pushbacks unless I hounded and there were still no yeses to finding him a place.

The reasons for refusal included –

- Cannot rule out a corridor crush
- Staff not adequately trained
- Not suitable with the cohort – if anyone can explain this one to me, please do.

These were legal responses from specialists you approve. I started to contact the schools myself but couldn't get a foot in the door so how could I possible name my preference. I did however find a school in July 2024 without any help or input from the local authority. For the whole year that this has gone on, my son received 9-hour tutoring and nine hours AP, but I had to fight to get him those hours, you did not want to give them to him. 18 hours was his legal entitlement to a full-time education.

His tutor was amazing. His AP mentors were amazing. But it would be interesting to see who monitors the policies and procedures because initially drop offs were whenever they felt like it and sessions were cancelled with a few hours' notice.

He was put on a 2 to 1 after stating he would call the police after a mentor accidentally stood on one of his toes. That 2 to 1 should have been reviewed after half a term. You funded a 2 to 1 for an additional two months when his own mentor said it wasn't needed.

His tutor and AP reports were fantastic. I asked if the reports could be used in his EHCP to help secure the best educational outcome. Your legal team answered – the LA does not detail strengths in plans. An EHCP does not define a child, but the process followed would have you believe that it does. It is extremely flawed in its approach.

To finish, parental blame is felt strongly by myself and other families. We want to work with you not against you and the systemic failings.

The Chair thanked Sam for coming to speak to the committee and for putting her case forward. The Chair confirmed that it would be passed on to the relevant place for a reply; it is a complex case, and someone will be in touch.

3. Question Time

(1) Questions to Cabinet Portfolio Holders

Councillor Piers Daniell asked Councillor Kam Kaur, Portfolio Holder for Education for confirmation in relation to the funding of early years education places for children with recognised SEND needs. Councillor Daniell stated that there seems to be an issue where children are moving through schools and the support isn't continuing.

Councillor Kaur confirmed that funding should follow the child throughout the school. She thanked Councillor Daniell for raising the issues and confirmed that she will investigate whether the issue is as a result of children moving into schools outside of the county.

(2) Updates from Cabinet Portfolio Holders and Directors

Councillor Sue Markham, Portfolio Holder for Children and Families, provided an update to the committee in relation to recent commissioning activities at the council. The following points were highlighted –

- Following Cabinet approval in July for the council to join the West Midlands regional frameworks for residential and foster care services, the fostering framework was successfully mobilised on 27th August 2024, providing the region with access to 3,282 homes for children. Based on current data, this supply of foster care homes should meet the regions sufficiency needs.
- The council received approval to retender a short term and bail and remand foster care block provision, which is a flagship service for the council. The service delivery and initial financial modelling for this have been drafted and will be shared at a future meeting.
- The capacity for children in care who live in Supported Accommodation has continued

to increase and is currently around 92%. The impact of this means there are fewer children experiencing disruption in other areas of their lives and can maintain important networks and access to universal services. To continue to build on this success, an options paper is being developed, following which recommendations will be progressed and presented at future meetings.

- A tender for our Care, Education and Treatment Review (CeTR) Expert by Experience Service is live – this service ensures that the local system is able to meet the requirement for an expert by experience (who is an autistic person or a person with a learning disability or a family carer with lived experience of services) to be present as a panel member at any CeTR for a child, young person or adult who has been admitted to a mental health hospital or is at risk of admission.
- The contract for the Family Wrap Around Serviced (Phase 1) has been awarded and the contract will go live in November 2024. The Service is being commissioned as a proof-of-concept for preventative and responsive solutions for families in distress and at risk of crisis, with children facing barriers to Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) wellbeing.
- The current Short Breaks and Respite contracts will be re-tendered from October 2024. The model has been redesigned to include a framework, enhanced offer, core offer and overnight respite and new contracts will be in place from April 2025.
- Phase 2 of Wrap Around (Care at Home/Urgent Outreach) will be tendered alongside Short Breaks and Respite as a 2-year proof of concept.
- The development of the action plan to determine the options available and make recommendations for the re-commissioning and future delivery of Children and Young People's emotional wellbeing and mental health services (Rise) in Warwickshire is underway.
- New governance arrangements and priorities are currently being developed for children and family centres in partnership with providers and wider stakeholders.
- Earlier in the year, following significant consultation and re-design work, WCC went out to tender for a new Accommodation Related Support Service. This new service will include Floating and Accommodation based provision for 16–25-year-olds. The tender was successful and new providers have been awarded contracts. Work is now underway to mobilise the new service, ready for when the new contracts start in 2025.

