

Minutes of the meeting of Children and young people scrutiny committee held at Herefordshire Council Offices, Plough Lane, Hereford, HR4 0LE on Tuesday 22 March 2022 at 2.30 pm

Present: Councillor Phillip Howells (Chairperson)
Councillor Jennie Hewitt (Vice-chairperson)

Councillors: Graham Andrews, Helen l'Anson, James, Mike Jones, Jim Kenyon and David Summers

In attendance Councillor Diana Toynbee, Cabinet Member for Children and Families
Councillor Kath Hey
Ruth Whittingham - Head of Law and Legal Business Partner Children and Families
James Kempton (LGA scrutiny mentor)

Officers: Democratic services manager, Service Director - Education, Skills and Learning, Interim Service Director Safeguarding, QA & Improvement and Head of Law and Legal Business Partner, Children and Families, Director of Public Health Community Democratic Service Officers, Democratic Service Manager

72. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Mr Sam Pratley, Education Co-optee, Mr Darryl Freeman, Corporate Director, Children's and Young People, Jane Ellis Healthwatch.

Councillors Toni Fagan and Helen l'Anson, attended the meeting remotely and did not vote on the resolutions of the Committee.

73. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Andrew Teale – Standing in for Sam Pratley

74. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

75. MINUTES

Resolved: It was resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 22 February 2022 be approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chairperson.

At this point it was put forward that the actions and minute tracker be brought forward to just after the minutes, but after discussion and committee members not being advised in advance, it was agreed to review these at the end of the meeting, but that in future meetings the action tracker would be reviewed after the minutes were approved.

The Chair was pleased to report to the Committee that the Archdiocese of Cardiff co-optee had been nominated and this would now begin the induction process, with the view of being a full member by the April meeting. Recommendations have been made to the legal team in regards to the parent's co-optee position. The process still needs completing and induction needs to take place, with hopes that the committee will be able to agree the co-opted member at the next meeting in April.

76. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from Members of the Public

77. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

There were no questions from Councillors.

78. IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON THE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF PUPILS IN SCHOOLS

The Assistant Director for Education, Development and Skills introduced the report the purpose of which was for the Committee to consider the impact of the pandemic on the mental health and well-being of children in our education system

During discussion the following principal points were noted:

- Schools are still experiencing the pandemic and its effects, therefore they are not yet in the post-pandemic stage. It is still a very active issue and the impact being felt is not yet fully understood. Work continues with schools to assess the full effects that COVID has had on both children's and teacher's mental health.
- Concerns were noted that early years was ill prepared for the issues of the pandemic. But it is hoped, as a result of continuing review, that we will see future improvements.
- Early years issues have been played down due to resources being stretched when the pandemic arrived. Half of nurseries closed in the first week or so of the pandemic.
- Recovery is one of the priorities in improving advisory support and how nurseries can manage their business model to be more resilient.
- It was recognised that perinatal assistance was introduced to support with the 0+ years. Communication with perinatal services is up and running, and partnership meetings are taking place. Information is being shared between different organisations, but it was acknowledged that further communication is needed to ensure all perinatal services can contribute and benefit from this assistance
- Schools have been offered additional training with pastoral care. However, it is felt that this has not been enough and not systematically applied.
- Funds from central government exist, but they tend to come with conditions attached, with the money only able to be spent on specific things. We are seeing that most funding is now community facing instead of school facing.
- Further, conditions for some grants require schools to use their reserves before being eligible to apply for recovery grant funding.
- Following further questioning it was explained that the number of extra pupils being affected by mental health because of the pandemic is unclear outside of the normal numbers the services would expect to see.
- It was noted that special schools should receive particular recognition in their management of the pandemic, as they have had extra hurdles to surmount.
- It was explained that elective home education officers have been visiting families in their homes. There has not been as high a spike in the number who elected for home education as maybe expected.

