

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 5 February 2018 at 2.00 pm

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

Councillors: ACR Chappell Mrs A Fisher, JA Hyde, Mr A James, JF Johnson, MT McEvilly and A Seldon

Co-optees: Mrs A Fisher and Mr A James

In attendance: Councillor JG Lester

Officers: C Baird, J Coleman, M Evans, JG Lester and A Scott and R Watson.

31. CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION AND APOLOGIES

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Chappell to the committee and thanked Councillor Lloyd-Hayes for the work she had undertaken since the formation of the committee in May 2017.

The Chairman also noted that this was Adam Scott's last meeting and thanks were extended to Mr Scott for his work with the committee.

The Chairman welcomed the co-optees to the meeting and explained that an informal meeting would be arranged shortly with them to discuss work with the scrutiny committee.

Apologies for the meeting were received from Mr Sell.

32. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor A Seldon declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item no. 7, School Examination Performance, as a governor at St Peter's School in Bromyard.

Councillor MT McEvilly declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item no.7, School Examination Performance, as a part time teacher.

Councillor FM Norman declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item no. 7, School Examination Performance and agenda item no. 8, Children and Young People's Plan as a member of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

33. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting on 4 December 2017 are agreed as a correct record.

34. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC (Pages 7 - 8)

A copy of the public question and written answer together with supplementary question and answer is attached to the minutes as appendix 1.

35. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

None.

36. SCHOOL EXAMINATION PERFORMANCE

The committee received a report by the Director for Children's Wellbeing concerning school examination performance from summer 2017. Lisa Fraser, Head of Learning and Achievement (HLA) introduced the report and provided a presentation on statistics around attainment. During the presentation she advised the committee that the school improvement service at the council relied on limited resource and was concerned with statutory functions primarily. Significant advancement in attainment had occurred in phonics for which commendation from the minister had been received. Challenges remained in key stage 2 mathematics with performance below the national average. Areas of development included work around vulnerable groups; performance of free school meals pupils, in particular, was mixed with outcomes varying from top to bottom quartile depending on the assessment indicator.

The committee made the comments below in the discussion that followed:

- The distinction between Ofsted ratings and the position of a school in the attainment league tables was queried. *The HLA explained that Ofsted took a holistic approach to assessing schools; the approach of the school improvement service was based on driving improvement through assessment of attainment.*
- It was noted that there was a significant gender gap in attainment in early years education and it was queried how it was proposed that this gap would be reduced? *There was a gender attainment gap which reflected national data. However, both boys and girls performed at a higher level than their peers. Girls' achievement was in the top 5 local authorities nationally; boys' achievement ranked in the second quartile.*
- What targets were in place to diminish the gap to the performance of disadvantaged pupils? *Herefordshire Council's Learning and Achievement Team intend to issue schools with targets focussing on the attainment of disadvantaged pupils.*
- The sum of £561,000 from the DfE was welcomed but it was queried whether the Council could have secured more funding. *The amount secured was a significant sum of money for Herefordshire but the Council would not be deterred from applying for additional pots of money to support teaching.*
- In light of the attainment of pupils at key stage 2 mathematics the small schools maths project was raised. It was noted that the project currently involved a small number of schools and it was queried what opportunities there were to roll-out the project to other schools. *If the programme was successful the approach*

would be disseminated across the county, it was noted that in order to move up a quartile in attainment only a small number of children were required to make improvements to their attainment.

