

Children & Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday, 23 June 2020

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

Councillor Yousef Dahmash (Chair)
Councillor Pam Williams (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Margaret Bell
Councillor Jonathan Chilvers
Councillor Corinne Davies
Councillor Peter Gilbert
Councillor Daniel Gissane
Councillor Howard Roberts
Councillor Dominic Skinner
Councillor Chris Williams
John McRoberts
Rev. Elaine Scrivens

Officers

Helen Barnsley, Democratic Services Officer
Ian Budd, Assistant Director - Education Services
Ross Caws, Warwickshire SEND Board Development Manager
Duane Chappell, Strategy and Commissioning Manager (SEND & Inclusion)
John Coleman, Assistant Director - Children and Families
Nigel Minns, Strategic Director for People
Louise Richardson, Policy Lead
Sushma Soni, Corporate Policy Lead
Gereint Stoneman, Manager - Planning Policy

Items on the agenda -

1. General

The Chair welcome everyone to the first virtual meeting of the Committee and went through the protocols for virtual meetings.

The Committee conveyed their sympathies to the families of Councillor Richard Chattaway and Councillor Bill Olnier following the announcement that they had passed away.

(1) Apologies

Apologies were received from Joseph Cannon and Sean Taylor.

(2) Members' Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None.

(3) Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes from the meeting held on January 28, 2020 were agreed as a true and accurate record. There were no matters arising.

2. Public Speaking

Councillor John Holland spoke to the Committee in relation to the Interim Executive Board (IEB) imposed on Round Oak School in Warwick. Councillor Holland expressed concerns about the IEB and requested that the Committee consider a review into the IEB with a view to establishing an understanding of what had happened and creating good practice/a code of conduct for future situations.

The Committee agreed that the matter would be discussed at the next Chair and Spokes meeting to be held on June 30, 2020 with regards to potentially adding an item to the Committee's work programme.

3. Question Time

(1) Questions to Cabinet Portfolio Holders

None.

(2) Updates from Cabinet Portfolio Holders and Assistant Directors

None.

4. WCC Covid Recovery Approach

Nigel Minns, Strategic Director (People Directorate) presented the report to the Committee and provided an overview of the Council's approach to recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. A full report was presented to Cabinet on June 11, 2020.

The report presented to the Committee focused on response and actions taken by services within the remit of the committee. The Committee noted that part one of the report provided a summary of what has happened over the last three months; including information on which schools remained open during lockdown and which offered online lessons. The following points were also highlighted –

- Support for mental health for children
- High level of participation in online events.

- Plans for development and risk assessments moving forward.
- Commission services – focused online offer from children and family services.

Regarding those children who did not have equipment or access to Wi-Fi connections, the Committee noted that 1,400 laptops had been made available to the Council from the Department for Education (DfE). 890 laptops have so far been distributed. Primarily, they have been given to Year Ten children or those with a social worker. MiFi devices have also been distributed to give access to Wi-Fi.

The Committee was informed that the laptop scheme does not include young carers. It was confirmed that this issue is being looked at by Officers. The Chair suggested contacting local MPs in relation to this.

It was confirmed that there are some children who are not interacting with on-line lessons. The is blended learning in place and officers are working to find solutions. The DfE has recently increased the criteria for the laptop scheme and is looking to extend the offer. There are weekly meetings with council officers to look at moving this forward.

John Coleman, Assistant Director for Children and Families confirmed that there were a number of children who had been unable to move on from care due to the pandemic. It was confirmed that while Court hearings have continued with agreed placement cases, there is a backlog as a result of Covid-19.

It was confirmed to the Committee that there has been a lot of virtual support for foster carers and that the feedback has all been very positive. It is likely that the virtual support offer will continue after the pandemic with a lot of families enjoying the new way of engagement. It was also confirmed that the foster carer forums that have been set up as a result of the pandemic will also continue.

Ian Budd, Assistant Director (Education Services) confirmed that officers have been holding twice weekly meetings. This has allowed them to share good practice as well as advice and guidance through these unprecedented times.

Following a question in relation to the wellbeing of children and young people, it was confirmed that there is a lot of work currently being done in this area. This includes a webinar programme. It was noted that the participation in the programme is always increasing and is currently at approximately 1600. The Committee was pleased to hear of the good practice and positive learning that has happened and that will carry on over the summer holidays and into the next academic year.

Following a question from Councillor Jonathan Chilvers in relation to the recruitment of social workers, it was confirmed that there had been no movement since the pandemic – no one has left. A request for temporary staff was sent out at the start of lock-down and a high number of people who had previously worked as social workers had been in touch. 50% of those have worked during the lock-down period and may continue to do so.