- Mental health referrals in the schools only went live in the autumn 2021 and currently there has been no high influx of referrals. Where referrals are made all young people are seen within 26 weeks, and the majority of young people are seen quicker than that.
- Noted that schools such as Blackmarstons, and Barrs Court school being excellent schools in regards to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and support groups that are in place.
- Riverside school sends out its teaching assistants to fetch some children into school and once they arrive at school they then feed them. While other schools do adopt this practice it is at the schools' discretion as to whether they do offer this service.
- Getting children active to help with their mental health is seen as a positive, but getting into swimming pools, as an example. It was commented that this has proved to be challenging and could be improved upon.
- The example of Hereford City Council sponsoring the junior park run was mentioned as a good example of helping children to get active and had shown real benefits in aiding children to improve their mental health. This can be socially prescribed to children, as a healthy body can give a healthy mind.
- A lot of schools have had support for educational catch-up as a result of children falling behind with their educational attainment. As a result Personal Social Health and Economic (PHSE) was described as falling to the side-lines because of academic catch up.
- Senior officers agreed that despite Covid grants the funding for schools had in real terms been less than in previous years
- It was noted that the council should be lobbying MP's about the crisis that is facing children in schools, in an attempt to obtain higher levels of funding.
- Mental health support teams in schools now referred to as Wellbeing and Emotional Support Teams (WEST), and mirrors the graduated response. It is a national programme and by 2024 the NHS want over half of schools in the country to have support in schools
- Nominated person from WEST working in each of the schools in Herefordshire as a mental health lead.
- Identified 20 primary schools of most in need after looking at health inequality data. These schools are yet to confirm they want to take part.
- The graduated pathway is what schools are expected to follow to make provisions for children with a range of special educational needs. Ranging for all children to those with complex needs. This covers all elements of special educational needs. The pathway dictates what levels of support should be available at each stage of education from early years all the way up to Key stage 4.
- All stages of the graduated pathway include teacher and pastoral support. Key stage 1 and 2 see the use of Nurture groups. Key stages 2, 3 and 4 use the pupil referral units.
- Nurture groups exist in 6 of the primary schools across the county. This allows the child to have a year of assessment and specialist input to help with their special educational needs. At the end of the year the child may be ready to reintegrate back into mainstream schools, or it may be deemed that they have further educational needs which could result in them needing to be placed at Brookfield's School for a short/long term.
- The nurture group is overseen by a principal education psychologist. There are currently too many people wanting to attend these groups, but not enough to set up a nurture group in each school. As such this has resulted in gaps in the graduated pathways. There is a growing need which we are observing, but lack of resources to support this.
- After making progress in a nurture group the child may be settled and not wish to move back to their original school. As such they are allowed to remain in the

school and transport will be funded for a child living over three miles away as it is seen as the closest school that can meet the child's needs.

- In the event a child is excluded from the school, it was explained to the committee that it was right that the money should follow the child in a swift manner. This is something that was noted as not to be happening at present. If the child is excluded from a Local Authority run school it is easier to achieve this than if it was from an Academy.
- Private schools are not eligible for the mental health lead training funding, but can access the course with their own funds.
- It was explained that children can be more vulnerable when at home, and if the child has mental health spending time at home can make them more vulnerable. Excluded children can go to a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU), but this is during school time and very little in the way of extracurricular or community activities are given.
- Turning to particular mental health conditions, it was explained that, for example, diagnosing autism is difficult and uses a multi-disciplinary process since 2018. Using this approach, however, it has been possible to evidence that more people have been diagnosed in the last 12 months than previous 12 months. This is widely felt to be caused by Covid catch-up. The number of children with autism is not increasing, in actual terms.
- Diagnosis could happen at 0+ years, but tends to lend itself more towards 2-3 years. Nurseries can make these referrals or paediatricians have the ability too.
- It was stated that not every school will have a mental health resource - some Multi Academy Trusts, for example, share this resource.
- The committee presented a shared view that every school should have involvement and mental health support should be the culture in schools. Emotional resilience needs to be built in all children, and should be focused upon
- Graduated pathway is a good scheme, and looks promising. If a school tries to exclude a child the inclusion officer will try to ensure this process is taken up and look to ensure the school takes the plan forward. If a school applies for funding they have to prove they have used the graduated pathway.
- There has been surge in schools wanting to be accommodating to all their children's social, educational, and health needs at the beginning of term time, but often as the term and year progresses frustrations and mental exhaustion of the teachers leads to a higher rate of exclusion and absenteeism. Concerns that due to rising mental health concerns in teachers it could correlate downwards as some children may not feel safe.
- In regards to funding from the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), historically, Herefordshire has been less well funded than its Worcester counterpart. Over the past two years the proportionality of the funding has been more heavily weighted towards Herefordshire to help level up the services provided. As such Herefordshire is getting more funding for mental health, but issues were raised around how the funding is being used and where it is going.
- The time in which a child in crisis wait to be seen after referral was discussed to be up to 26 weeks. The committee saw this as not being good enough. 1 day of a child in crisis is too long, but half a year is too much. More funding is coming to help with crisis response, but it was stressed that all children will be seen within 26 weeks although most are seen much sooner.
- Noted that there is a need to explore what is happening with mental health within GP practises. Currently there are three GP practices in Herefordshire that may have mental health services. This could be an item referred onto All Ages Commission.
- All pandemic babies have access to speech and language enrichment activities. Currently children are seen at 9 months and 2 years to measure their development. If anything is picked up, then this will be referred and support provided where possible to help.