The committee noted that there is a lot of commissioning work underway and were grateful for the update. It was agreed that the full list of commissioning activities would be circulated to the committee.

Councillor Kam Kaur, Portfolio Holder for Education confirmed that following the recent Government announcement in relation to the removal of one word inspection reports for OFSTED that the council is working with schools. There is some confusion as to how it will work moving forward and some schools are nervous. It was confirmed that the education partnership board has held discussions with school heads and that the support will continue

when the new guidance is released.

In relation to the take up of early years placements, it was confirmed that additional hours were available from the start of this school term and the numbers for Warwickshire are above the national target. Big thanks to all the officers who have helped ensure the places are taken up.

4. Corporate Parenting Panel Update

Councillor Sue Markham, Portfolio Holder for Children and Families stated that she has a lot to update the committee on in relation to the work of the Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP).

- Councillor Markham attended the Brothers and Sisters Days held in April 2024 and that it had been a very worthwhile day. All the siblings had been very pleased to be able to spend time together.
- The council's new Sibling Strategy was introduced at the panel meeting in September 2024. It was agreed that the draft strategy would be shared with members of the committee. The CPP received information about the work done by officers who conducted a deep dive into brother and sister relationships of children in care.
- This was an issue that was raised by the Children in Care Council (CiCC) and the Youth Forum. The issue lay with children and young people in care who weren't living with siblings; either in different placements, or with one staying at the family home. Young people stated that they often do not know why they are in care and do not know why they no longer live with their brothers & sisters. Young people outlined that professionals could better explain this to them, as well as how decisions were made and what work had been undertaken to support them keeping a strong relationship with their brothers and sisters.
- The panel learnt that the first issue raised was by children and young people was that they did not like the word sibling – so the strategy is the brother and sister strategy.
- It was confirmed that four care experienced apprenticeships have secured full time roles at the council.
- The football team continue to do well with Warwickshire young people winning the Care Experienced Week Championship Cup tournament in Walsall.
- Councillor Markham reminded the committee of the film - [Wrong Size Fits All](#) and asked anyone who hasn't seen the film to please watch it; it shows the personal journeys of individuals with SEND within education settings.
- The first meeting of the newly elected Warwickshire Youth Council had involved discussions around priorities for the year and the council also identified key priorities.

5. Council Delivery Plan and Performance Q1

John Coleman, Director of Children and Families presented the report to the committee and confirmed that there were summary points available in appendix one. It was also confirmed that

the number of measures for the committee to review has been reduced to allow focus on particular areas. It was noted that 7 focus areas are currently on track, and 3 are not on track.

The committee noted that the overall number of Children in Care has continued to reduce, with the latest a significant reduction of 68. This is, in part, due to the increase in the number of children being placed with family members of being returned home where safe to do so.

It was confirmed that Warwickshire does need more foster carers. There will be a new marketing campaign launched shortly however, 8 mainstream foster carers have been approved with 8 more in the pipeline. This is the highest number for some time but there is still room for improvement.

In relation to Education Services, performance in relation to attendance is good. The Early Help support is on track, but officers are working towards more early support being in place.

Performance in relation to safer accommodation (following domestic abuse) is not currently on track but is showing signs of improvement. There is a plan to source accommodation, renovate and launch. This is not where officers want to be, but things are progressing and moving in the right direction.

In relation to the completion of Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCP) within 20 weeks, it was confirmed that performance is not currently on track, but plans are in place to make improvements. Demand has doubled recently but the resources available to officers, have not increased. The council has bought in some agency staff to offer support at the assessment phase.

