

## **Minutes of the Children and Families**

### **Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

#### **County Hall, Worcester**

**Tuesday, 11 January 2022, 10.00 am**

---

#### **Present:**

Cllr Tracey Onslow (Chairman), Cllr Dan Boatright, Cllr David Chambers, Cllr Matt Jenkins, Cllr Steve Mackay, Cllr Jo Monk, Cllr Tony Muir and Cllr David Ross

#### **Also attended:**

Cllr Shirley Webb, Adult Services and Well Being O&S Panel member  
Cllr Lynn Denham, Adult Services and Well Being O&S Panel member  
Cllr Paul Harrison, Adult Services and Well Being O&S Panel member  
Cllr Emma Stokes, Adult Services and Well Being O&S Panel member  
Cllr Andy Roberts, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families

Cllr Marcus Hart, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Education  
Cllr Adrian Hardman, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Adult Social Care  
Cllr Tom Wells, Chairman of the OSPB  
Sally-Anne Osborne, Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust  
Dr Susanne Friess, Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust  
Jenny Dalloway, NHS Herefordshire and Worcestershire Clinical Commissioning Group  
Jane Stanley, Healthwatch Worcestershire

Tina Russell, Director of Children's Services / Chief Executive, Worcestershire Children First  
Phil Rook, Director of Resources, Worcestershire Children First  
Sarah Wilkins, Director of Education, Early Years and Children with Disabilities, Worcestershire Children First  
Kerry McCrossan, Assistant Director for Adult Social Care  
Stephen Mason, Interim Head of Service, Worcestershire Children First  
Tina Partridge, Group Manager, SEND support services, Worcestershire Children First  
Samantha Morris, Scrutiny Co-ordinator  
Alison Spall, Overview and Scrutiny Officer

## **Available Papers**

The members had before them:

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated);
- B. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 12 November 2021 (previously circulated).

(A copy of document A will be attached to the signed Minutes).

### **505 Apologies and Welcome**

The Vice-Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained that she would be chairing the meeting in the absence of the Chairman.

Apologies were received from Councillor Kyle Daisley, Mark Hughes (Parent Governor Representative), Tim Reid (Church Representative) and Paula Furnival, Strategic Director of People.

### **506 Declaration of Interest and of any Party Whip**

None.

### **507 Public Participation**

The Chairman reported that 4 members of the public had requested to speak at the meeting. A summary is shown below of the key points raised by the participants.

#### **Anne Duddington**

- Anne Duddington advised that she wished to speak to the Panel to give the perspective of a family carer whose son has a learning disability and complex health and social care needs. She had asked to speak in relation to All-Age Disability proposal, and specifically wished to address the aspects which focused on preparation for adulthood and the Young Adults Team (YAT).
- She praised the work of the Council's Young Adults Team with their firm focus on preparation for adult services and their broad knowledge and expertise, as well as their implementation of the Mental Capacity Act and adult safeguarding. She highlighted that the work of the Team had been recognised both locally and nationally.
- She expressed dismay at the proposals to locate the YAT team in Children's services and furthermore to disband it into locality teams and felt that the risks associated with a restructure had not been adequately explored. She was also concerned at a lack of an equality impact statement considering the impact of significant change could be lifelong.

- She highlighted that the proposals appeared to be at an early stage, with many unanswered questions and apparently no feasibility study undertaken to conclude that the proposed model should be taken forward. Also, the co-location of some Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) staff in the YAT did not seem to have been considered.

### **Alison Price**

- Alison Price advised she was a family carer, having a daughter with learning disabilities and that she had come to speak about the All-Age Disability proposals particularly the plans for the YAT. She highlighted that 10 years ago she had had an active involvement as one of the family carers on the Working Party which had helped to design the YAT.
- She highlighted that the YAT was held in high regard by family carers and had achieved regional and national recognition for its work.
- She was concerned that the proposals would disperse the team, lead to a loss of identity and expertise and destabilise the quality of the service provided. She felt that moving the team into children's services was contrary to the needs of families. She stressed that families needed to turn towards adult services as soon as possible as support for employment, housing and such like were all catered for within that service.
- She pointed out that the report focussed on the benefits of the proposals, but not of the risks. She felt the proposal should be rejected to allow the effective YAT service to continue.

### **Elena Round**

- Elena Round had indicated that she wished to speak to the Panel about the outcome of the Ofsted report the previous week. She felt it would be prudent to temporarily delay any restructuring of the SEND provision until such time as the Ofsted report findings had been fully considered and an action plan drawn up to positively address the failings.
- She explained that her son has severe complex disabilities and when they moved to Worcestershire in 2018, he had a detailed Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) in place. This Council had then failed in its duties regarding this plan and had issued a new EHCP which removed certain therapies which her son had benefitted from previously. She had taken the Council to a tribunal and had been successful. She suggested that many carers had also been affected by mismanagement.
- She queried why staffing levels were so low and why it seemed to be difficult for the Council to retain staff. She also challenged the Council as to why it wanted to spend money on external fees to fight parents.
- She felt the Ofsted report showed that the fundamental issues were still the same as in 2018, so there had been no improvement in that time, which she found to be unacceptable.

