

Minutes of the meeting of Children and young people scrutiny committee held at Committee Room 1 - The Shire Hall, St. Peter's Square, Hereford, HR1 2HX on Monday 17 September 2018 at 10.15 am

Present: Councillor CA Gandy (Chairman)
Councillor FM Norman (Vice-Chairman)

Mr P Burbidge, CR Butler, ACR Chappell, Mr A James, JF Johnson, MT McEvilly and A Seldon

In attendance: Councillor EJ Swinglehurst, Cabinet Member Young People and Children's Wellbeing

Officers: Chris Baird, Director, Children and Families (DCF), Keith Barham, The Head of Service (HOS), West Mercia Youth Justice Service (WMYJS), John Coleman, Statutory Scrutiny Officer, Gill Cox, Head of Looked After Children (HLAC), Liz Elgar, Assistant Director Safeguarding and Family Support and Matthew Evans, Democratic Services Officer.

11. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor FM Norman declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item number 8, Corporate Parenting Strategy Action Plan, as a member of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

12. MINUTES

RESOLVED: that the committee approves the minutes of the meeting on 16 July 2018.

13. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

14. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

There were no questions from members of the Council.

15. YOUTH JUSTICE PLAN 2018-2019

The committee considered a report which set out the draft Youth Justice Plan 2018 – 2019, for pre-scrutiny ahead of its presentation to Cabinet and full Council. The Head of Service (HOS), West Mercia Youth Justice Service (WMYJS), introduced the report and provided the presentation circulated in the supplement to the item. During the presentation the statistics relating to first time entrants (FTEs), use of custody and reoffending were provided

Councillor Bowen, Chair of the General Scrutiny Committee, commented on the response provided in the presentation to the recommendations of the committee from

2017. It was hoped that the timing of the preparation of the plan could be reconsidered to enable earlier comments and recommendations from scrutiny. It was pleasing that the evaluation of informal disposals had been undertaken and was included in the Plan and the year on year comparisons were welcomed. The ongoing impact of low numbers in Herefordshire was mentioned and the distortion of statistical comparisons. *The HOS confirmed that the low numbers in Herefordshire did distort the figures but the WMYJS was moving to a method of presenting the numbers alongside the rate.*

The committee raised the issues below in the discussion that followed:

- The purpose of the Plan was questioned and whether it was a statistics gathering exercise. The benefit to the community of the Plan was queried. *The HOS explained that the Plan was a requirement of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and its contents were prescribed. It was explained that the primary aims of the Plan and the WMYJS was to reduce the level of FTEs and reoffending rates which contributed to the efforts to reduce risks to the wider public and young people.*
- There were concerns that the statistics used in the Plan presented an impression that crime and disorder in Herefordshire was at a very low level however it was felt that the reality on the ground was very different. Police intervention in petty crime was an area of frustration as very little appeared to be done about low level crime which contributed to its incidence in the county. This was felt to be particularly pronounced in anti-social behaviour.
- There were concerns expressed that the experience of local communities did not accord with the presentation of the figures in the report. *The HOS confirmed that the WMYJS management board had held discussion to attempt to understand the figures contained in the report in the context of increases in the level of recorded crime.*
- There was concern regarding the relatively high reoffending rate and whilst it was acknowledged that the statistical numbers might be small it was still problematic in Herefordshire. The first time entrant rate was also perpetually higher than acceptable.
- The research undertaken on the adverse childhood experiences was raised and when any outcomes from this research would be available. It was queried whether any information could be shared with the committee. *The HOS explained that the first report would be available in October and this could be shared with the committee.*
- It was queried whether there were any parallels between some of the experiences in childhood of young people that contributed to reasons for reoffending and experiences of some looked after children (LAC) early in their lives that then contributed to issues that they faced in later life. *The Head of Looked After Children (HLAC) confirmed that that there were a very low number of LAC in the criminal justice system in Hereford.*
- The increase in the rate of drug offences was a significant concern and it was queried what work was ongoing with organisations such as Addaction. It was further queried whether the work of Addaction was limited to the city and market towns which allowed drug problems in rural areas to persist. *The HOS explained that the majority of drug offences concerned the possession of small amounts of cannabis, ecstasy and cocaine. The WMYJS had employed a drug worker who provided a link and liaison to groups such as Addaction.*
- The previous recommendation of the General Scrutiny Committee to circulate the Plan at an earlier stage of its preparation was supported by the committee.
- The committee discussed inviting witnesses to future meetings from partners, including the Community Safety Partnership (CSP), the Police and groups such as Addaction to provide a context around the figures presented in the Plan.

- A role for the General Scrutiny Committee was discussed to review work by the Herefordshire CSP relating to reducing youth offending and scrutinising the associated delivery plan. It was commented that the committee could look at the broader issue of youth crime and anti-social behaviour. Mentoring of children and young people by the police was also raised. *The HOS explained that an overall prevention strategy would be looked at by the CSP.*
- The involvement of the WMYJS with Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and the Children and Young People Mental Health Partnership was queried. *The HOS explained that a CAMHS worker had been seconded into the local team and was delivering assessments and interventions to the Youth Justice Service. Funding accessed through the transformation fund is supporting training so that staff are able to respond to mental health issues which fall below the CAMHS threshold.*
- It was requested that the Plan includes clarity regarding why it was produced, to whom it was aimed and which communities it serves.

