

## **Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

### **Tuesday, 16 March 2021, Online - 2.00 pm**

		<b>Minutes</b>
<b>Present:</b>		Mr T A L Wells (Chairman), Mr S J Mackay (Vice Chairman), Ms P Agar, Mr B Allbut, Mr B Clayton, Mrs F M Oborski, Ms T L Onslow and Mrs J A Potter
<b>Also attended:</b>		Mr A C Roberts, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families Mr M J Hart, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Education and Skills Julie Wills, Headteacher, Upton upon Severn Primary School Nick Gibson, Headteacher, North Bromsgrove High School Derek Benson, Independent Chair of the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children's Partnership Jane Stanley, Worcestershire Healthwatch Tina Russell (Interim Director of Children's Services / Interim Chief Executive, Worcestershire Children First), Sarah Wilkins (Director of Education and Early Help, Worcestershire Children First), Nikki Jones (Assistant Director for Education Quality and Improvement, Worcestershire Children First), Gabrielle Stacey (Assistant Director for SEND and Vulnerable Learners, Worcestershire Children First), Samantha Morris (Scrutiny Co-ordinator) and Alison Spall (Overview and Scrutiny Officer).
<b>Available Papers</b>		The members had before them:  A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated); B. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 29 January 2021 (previously circulated).  (A copy of document A will be attached to the signed Minutes).
<b>474</b>	<b>Apologies and Welcome</b>	Apologies were received from Mr T Baker-Price and Mr P McDonald.
<b>475</b>	<b>Declaration of Interest and of any Party Whip</b>	None.
<b>476</b>	<b>Public Participation</b>	None.

**477 Confirmation of the Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 29 January 2021 were agreed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman.

**478 Educational Outcomes 2020/21 Update**

The Chairman welcomed Mrs Julie Wills, Headteacher of Upton upon Severn Primary school and Mr Nick Gibson, Headteacher of North Bromsgrove High school who had been invited to join the meeting to provide a school perspective on the impact of COVID-19.

The Panel had received a report which provided an update on educational outcomes for:

- the academic year 2019/2020, in particular the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the measurement of educational outcomes; and
- the academic year 2020/21 including the impact of Covid-19 and next steps.

Mrs Wills explained that she was the Chair of the Worcestershire Headteacher's Primary Partnership. In this role she worked closely with the Leadership of Worcestershire Children First (WCF) and disseminated information and updates back to the partnership members. She also met regularly with the Chairs of the other Partnerships in the county, and during the first term of the pandemic they met every day, to ensure that no school was left feeling isolated with issues that were arising.

In preparing her presentation for this meeting, Mrs Wills had consulted with all of the Headteachers in the partnership and 71 had submitted their views, which had been incorporated. The statistical findings and key feedback received were as follows:

- 93% of Headteachers were worried about the impact of COVID-19 on pupils learning. Key issues of concern were those children who had not engaged with remote learning, learning behaviours and children's well-being and mental health.
- 71.8% of Headteachers felt that both educational and social impact would be felt equally, with the balance of the remainder being towards social impact. The findings had indicated that this lockdown had been harder for parents to manage than earlier ones. The key focus was on social and emotional health and well-being.

- 97.2% of Headteachers felt confident that a secure system was in place that accurately reflected children's attainment, despite the absence of external assessment. The Panel was assured that teachers had the experience and expertise to ensure assessment processes were robust and accurate. Much of assessment was through teachers' observations and Mrs Wills explained that teachers had an intuitive feel for their children's development needs going forward.
- 97.2% of Headteachers felt that their school had the capacity to provide continued improved educational provision.

Mrs Wills led the meeting through her presentation, and the following summarises the resultant key areas of discussion and Members questions:

- Whilst headteachers could not know the long-term impact of the pandemic on children, they were clear that children must feel confident and happy to enable effective learning to take place. There had been a very positive return to school this month for most children with a sense of joy at being back in school with their friends. None of the schools had reported any major problems. Members of the Panel reported similar experiences in schools they were connected with.
- In terms of children in pre-school and reception, it was highlighted that whilst these year groups were open during this last lockdown, some parents had kept their children at home. The Assistant Director for Education, Quality and Improvement explained that some of the youngest children were finding the return to school difficult, but that it was early days and the School Improvement Team were on hand to offer additional support where required, such as with phonics. There was also considerable support in place for children due to start school in September.
- The Director of Education and Early Help advised that in order to understand the experience of the very youngest children, an Early Years Task Group had been set up, in conjunction with colleagues in the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust (HWHCT), with a focus on attendance and encouraging take up of early years places. On a positive note, she was able to report that attendance in this age group was now increasing steadily.