It was confirmed that the Warwickshire education strategy has been approved and is now in place. The new term has now started and started well. On October 3rd, 2024, there will be a conference to launch the strategy to the wider school community and includes priorities for the next five years.

In relation to the overspend reported in appendix three, John Coleman confirmed that this has reduced from £10 million to £7 million. This is still a significant overspend but does show the work undertaken to reduce the overspend. The majority of the over spend comes from residential care, and there has been a significant increase in these costs. We do not accept any residential care placement that doesn't include education. Other work to reduce the overspend has included ending fixed term staff contract earlier where possible as well as accelerating plans for children to leave care plans, when it is absolutely right for the child/ren; for example, step down care plan to foster carers. It was confirmed that there is a strategic lens to the barriers in place but at the forefront of all our minds is what is best for the children and young people.

Opening council owned homes and bringing children back into the county or out of residential care will significantly reduce these costs – in some cases up to £15k a week. This is a national issue.

Following a question from Councillor Simpson-Vince in relation to finding new foster carers, it was confirmed that there hasn't been large number coming through for some time, but the new marketing campaign does seem to be working. There has also been increased visibility at community events across the county to make sure the team is seen, and making sure that WCC can offer the best level of support, and the whole package for anyone considering fostering in comparison to other agencies. It is important that the message gets out that that anyone can foster...single, renters, there are various groups that think they can't.

Following a question from Councillor Justin Kerridge in relation to the council's refusal to assess children for EHCPs and the rate of appeal failure, it was agreed that a detailed report would be added to the committee's work programme and would include the council's historical performance. Nigel Minns, Executive Director for Children and Young People confirmed that more plans are issues every year than ever before.

Resolved

That the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers and comments on Quarter 1 2024/25 organisational progress against the Council Delivery Plan, performance, management of finances and risk.

6. Childrens OSC Feedback report

Ruth Rollings, Service Manager – Customer Relations (Complaints Manager) gave a brief overview of the report and of the individual services in the report. It was highlighted to the committee that complaints in relation to the Children and Families service are reducing; in addition, compliments are increasing. In 2023/24 the number of compliments increased by 39% to 25, indicating improvement in service and customer satisfaction.

The top category for complaints within the children and families service is protection of user – when a member of staff is specifically named in a complaint. The other top categories include WCC service standards and staff conduct. The top categories for complaints within the education service are communication, WCC service standards and protection of user.

It was noted that a high proportion of complaints are completed outside of timescales. (See appendix 1). More targeted work is required within services on the importance of closing complaints within timescales.

The committee noted that officers had identified lessons learned and were actioning and recording progress made against them; it was acknowledged that this is critical work in order to improve the service. Examples of identified lessons learned include –

- Clear and timely communication throughout the edge of care process.
- When workers are off sick, Team Leads ensure that things are still being progressed to prevent delays.
- Identifying specific training e.g. neurodiversity training undertaken by the customer relations team.
- Updated training for Children and Families staff on specific areas like Special Guardianship Order.
- Training and briefings for managers about responding to and investigating complaints

Councillor Penny-Anne O'Donnell commented that it had been lovely for the committee to hear that compliments were increasing and asked where the council stood in comparison to neighbouring authorities. Ruth Rollings confirmed that benchmarking was still underway but that

the information should be ready in time for the next time this report is presented to the committee. All members of the committee agreed that being able to benchmark the council's performance would be really useful.

Councillor Jill Simpson-Vince added that given the issues the council faced with the school admission process, it was very encouraging to see the reduction in complaints and showed that the work being done by officers is working.

The Chair requested that the committee receive a further update from Ruth at the meeting in February 2025.

Resolved

That the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers and comments on the contents of the report.

7. Youth Justice Plan

George Shipman, Head of Children's Pathfinder Programme presented the report to the committee and confirmed the following highlights from the plan -

The youth justice plan is a requirement from the crime and disorder act 1998. It is an annual plan that goes through the council process to be signed off by full council. The committee was informed that this will be the last annual plan as it is moving to three-year plan with annual updates. There were several changes to this year's plan, including multi agency safeguarding arrangements, so it wasn't the best time to move to three yearly.