The following recommendations were read out to the committee. They were proposed by the chair and seconded by Cllr Andrews. The recommendations were carried unanimously

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Having reviewed the impact of the pandemic on mental health and wellbeing of pupils in schools, the committee recommended that:

- a) If/when a child is excluded from a school, the money follows the child within a month so that their special /mental health needs are addressed quickly. To include lobbying the CCG for funding
- b) A report and methodological approach is prepared to review the progress at the CYPSC meeting, including national comparator data to report to the committee about what action planning Herefordshire is considering to address the problems within our county.
- c) A review be undertaken and a report be prepared on the impact of COVID 'enrichment' initiatives, including the WEST programme, is reviewed and the analysis provided as to which schools have been involved in this initiative, including how many schools knew about it.
- d) Consideration be given to a T+F group or spotlight review with schools to encourage and support parents to ask for and take up the various mental health initiatives in their school setting. To be added to the work programme.
- e) More resource to be allocated for Brookfield's and the other special schools – with particular emphasis on investment in early years, and Yr 1 and 2 to prevent problems being exacerbated in relation to the impact of COVID
- f) CYPSC to lobby local MPs to lobby DfE to prioritise funding, supported by a funding bid and business case, to fund two attendance officers.

79. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING: DATA AND PREVENTION

Before this presentation and discussion the chair proposed extending the meeting for 15 minutes until 5.45pm and this was accepted by all attending.

The Consultant in Public Health introduced the report on the overview of work that has been undertaken to inform our understanding of children and young people's (CYP's) mental health in Herefordshire, and the universal and preventative programmes that support good mental health and wellbeing.

During discussion the following principal points were noted:

- During the pandemic a lot of children are now using social media, the pressures and bullying online are causing issues. The police are leading on the worst examples of this.
- It could be something for local government to look into, and for the schools to monitor some of the children.
- The pressures that children are under was raised and suggested that it could lead to grooming and sexual exploitation. Local government should be getting a handle on this and liaising with the police.
- Need to get a grip of bullying on platforms online. The committee would like to see local government take a closer look into this, as it leads onto mental health and abuse issues.

- Engagement with the faith communities is supported by Talk Communities, which aims to reach all different forms of communities. Cross directorate initiative needed to support this.

The following recommendations were proposed and seconded and carried unanimously.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Committee recommended that:

- a) The children's commissioners' newsletter be circulated to all councillors.
- b) Local government level social media platforms are explored in their relation to their impact on the wellbeing of young people and the risks presented to young people into being drawn into sexual exploitation and bullying using these platforms be investigated

80. WORK PROGRAMME REVIEW

The Committee agreed to defer this item until the next meeting.

ACTIONS:

- Send out a report with an update of the proposed work programme and a list of dates for suggested next meetings.

81. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was noted as Tuesday 26 April at 2.30pm.

The meeting ended at 5.42 pm

Chairperson