- On the practicalities of social distancing with young children, Mrs Wills explained that with the very youngest children it was impractical and so risk assessments had been put in place which ensured that, when appropriate, staff were able to make use of personal protective equipment (PPE). They had been able to put certain measures in place in her school, for instance individual desks for Reception children, and reading screens which children had adapted to easily.
- In response to a query regarding the educational impact on disadvantaged children, Mrs Wills explained that these children had actually been in school during lockdown and whilst it was too early to ascertain the impact on their learning, in her school they had flourished as a result of smaller groups and more direct input from teachers. The Interim Chief Executive highlighted the distinction between disadvantaged and vulnerable children. Since Christmas a maximum of 50% of vulnerable learners had been attending school and she had concerns for those who had struggled to get support at home.
- In terms of elective home education (EHE), it was noted that there had been a general increase in numbers of children being educated at home. The Director reported that there had been a significant increase in enquiries about EHE compared to the previous year, though this had fallen since the start of this year. The Early Help team were having early conversations with those considering this route.
- Mrs Wills advised that there had been a gradual process of change within schools with systems now in place to enable on-line learning. Home school liaison played a key role as did the roll out of computers to those in need. Teachers had grown in confidence with the learning platforms available and the tools to enhance the effectiveness of their lessons. A Member commented that the facility for on-line learning in the Spring and early Summer had been slow to be implemented, but during this last lockdown when children were able to see their teacher and engage with them, that had made a real difference. The Director of Early Help and Education commented that there had been some quick learning by some schools, but that the lack of access to IT had been problematic. Vulnerable children had been a key focus as well as setting up systems to ensure full education coverage from

September, including for those required to self-isolate at home.

- The issue of connectivity problems was raised leading to problems with remote learning. The Director advised that there were lots of issues with connectivity, but that over time these were identified and resolved. With school being mandatory since September, schools have had to work in different ways to find ways to address the need.
- Mrs Wills drew attention to a chart which set out the most significant barriers to positively impacting children's learning, as identified by Headteachers. The issues were pupil and staff mental health and well-being, restrictions with premises and financial issues, the latter especially for schools that ran businesses for wraparound care.
- Going forward, other areas of concern for headteachers included the lack of priority for school staff to be vaccinated, potential bubble closures, staff capacity and parental anxiety about risk.

The Chairman then invited Mr Gibson to share his school's experience with the Panel. Mr Gibson advised that from the start of the pandemic his school took the view that consistency was key and therefore the remote learning structure that was established was designed to emulate the school day with usual timetables being followed. Towards the end of Lockdown, live lessons had been trialled and this had begun a learning journey for all staff and pupils. One key learning point was that the pedagogical approach had to be altered to ensure pupils were engaged and fully understanding the lesson being delivered. There was more scaffolding of learning and a greater emphasis on sharpening questioning and testing to gain assurance of understanding.

The Panel was advised that regular feedback from parents and students was sought and acted upon, for instance with the reduction in length of lessons and setting out expectations and topic areas being covered to keep parents informed. In terms of ensuring that students were engaged with lessons, the school introduced a prompt button that a teacher could use if it was felt that a student was disengaged. This prompt would send a text to the parent so that they could check on their child. The introduction of this system had made a significant difference to the engagement of some students.

Mr Gibson explained that his staff were committed to

offering the best possible learning experience, but in the interests of transparency and to gain external verification for this, the School Improvement Team had been asked to provide an objective overview of the remote learning experience, which had been helpful.

With regard to some of the blocks that had been experienced during the year, the key ones had been:

- The impact on staff well-being resulting from Government announcements requiring action, which were received without any prior notice.
- The shortage of laptops was initially a significant issue, but the local authority had been a tremendous help with this.
- Capturing those students on the cusp of pupil premium to ensure that the relevant funding and support was received.
- Broadband had caused problems initially, especially for those students attending lessons via their phone.