- The effect of small cohorts on attainment and position in quartiles was raised. It was queried what analysis was undertaken to explain poor performance resulting from small cohorts. *It was acknowledged that some cohorts were very small and annual risk assessments were conducted on schools felt to be at risk. The issues surrounding attainment at schools identified at risk of poor performance were often deeper than small cohorts alone.*
- The receipt of set exam papers and course materials, close to the date of exams and SATs from the DfE affected attainment. Such issues compounded problems in attainment for less able pupils.
- The resources available to the school improvement service were raised. *The equivalent FTE in the service was 1.6. The Director for Children's Wellbeing explained that a significant reduction in funding for the service had led to a change in focus and the brokering of support for schools from leading headteachers across the county and beyond.*
- It was queried whether a breakdown in the statistics around NEETs in the county could be provided to include indicators around rural/urban/market towns/gender/traveller community. A briefing note was requested to also focus on the new data system for the analysis of statistics around NEETs. *Officers would look into the practicalities of producing such statistics.*
- Issues concerning assessment of attainment and safeguarding in respect of home schooling were raised. It was felt that the absence of regulation concerning home schooling posed a potential risk to vulnerable children. The lack of a statutory role for local authorities to monitor the provision of home schooling could result in a child receiving a poor education and could undermine safeguarding responsibilities. The lack of any requirement to register a child as home-schooled along with the absence of data relating to the number of home-schooled children was felt to be troubling. It was proposed that the committee write to the government to outline its concerns.
- The admission of children with mild special education needs (SEN) to specialist schools rather than mainstream schools was raised and whether this affected their education and life experiences detrimentally. The reliance on specialist schools could detract from the ability of mainstream schools to make provision for SEN and undermine inclusion. The prospect of a task and finish group on the topic was raised which could be looked at again after the committee had considered the Autism Strategy at its next meeting. *The Director Children's Wellbeing explained that the Council makes the decision on placements for pupils with EHC Plans, through consultation involving consideration of parental preference. Children could be placed in an appropriate school which could be an SEN school or mainstream establishment and detailed evidence would need to be considered in coming to a view on whether children were placed appropriately.*
- It was queried how many schools were subject to monitoring arrangements. *Any school considered inadequate or requiring improvement was potentially subject to monitoring arrangements. Currently four secondary schools and academies were subject to monitoring arrangements.*
- Statistics concerning Ofsted inspections indicated that 28% of pupils were at schools judged to be inadequate or requiring improvement. *This was attributable in large part to the Ofsted rating of a single secondary school in the county. In terms of regional and national statistics this was a relatively high proportion of children not at good and outstanding secondary schools. The cabinet member young people and children's wellbeing commented that the statistics concerning the number of primary schools deemed good or outstanding was cause for pride.*
- The committee asked about work with the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) and academies. A briefing note on the RSC was requested to provide

detail of where there was an overlap with the Council in terms of responsibility for school improvement. *It was confirmed that regular meetings would take place with the Commissioner to exchange detail of what actions were being undertaken in respect of school improvement. The distinction was drawn that academies were responsible for improving the school performance and the council was responsible for improving pupil performance.*

- The Chairman explained to the committee that following a request that she had raised it had been arranged that the executive summaries from Ofsted inspections would be circulated as part of the member ward update.

Resolved – that the committee:

- 1) Recognises positive attainment in a number of areas of school examination performance but in particular in the field of phonics;**
- 2) Requests a briefing note on the current level of NEETs, the new data recording system and a breakdown of statistics to include indicators around rural/urban/market towns/gender/traveller community;**
- 3) Requests a briefing note on the role of the Regional Schools Commissioner and a focus on areas of overlap with the Council; and**
- 4) Agrees to write to government to express concern regarding the lack of regulation and monitoring in respect of home schooling. The correspondence should include reference to the potential impacts of home schooling upon the educational achievements of children and safeguarding responsibilities of the Council.**

Mrs Fisher and Councillor JF Johnson left the meeting at 15.23.

37. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PLAN

The committee received a report from the Director Children's Wellbeing concerning the production of the children and young people's plan. There was a presentation by Richard Watson, Children's Joint Commissioning Manager and Amanda Price, Children's Commissioning and Contracts Lead. The committee was asked to consider the approach to the production of the new version of the plan and propose priorities for inclusion. The plan would include a review of the previous three years of the existing plan and would provide a strategic link to other existing documents such as the Health and Wellbeing Strategy. It was anticipated that a draft plan would be developed by April and consultation would be undertaken with schools and youth groups. An early version of the plan would be shared with the committee for consideration.

The committee made the comments below in the discussion that followed:

- The early engagement activity and feedback appeared to be from children in urban areas of Herefordshire. It was questioned how engagement would take account of children from rural area to ensure a fully representative plan of the county was produced. *It was confirmed that the early engagement was conducted in the market towns but schools throughout the county would be visited in February including those in rural areas.*
- It was hoped that the plan would complement other initiatives in Herefordshire including the Youth Project developed by Leominster Town Council.

- The committee queried what examples there were of projects involving the positive involvement of children and families and what the impact had been. *The children's commissioning and contracts lead explained that parents had been involved in: the recommissioning of disability services; the development of the mental health plan; and that it was intended that they would be closely involved in the development of the children's and young people plan.*
- How the plan would engage partners and ensure that they were committed to the priorities was raised. Youth safety and the role of West Mercia police force was raised in particular. *Part of the role of the Plan was to engage partners and seek to influence the role they can play in fulfilling its objective/priorities. The cabinet member young people and children's wellbeing explained that it was intended that partners would adopt the plan and feel an ownership for it. In respect of West Mercia police and youth safety it was felt that this was of greater concern to community safety.*
- Detail was requested regarding the legal status of the plan. *The Director Children's Wellbeing explained that it was not a statutory requirement but the plan formed part of the policy framework at the council and through engagement with key partners it would be adopted by local organisations such as the CCG.*
- The provision of transport and youth facilities were key issues which should be included in the plan. *It was confirmed that an element of the plan would focus on the aspirations of young people for Herefordshire.*
- The committee queried those areas of the existing plan to which it was difficult to apply quantifiable measures. The notion of proxy measures was queried. *It was confirmed that certain areas of the previous plan were updated with regular data but in other areas it was very difficult to produce evidence to assess the success of priorities. Proxy measures relied on evidence and data not directly related to a key priority but which provided a general context in which indications of progress could be analysed.*