The Committee discussed the Family Information Service and was informed that the service had been very busy. Referrals to the MASH service have now reduced to almost 'normal' levels having increased at the beginning of lock-down. It was noted that the significant likelihood was that

demand will increase as things start to return to normal. This was noted to not necessarily be in the number of cases but the complexity of each case. The Committee received confirmation that resources have already been put in place to face any increase. It was noted that not all referrals were expected to be related to Covid-19. In relation to the complexity of cases it was noted that this was likely to be concerning domestic or sexual abuse. Following a question about how officers were preparing for this, it was confirmed that teams, such as the domestic abuse service, were already investing resources in areas where an increase in demand is anticipated.

The discussion moved onto Wellbeing and Recovery, Ian Budd confirmed that work would move into the recover and reflect period over the summer. The education workforce would provide access to support for children and young people. Families will be encouraged to use the support that is available to them.

Resolved

That the Committee:

1. Receives and comments on the County's approach to Covid-19 Recovery, as set out in the attached Cabinet report.
2. Comments on the specific issues relevant to the remit of this Committee that should be considered in the development of the Recovery Plan which is due to be submitted to Cabinet in September.

5. Review of the SEND Change Programme Report (presented at Cabinet on 11.06.2020)

Duane Chappell, Strategy and Commissioning Manager (SEND & Inclusion) presented the report to the Committee which gave full representation regarding funding for the SEND & Inclusion Change Programme.

It was noted by the Committee that national funding is an issue for SEND and as a result a concern for families with SEND children who fear their needs may not be met in the future.

It was confirmed that parents and schools are key parts of the discussions around future funding to ensure that the needs of children can continue to be met.

It was noted that there are no spare spaces in Special Education Schools so the priority was to make sure that SEND children could have their needs met in mainstream schools; although there are fundamental issues with the funding of SEND children in mainstream schools. Mainstream schools are able to adapt to accommodate SEND children and there is increased support for staff working with SEND children.

Following an in-depth and valuable discussion the Committee acknowledged that there will be a reduction in funding across SEND services and Warwickshire County Council will need to review how to work moving forward. The Committee raised concerns relation to cuts as opposed to 'invest to save' measure that could be introduced. This is a highly complicated area and officers noted that the input of members of the Committee will be invaluable; this is especially important in building confidence in a system that is currently lacking in confidence from its users.

It was agreed that the Committee will help shape what is needed; what can be done, what officers would like to be done, and what is in-between based on the current situation and look to realign resources not cut them. It was agreed that Ross Caws would circulate the IMPOWER report to members of the Committee.

It was agreed that a formal response from the Committee would be drafted for Cabinet to recognise the challenge of balancing the budget while raising concerns of the impact on service users.

Resolved

That the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers the report presented to Cabinet on the SEND & Inclusion Change Programme (Appendix A) and makes appropriate recommendations.

That a further report is brought back to the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee in Autumn 2020 to allow greater scrutiny of the SEND & Inclusion Change Programme once launched.

6. Children and Families Change Programme Update

John Coleman, Assistant Director (Children and Families) presented the report to the Committee, highlighting the executive summary which included information in relation to additional funding and how it will be invested.

The following points were also highlighted to the Committee –

- Warwickshire has chosen to implement the Leeds Family Change Programme
- The Department for Education (DfE) will evaluate and monitor the progress made; there is a transformation board in place.
- The Covid-19 pandemic has delayed the programme by 3-4 months but there is now an agreement in place with the DfE and officers are working to get the programme back on track.
- It was confirmed that the whole change programme would be informed by young people and their families. This includes care leavers.

It was also confirmed that the Different Futures programme aimed to support parents who have had multiple children taken into care

The Committee agreed that the programme was a good example of invest to save and that very few local authorities have been able to invest in this area. The Committee wished it to be noted that they were proud of the work completed by members and officers.

It was noted that there was an error in the report at point 4.11 (page 71 of the document pack). The figure should read £3.425 million and not £3.4254 million.

Resolved

That the committee consider and comment on the programme and work completed to date.

7. Work Programme

The Committee noted the work programme as submitted with the following addition - The Autism Strategy – added to the agenda for September 29, 2020.

It was agreed that the following issue would be discussed at the next Chair and Spokes meeting (June 30, 2020).

- School Placements – how they have been processed this year; to include the possible link to school transport disruption as a result of the pandemic. The Chair requested that the paper include data in relation to school placements & appeals; and the number of successful appeals following a complaint.

Following a statement from Councillor Corinne Davies in relation to nitrous oxide canisters (hippy crack/laughing gas) the following actions were agreed –

- The issue has already been highlighted to Cabinet and work will continue to focus on the issue which is extremely dangerous and becoming more prevalent.
- A letter will be sent to Government Minister, copying in local MP's
- Nigel Minns will request data from Trading Standards and the Drug & Alcohol teams.

8. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would take place at 10.00a.m. on 14 July 2020.

The meeting will be held virtually via Microsoft Teams.

The meeting rose at 1:00pm

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Chair