The plan has a set proforma to complete. The committee was asked to note expectations from the youth justice board including, child first principles, evidence-based practices and putting children at the heart of the service. Work will include promoting positive elements and thinking about positive behaviour.

Last year's plan set out four priorities – core good practice, day to day work of the service, reviewing policies and procedure and multi-agency/disciplinary process: being open and honest with all partners.

The plan builds on the progress made in 2023/24 including the embedding of the ARC (Attachment, Regulation, Competency) Trauma Informed Model. This work will include thinking about interventions delivered to children and young people and what other tools are available. This has been funded for a two-year period.

There will also be a focus on the prevention of serious violence with a focus on prevention with the development of pathways team getting involved at the earliest opportunities. There will also be a targeted offer to schools to reduce the likelihood of young people getting involved in serious violence.

In relation to harmful sexual behaviours, it was confirmed that a new partnerships document has been produced and training is being rolled out to schools around the county on identifying behaviours and how to access support.

It was confirmed that reoffending rates are steadily declining. There is a strong relationship between the service and the court.

Moving forward, key challenges were noted; strengthening governance and partnership working and making sure the service is inspection ready. The committee noted that the service is currently in a really strong place.

There is some fixed term funding in place, primarily for the prevention work. This will come to an end and sources for further funding are currently unclear; a number of changes may need to be made – sustainability is key

It was confirmed that a holistic approach to health, speech and language therapy has made a difference to the service along with substance misuse support.

In relation to victim support and restorative justice, the service is working towards a quality assurance mark for victim support. Only a small number of youth justice services have achieved this, so it is a key aim for the team.

Councillor Penny-Anne O'Donnell thanked officers for a very positive report and added a well done to the team for the recognition they have received.

Following a question from Councillor O'Donnell in relation to the number of offenders that may have additional needs, George Shipman confirmed that there is a high number and that there is a multidisciplinary team in place who focus on support within education for those who have particular challenges such as attendance.

Following a question from the committee, it was confirmed that in almost all areas, Warwickshire is performing better than the UK, and against the statistical neighbours, average or better. Councillor Jeff Morgan added that it is important to look at comparisons, especially with the statistical neighbours. Councillor Morgan added that he has previously worked with the youth justice team and was always very impressed with the work. The team work in extremely difficult situations and it is great to see the good work continuing. Councillor Justin Kerridge added that the report is very encouraging and seeing the early intervention working across all service areas.

Councillor Parminder Singh Birdi raised the need for more detail in relation to point 14 – National Priority Areas, stating that there needs to be more local data. George Shipman agreed that there does need to be more data from a local level to see if there are local communities that we need to offer more support to.

It was noted that a small number of cases has a disproportionately high impact on communities. George Shipman confirmed that the service is now closely tracking, live, the children and young people who are disproportionately causing disruptive behaviour. The service is working with a number of agencies and almost all those young people will have complex needs, and some will be being exploited. The team's responsibility isn't just crime reduction it is supporting these young people. It was added that there may not be quick wins in some cases; it is about sustained support and early intervention, engagement in education and support to the wider family. This isn't an easy area and is reflected across the country.

Resolved

That the Committee comment upon the Warwickshire Youth Justice Service Strategic Plan 2023/24

8. Work Programme and items on the Forward Plan

Following the update from Councillor Sue Markham in relation to commissioning, it was agreed to add this as a regular update – either verbally or as a report when required. It was agreed that briefing notes would also be a good way to get commissioning updates to the committee.

It was agreed that t report on Children and Family Centres would be presented at the meeting in February 2025.

It was confirmed that an update report in relation to Childrens OSC Feedback would be presented at the meeting in February 2025.

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

9. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting date is scheduled for Tuesday 26th November 2024 at 10am.

The meeting will be held at Shire Hall, Warwick.

The meeting rose at 11:59

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Chair