### **Katrina Kear-Wood**

- Katrina Kear-Wood advised that she was a Mum of two children, both of which had SEND. She thanked the Worcestershire Children First as there had been some improvement in recent times. She stressed, however, that she had spent 5 years battling the system and felt that neither child had received a suitable education.
- She felt that many children were failed when it came to the stage of needing an ECHP. She suggested that WCF had a disregard for the law, ignored timescales, put barriers in place and failed with respect to parents' legal and representation rights.
- She questioned what WCF meant when it was said they were listening, and she questioned whether they understand the signs of failure referred to above?
- She highlighted that WCF was losing staff and asked what was being done about this? She had herself been a SENCO in another authority and she was astounded by the failures displayed by WCF. Children's needs were not being met and many children were lost to the system.

The Chairman thanked all the speakers and advised them that they would receive a written response to the points they had raised.

## **508 Confirmation of the Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 12 November 2021 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

## **509 All Age Disability (0-25) Service Proposal**

The discussion of the Report was held jointly with Members of the Adult Care and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Panel who had been invited to attend and participate in this part of the meeting.

The Panel received a report which provided an update on the transformation and proposed restructure to create a new All Age Disability (0-25) Service, to provide a more coherent and co-ordinated response to need and deliver better outcomes in the short term and into adulthood.

The Service was being developed jointly between Worcestershire County Council's People Directorate (the Council) and Worcestershire Children First (WCF) and was sponsored jointly by the Strategic Director of People and the Chief Executive of WCF/Director of Children's Services.

The Chief Executive of WCF thanked the parents attending the meeting to share their views and stressed the importance of listening and understanding parents' views.

The aim of the proposal was to provide a co-ordinated, positive experience taking children and young people (CYP) through the key transition points in their lives. The proposal joined together teams working in Children services, Adult Services and SEND and brought together the strengths of each service for the benefit of all the CYP. It was recognised that although there were some current challenges within SEND, by working together as one team with the

same culture and practice, a better service would be able to be provided. The Panel was informed that better outcome focused plans would be needed for children to prepare them for transition, but that all the specialisms previously offered with the YAT, such as housing and employment support would continue to be maintained going forward.

The Panel was informed that the Human Resources Consultation process with staff would commence in February and be completed in March. During this time, further feedback would be sought from parents regarding any issues and concerns. Following on from this, the final proposal would be drawn together.

The Interim Head of Service, All Age Disability (0-25) Design and Change provided some further detail about the journey which had been undertaken to reach this stage, which had commenced with consultation and engagement with parents and families in 2019. The strong message that had been received from that feedback was that there was room for improvement with regard to preparing CYP for adulthood.

Members of the Panels were invited to ask questions and the following points were raised:

- It was suggested that the language used in the proposal was jargonistic and that accessibility was an issue. The Chief Executive acknowledged that this was a complex area but would endeavour to simplify future reports and include a glossary of terms and acronyms.
- In response to the question about the target audience for the proposal, it was explained that the proposal had several target audiences.
- In terms of transparency of the proposal and the perception that a decision had already been made, the Panel was advised that things had not been working well for a while but there had been some delays in progress due to the SEND Inspection and Covid. Members were however, assured that discussions on this service area had been taking place for a few years and had involved sessions with parents and staff.
- The Interim Head of Service had been appointed to take this process forward, but the pandemic had delayed that progress. It was confirmed this was a formal consultation process, but that some level of detail was required in order for people to get an idea of what was proposed.
- In support of the proposal, a Member asked whether KPI's had been set. The Chief Executive advised that some of the current KPI's for this area were statutory, whilst others were business management ones. The Leadership Team would review all the KPI's and bring together a single dashboard.
- The Chief Executive highlighted that the SEND Improvement Board would transform into an All-Age Disability 0-25 Partnership Board (AAD Board) with representation from all sides.
- It was suggested that future Scrutiny discussions about this service should take place by alternating between the Children and Families and Adult Care and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Panels. It was noted that other forums such as the Health and Well-being Board would also have oversight of this area.