In terms of what had been learnt during the last year, Mr Gibson also highlighted some key factors:

- the solution focussed approach was the best way to cope with the ever- changing situation.
- Innovation and versatility were key requirements for all staff.
- An appreciation of the value of face to face teaching and learning.
- Parents gaining a greater understanding the value of education and of being able to attend school.
- Improving the understanding of scaffolding approaches and the use of visualisers and modelling techniques.
- Understanding that vulnerable/fragile learners had preferred some aspects of remote learning, for instance, they had felt more confident to make contributions in lessons.

As to where the school was currently at with assessment of students, Mr Gibson advised that they had a wealth of evidence-based assessment to use, including results from mock exams taken on site in December. Going forward, there would be a focus on consolidating the learning of the students in Years 9, 10 and 12.

The Chairman thanked Mr Gibson for his comprehensive overview. Members asked questions which were

**479 Proposed  
Delivery Model  
for Medical  
Education  
Provision in  
Worcestershire**

responded to as follows:

- The school had employed a number of techniques to boost engagement with remote lessons, which was recorded at 97%.
- Liaison with other schools in their pyramid had continued throughout the year, with preparations ongoing with Middle schools in respect of the new cohort of students in September.
- There had been an increase in safeguarding concerns during the year and it had been ensured that all students had the ability and opportunity to offload to a member of staff about any issue that was affecting their social and emotional well-being.

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Education and Skills thanked the Headteachers for their contributions to this meeting and for their efforts during this difficult year. He appreciated the way in which schools had adapted to change during the pandemic, remaining open for vulnerable learners and children of key workers throughout. Moving forward, as Cabinet Member he would be looking to ensure that the learning outcomes of vulnerable learners were unaffected whilst also seeking the most positive outcomes for all learners.

The Church Representative thanked the local authority for the effective way in which all schools had been supported during lockdown, which was greatly appreciated.

The Chairman thanked Mr Gibson and Mrs Wills for attending the meeting and for their useful insight into the experience of schools in the past year.

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Education and Skills reminded the Panel of the lengthy review process that had been undertaken on the provision of Medical Education within the County, of which the Panel had received several progress reports. The findings and proposals were due to be considered at Cabinet on 18 March, and if approval was gained, the next steps would be taken towards finalising the journey leading to a formal commissioning process taking place later this year. The Director of Education and Early Help outlined the Report which the Panel had before them and commented how pleased she had been with the way the review was carried out and the engagement of health colleagues in the process.

The Assistant Director, SEND and Vulnerable Learners highlighted some key aspects of her presentation on the medical education pathway proposal and details of the proposed multi-agency preventative approach, as follows:

- A recap of the timeline of activity since January 2020 when approval was given for a multi-agency co-produced review and design of medical education provision. During the year workshops had been held drawing together the stakeholder feedback and putting forward proposals for consideration.
- A specific change which the Assistant Director wished to draw the Panel's attention to, was that following consultation with the HWHCT, the idea of an Outreach role to support the early stages of the pathway, had now been altered to a Liaison role. The exact details of this role, for instance how it would dovetail with the existing teams supporting families, was to be determined.
- The Panel was informed that with 80% of the Medical Education Team (MET) students identified as having anxiety issues, the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) were now providing timely training for all schools to support them in their role. From October 2021, Mental Health Support teams would also be working directly in some schools to provide additional specialist capacity.
- The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and the CCG had agreed to be members of the Multi-agency Assessment and Review Panel. In preparation for the above, CAMHS had agreed to revise their triage and assessment considerations for their entry criteria for Tier 2 and 3, to review the impact of a young person's mental health on their ability to access education and the necessary support required to manage that.
- The CCG had agreed to seek additional funding options to improve the timeliness of support and outcomes for children and young people with autism.
- The overall funding basis for the provision of medical education had been looked at in detail. It was necessary to support a wider pathway being developed and to ensure a broad and balanced curriculum was provided for learners, the latter being an issue raised by learners during the stakeholder consultation. This had been raised at



the Schools Forum which had been supportive of the need to improve the provision to the MET. The proposed new funding arrangements would mean that in addition to the current funding arrangements, the MET would additionally gain from schools, 80% of the notional £6k special education needs funding and 100% of the pupil premium grant for each child.