RESOLVED: that the Committee:

- **endorses the Plan for presentation to full Council;**
- **notes the improvement in the rate of first time entrants across West Mercia but recognises further progress is required to reduce the rate in Herefordshire;**
- **supports an increase in the use of informal responses, such as community resolution, to divert young people from the formal justice system and recommends that this is progressed as a priority;**
- **expresses concern regarding the persistently high level of reoffending in Herefordshire and recommends that the General Scrutiny Committee review the reducing youth offending delivery plan, being produced by the Herefordshire Community Safety Partnership, and also scrutinises the CSPs approach to youth crime and anti-social behaviour;**
- **agrees witnesses from the police, the CSP and other relevant partners, such as Addaction, will be invited to participate in the committees future consideration of the Youth Justice Plan; and**
- **requests that the Plan incorporates clarity regarding why it is produced, to whom it is aimed and the communities it serves.**

There was a brief adjournment at 11.55 a.m. The meeting reconvened at 12.03 p.m.

16. CORPORATE PARENTING ANNUAL UPDATE

The committee received a report which provided an update on the corporate parenting strategy and action plan ahead of its presentation to Cabinet. The Head of Looked After Children (HLAC) introduced the report and provided an update on actions undertaken on the scrutiny committee's recommendations on the Corporate Parenting Strategy. It was explained that challenges remained to ensure members completed the skills directory, finding more apprenticeships at the Council for LAC and the current level of LAC in the county.

The committee raised the issues below in the discussion that followed:

- Detail was requested of the LAC who had attended university and whether they had now found employment. *The HLAC confirmed that this information would be provided;*

- It was recognised that progress had been made in certain areas of the action plan.
- The committee highlighted the importance of all members completing the skills directory and also identifying where potential work opportunities existed in their wards. Details of the number of LAC looking for opportunities was requested and it was suggested that detail regarding the type of placements sought was compiled and the economic development team encouraged to work with micro business to identify potential placements. *The Cabinet Member Young People and Children's Wellbeing confirmed that members would be contacted individually to encourage greater engagement with corporate parenting responsibilities and to request details to include in the directory. Work was ongoing to include a social value element to contracts the council procured to include opportunities for LAC. The HLAC confirmed that approximately 20 LAC were looking for opportunities.*
- The committee encouraged corporate parenting to be presented at the forthcoming parish summit.
- The committee emphasised the importance of the early help and the edge of care service which had been recognised by Ofsted and the peer review. *The Director of Children's Wellbeing explained that as part of the budget setting process for 2019/2020 resources concerning an edge of care service would be evaluated.*
- It was recognised that LAC had concessions to leisure facilities and it was felt that such concessions to cultural providers locally should also be explored. It was suggested that the chair of the committee writes to local cultural providers to request concessions for LAC.
- The committee requested detail of how unsuitable accommodation was defined. *The HLAC explained that unsuitable accommodation was accommodation which was not felt to be meeting the needs of LAC, including sleeping on sofas, being in inappropriate relationships. Better recording of accommodation had been achieved through Mosaic and a reduction in the number of LAC in bed and breakfast settings had been achieved.*
- Detail of progress with the savings proposal to reduce the numbers of looked after children was requested. *The DCF confirmed that there had been progress in meeting the needs of some looked after children in different family based arrangements and that the directorate was delivering on its medium term financial savings target for this area. However the expenditure on LAC in the current year would exceed planned spending. This was down to a number of reasons including the number of LAC had increased in the current year, the number of residential placements had increased significantly this year compared to what was planned for and there was a lack of placement choice that contributed to higher prices. The increase in spending on children's services was a national trend that saw a reported £800m spend over budget across all local authorities in England for 2017.*

RESOLVED: that the Committee:

- **notes the update and recognises the progress made;**
- **asks the executive to encourage all members to use local contacts to identify employment and work experience opportunities for LAC; and**
- **agrees to write to local cultural providers to request concessions for LAC.**

17. EDUCATION, DEVELOPMENT AND SKILLS STRATEGY 2018-2021

The committee considered a report which contained the draft education, development and skills strategy for preview scrutiny ahead of its approval by the executive. The DCF introduced the report and outlined the role of the Council and its core legal responsibilities. It was explained that the educational landscape was complex with

maintained schools, academies and free schools and the regional schools commissioner. The strategy was based on the principles of keeping children safe and giving them a great start in life. There was a particular focus in the strategy on 16-19 education and reducing the gap in attainment for additional needs and free school meals pupils.

The committee raised the issues below in the discussion that followed:

- A query was raised regarding performance measures and action plans associated with the strategy. *The DCF explained that performance would be assessed through performance challenge sessions and cabinet performance reports.*
- When would further details of the review of the strategy to improve SEN and disabilities provision be available and would there be a role for the committee in this work? *The strategic approach had already secured £500k to be used in Herefordshire to promote improvement from the DfE and also a successful bid to develop a 16-19 SEN Free School. The DCF explained that further work would be undertaken in the autumn and the SEN task and finish group could be involved in work around the review of the strategy.*

RESOLVED: that the Committee:

- **supports the Strategy as a high level statement of intent and requests that further detail on the individual projects is circulated when available; and**
- **requests that the committee is involved in the review of the SEND strategy.**

18. WORK PROGRAMME REVIEW

The committee received and noted its work programme 2018/19 and the updates contained in the recommendation tracker.

19. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The committee noted the next meeting would be held on Monday 1 October at 2.00 p.m.

The meeting ended at 1.00 pm

Chairman