RESOLVED - that the committee:

- 1) Supports the inclusion of: obesity; dental health; mental health and wellbeing; transport; and youth facilities as key areas of focus for the plan;**
- 2) Supports the implementation of a robust monitoring framework for the new version of the Plan; and**
- 3) Asks for the draft Plan to be presented to the committee ahead of consideration at Cabinet and full Council.**

38. WORK PROGRAMME REVIEW

The committee received and noted the work programme for the remainder of 2017/18. The chairman explained that there would be six meetings of the committee in 2018/19 in order to allow for more draft executive decisions to be considered at committee before going to Cabinet.

The Assistant Director Safeguarding and Family Support updated the committee on the regional adoption agency; Adoption Central England (ACE). Herefordshire Council had applied to become part of the agency in 2017 but consideration of this application had been delayed due to the general election and change in the responsible government minister. Adoption Central England would become a legal entity in February 2018 consisting of those authorities and partners who had been formally admitted. Herefordshire Council along with Birmingham Social care were awaiting a decision to formally join the agency which was likely to occur in May 2018. Until that time a request

had been sent to the board of ACE to request that the council is granted observer status at board meetings to ensure that arrangements can be undertaken to prepare the council and its services for the potential of admission to ACE later in the year.

The Chairman raised the establishment of a scrutiny panel to receive updates and scrutinise progress against the objective of reducing the number of looked after children and realising those savings recently agreed as part of the revenue budget 2018/19. Councillor CA Gandy and Councillor A Seldon were appointed to the Panel.

Resolved – that the committee appoints Councillor CA Gandy and Councillor A Seldon to form the scrutiny panel to examine performance against the objective to reduce the number of looked after children.

39. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was 16 April at 10.15 a.m.

The meeting ended at 16:25

Chairman

Appendix 1 - Question from members of the public and responses

Question Number	Questioner	Question	Question to
PQ 1	Dr Selfe, Leominster	Can the scrutiny committee make detail available as to how the Local Offer and the SEN service meets the obligations contained in the Children and Families Act s3(57) and will it commit to scrutinise arrangements, as part of its work programme, for the independent support service ahead of proposed government funding taking effect in April 2019?	Chairman of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee
<p>Chairman's response</p> <p>The obligations contained in the Children and Families Act s 3(57) covers the resolution of disputes between the Local Authority and parents and carers. The Council's SEN Team refer to the Special Educational Needs and Disability Information, Advice and Service (SENDIAS) in their standard letters to parents and carers and offer this service as the means of resolving disputes. The Council's Local Offer can be found through the Council Website search facility. This also provides information about SENDIAS. The Council is currently in the process of reviewing its information, advice and dispute resolution arrangements to ensure that they meet national expectations.</p> <p>The Independent Support Service is a service commissioned nationally through one of the Government's delivery partners. As such it is beyond the remit of Herefordshire Council's Scrutiny Committee. Our understanding is that there will be new national arrangements commissioned for the period April 2018-March 2020.</p> <p>It was explained that there was an opportunity to meet with Les Knight, Head of Additional Needs, to discuss the matter.</p>			
<p>Supplementary Question</p> <p>Over 1,000 children in Herefordshire are subject to Education Health and Care Plans which are very difficult and complex for already beleaguered parents who need help and advice. SENDIAS at the Council is staffed by one part time employee and cannot be considered independent as the employee is a Herefordshire Council member of staff. What would be the provision in the interim between funding ceasing for the service in March and new government funding in April 2019.</p>			
<p>Response to supplementary question (provided by the Director Children's Wellbeing)</p> <p>The Council had information that the new service would be in effect from 2018 not 2019. It was suggested that this was a matter which could be looked into with Les Knight. In respect of the independence of the member of staff involved in SENDIAS it was noted that although employed through the Council the individual was independent of the special educational needs service; this was a further issue which could be explored with Mr Knight.</p>			