- If proposals were approved by Cabinet, the next steps would involve a soft marketing testing of education providers, then stakeholder consultation on the policy approach. The formal process for seeking an education provider would take place in the Autumn of this year, with the service expected to commence in September 2022.
- It was highlighted that the new Medical education service provider would be required to be separately registered as a DfE registered provider, with the rationale for this being set out in the report.

Members were pleased that the review had been carried out in such a careful and considered manner to ensure that the best way forward would be achieved for this vulnerable group of young people. They were also supportive of the new provider being registered with the DfE which would ensure that external quality control and scrutiny would be provided.

Members made a number of comments and raised questions, which were responded to as follows:

- In response to the issue of the pathway to the MET being frustrated by the difficulty in obtaining an appointment at CAMHS, the Assistant Director explained that the priority was to ensure that many children's needs were met earlier without the need for an appointment with CAMHS, if this was not deemed necessary. Under the guidance of the Review and Assessment Panel a Liaison person would be able to gain clarity and establish what the appropriate support should be for a child, with various possible routes considered for this to be implemented. The option for an appointment with the specialist CAMHS service would still be available where this was deemed appropriate.
- The Mental Health support teams would be working in the 3 areas that were specifically identified as part of the Government's bid criteria. Although the work would be focussed on these

areas, it was anticipated that the learning acquired through this process would be able to be shared across the county. In addition, going forward, as the Government identified good practice from this initiative, it was hoped that this would also be able to be shared with all schools.

- A Member commented that the co-location of the MET with the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) on the same site in Kidderminster had not been appropriate and therefore the location chosen for the new MET provision would be crucial. She also stressed that historically the buildings used for the MET in her area had been sub-standard and that it should be ensured that good quality buildings were used for this new provision. The Panel would keep an eye on the proposed locations going forward.
- Whilst supportive of the close working with health services, a Member expressed some concern about the pressure being placed on mainstream schools. The Assistant Director assured the Panel that schools had given their full backing to the model and that they were working to equip schools with the necessary tools, guidance and training to be able to maintain children successfully, with some schools already successfully doing this. Schools were very keen that they should take the lead role to guide the multi-agency planning process and the new liaison role being created would provide the additional support where needed, for instance where there were complex cases.
- The details of the funding modelling which had been carefully worked out were set out in the Cabinet report. It would ensure that the individual funding which was expected to provide education and support for an individual child, was being allocated to the setting where they were currently based, in order for this to take place. The extra funding for the MET would help to ensure a broader, richer curriculum for those students.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member, the Director and Assistant Director for their contributions to the meeting.

The Chairman welcomed Derek Benson, the Independent Chair of the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership (WSCP) to present the WSCP Annual Report for 2019-20.

## Annual Report 2019-20

As background to the report, the Independent Chair reminded the Panel that in September 2019 the WSCP had formally replaced the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB). The partnership was made up of 3 safeguarding partners, the local authority, the CCG, and the Police. The partners were required to publish a report at least every 12 months detailing progress regarding their responsibilities for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in the area. The last annual report of the WSCB had covered the year to March 2019, therefore this Annual report was covering the period from April to September 2019, when the WSCB was still in place, as well as the 12-month period to September 2020.

The Panel was informed that the new streamlined WSCP arrangements had proved to offer a more dynamic and effective decision-making function. There was strong involvement in each of the WSCP Sub-groups from all of the partnership agencies, ensuring that there was an efficient multi-agency child safeguarding system in place in the county.

The Independent Chair advised that he was leaving the role at the end of this month and thanked the previous Chief Executive (WCF), the Interim Chief Executive and the Cabinet Members for all of their support in ensuring that the current safeguarding position had been able to be achieved.

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families thanked the Independent Chair for his efforts and integrity in the role and for the new style of report. Other Panel Members added their thanks to the Independent Chair for his effective chairing of the partnership and for the much-improved position of the WSCP. The Interim Chief Executive praised the Independent Chair and the whole team involved in the safeguarding partnership for how well it was working. The interim Chief Executive was pleased with the Report and how the key personnel from the partner agencies had proved to be a great support and challenge for each other.

It was noted that Steve Eccleston had been appointed as the new Independent Chairman.

Members raised a few questions which led to the following areas of discussion:

- Referring to a potential increased incidence in

domestic violence during lockdown, concern was expressed about the impact of this on children and young people. The Independent Chairman advised that a recent national report had indicated that there had not been a massive spike in incidents, although a careful eye was being kept on referrals coming through the Family Front Door. A multi-agency approach was in place to deal with any complex issues that might come to light.

- The Interim Chief Executive advised that as yet only a small increase in the safeguarding impact of lockdown had been seen. In terms of domestic abuse specifically, there had been a rise in the lower level domestic abuse pressures resulting from lockdown and in the extreme high-risk harm where domestic abuse already existed.
- The Family Front Door had seen an increase in activity and appropriate help and interventions were set in place. All in all, the Interim Chief Executive advised it was a very concerning picture.
- On the theme of domestic abuse, a Member referred to a scheme operating in some areas whereby local government employees, such as refuse collectors, were trained to keep their eyes open for anything suspicious when they went about their duties. She felt this could be something to consider going forward.
- A Member raised concerns that with the restrictions of COVID, tactics seemed to have changed with county lines drugs activity which appeared to have switched to using local children. The Independent Chair advised that the Get Safe work was ground-breaking and innovative, with the flexibility to adjust to any new ways of working regarding criminal activity. He commented that the use of local children was not a new development and he was certain that the local team would be aware of the situation on the ground.
- The progress of a Child Safeguarding Practice Review, previously put on hold at the start of the pandemic, was queried. The Interim Chief Executive advised that this review was now complete, with a publication date awaited.
- In respect of the Headteachers' Safeguarding Group and areas for development (detailed on page 42 of the Agenda), it was questioned whether there was currently an element of under-reporting? The Interim Chief Executive explained

**481 Work  
Programme  
2020/21**

that this was not the case and that it related to the thresholds of reporting and making sure that reporting was tied into the early help offer and the support given to schools to better evidence the offer and identify the impact on children. She explained that this was not something just for schools, but for all the partners to act upon in response to the Ofsted recommendation on early help. Progress on this had been on hold due to the pandemic, but it had become increasingly problematic during Covid and there was now a refreshed approach to give more clarity to the offer.

- As part of progressing the early help agenda, the Panel was informed that Worcestershire Children First had commissioned a piece of work with the University of Worcester regarding the early help support received by families.
- The Interim Chief Executive confirmed that Corporate Parenting would be covered in the Induction process for newly elected members, as part of one of 3 key briefings.

The Chairman thanked the Independent Chair for the report and wished him well for the future.

The Panel received its work programme and the following issues were discussed and actions determined:

- Sufficiency Strategy - The Interim Chief Executive advised that the Sufficiency Strategy, currently on the Panel's Work Programme was to be considered at Cabinet on 10 June. It was acknowledged that there would therefore not be the opportunity for the Panel to scrutinise the report in advance of Cabinet, due to the next formal Panel meeting not taking place until 16 July. It was agreed, however, that the item would be included on the agenda for the July meeting for discussion.
- Supporting Families First – It was agreed that this report would cover the impact of COVID on this service.
- Vulnerable learners – A Member suggested the Task Group on elective home education (EHE) should be a priority for taking forward after the elections. The Interim Chief Executive suggested a report on vulnerable learners be added to the Work Programme in the first instance covering the 3 cohorts of vulnerable learners (one of which was EHE), prior to a decision on whether an in-depth

scrutiny on EHE was required. This was supported as a way forward.

- Catholic Co-opted Church Representative (for education matters) – It was highlighted that the Panel had not had the benefit of a Roman Catholic representative on the Panel for a number of years. It was agreed that the Archdiocese of Birmingham would be contacted to seek to secure a nominee for the Panel.

As this was her last meeting before the County Council elections, the Chairman took the opportunity to thank Mrs Jane Potter for her valuable contribution to the education agenda over a number of years.

The Chairman then thanked everyone for their attendance and participation in the meeting.

The meeting ended at 4.38 pm

Chairman .....