- In light of the outcome of the Ofsted SEND Inspection, it was questioned whether this was the right time to proceed with this proposal. The Chief Executive gave assurance that it was but recognised the importance of the 4 areas of the inspection which still required improvement, one of which was engagement with parents and carers. It was highlighted the AAD Board would have oversight of the 3 strategies for SEND, Carers and Autism and thereby provide a link between them.
- The Chief Executive explained that the locality model would split service areas into local teams, leading to a reduction in travelling for many staff in AAD teams and the development of a close working relationship with professionals such as early years providers, GP's etc in a specific locality. It was also noted that some specialist staff would continue to cover all areas.
- A Member challenged the lack of balance in the report with a list of benefits set out and one only risk. The Chief Executive advised that this was not the first time of talking to parents/carers, young people and staff, and feedback was being obtained all the time. This report, however, was part of the formal process and fundamentally a business case for staff consultation so the benefits related to risks for staff.
- It was agreed that the Panel would be provided with an overview of all the feedback received to date as well as any future feedback.
- The Chairman sought assurance that the public sector equality impact assessment had been carried out. The Interim Head of Service confirmed that this had been completed and that no further action was required. It was requested that this be made publicly available.
- A Member asked what happened when a young person (YP) reached the age of 25 and the Assistant Director for Adult Social Care explained that 25 was not seen as a 'cliff edge' but that early conversations took place with YP to ensure that their needs were being met and that a smooth transition could take place at the right age. Transition to adult services varied on a case-by-case basis and would follow conversations with families and professionals but would, essentially be at the right time for the YP.
- It was questioned why vulnerable learners, the Virtual School and the Young Adult's team Housing Officer were not being included in the scope for the new service. Officers explained that not all vulnerable learners had SEND and the Virtual School was about education for looked after children and therefore were not included in the new service proposal. The Young Adult's Housing Officer also provided support for the mental health and learning disability teams and the role would therefore be re-located into the Adult Commissioning team to enable scope for services to be provided across the whole spectrum of need.
- Members were reassured that Young Adults Housing Officer would continue to provide support to young people in a wider context
- It was confirmed that the Director of AAD was a new post. Currently, the responsibilities which would be combined in the new post were split out within the existing structure. To aid Members understanding, it was agreed that current staffing structure charts would be provided to the Panel to compare to the proposed new structure.

- A Member highlighted to Officers an error in one of the symbols of the proposed structure chart (page 7 of the Agenda).
- In response to a Member question, it was agreed that the Panel would be provided with a timeline detailing the transformation process of the Service to date.
- A Member referred to the key issues and risks section of the report (page 13) which explained that public consultation was not required because the proposed changes wouldn't alter the service offer, only the way services were arranged. He suggested that whilst public consultation was not legally required, there would be an advantage of doing so. The Chief Executive confirmed there would be further engagement as the process evolved.
- A Member expressed concern from hearing the parents' views expressed during public participation earlier in the meeting. The Chief Executive commented that she had picked up parental concerns and anxiety about losing the YAT Service and also about a poor experience of the SEND service. The Chief Executive understood the concerns and stressed that the new structure would maintain the special service of YAT, and the SEND Action Plan (following the recent SEND Inspection) would address the concerns about the SEND Service.
- The lack of financial detail on the budget implications table was highlighted. The Director of Resources confirmed that the detail of the staffing budget for this Service would be included in the regular quarterly Budget Monitoring Report received by the Panel.

The issues raised and actions requested as detailed above would be followed up by the Chief Executive and her team in advance of the proposal being considered by Cabinet.

## 510 Budget Scrutiny 2022-23

As part of the Budget scrutiny process, the Panel considered the draft 2022-23 budget for areas within its remit. The County Council's Chief Financial Officer (CFO) highlighted the main points to note from the draft budget and the medium-term financial plan including:

- The overall net Council budget for 2022-23 was £373.2m, compared to the gross budget for 2021-22 of £349.7m.
- The significant pressures on the budget included £15.7m for People Services, £10.3m for pay and contract inflation and £5.9m (£7.9m gross) for WCF relating to social care. Specific details were provided as to how it was expected these funding pressures would be met.
- Several one-off Government grants had been received for 2022-23 including a further £6.1m in recognition of the pressures in Adults and Children's social care; also, a one-off services grant of £1.4m, discounted in part to reflect that the grant was to fund the Council's employer liability in relation to the new National Insurance levy.
- The Panel received a graph benchmarking Council Tax for County Councils in 2021-22 without Fire. The Panel noted that Worcestershire's average Council Tax (£1,344) was at a lower level than the average, but highlighted the graph was difficult to breakdown in terms of area.

In terms of specific budget information in relation to children and families, the Panel was informed that:

- The full year WCF Budget was £134.9m gross, of which £109.143m related to the Council's base budget contribution to the total running costs of WCF; £23.319m related to other funding and £2.459m related to non-County Council sales, fees and charges.
- Over half of the WCF budget was the 'demand led' placements and home to school transport budgets. There was a risk that the placements budget for 2022-23 could exceed £2-3m and that this was being mitigated by a £1.9m risk reserve. This would be closely monitored, with prompt action taken as required.
- The Panel was informed of an additional allocation of £7.1m to the High Needs Block in 2022-23 which was Worcestershire's share of the national £780m announced in October 2021. A further £325m was announced in the settlement to support High Needs placement and top-up pressures being experienced by all local authorities.
- The Director of Resources (WCF) explained that the above would help to support some of the ongoing cost pressures in the High Needs Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), however, it would not eliminate the deficit of around £16m which would need to be carried forward to 2022-23. The Panel was informed of the key risk associated with the expectations of the Government when the statutory instrument came to an end, which would be the position for the 2023-24 financial year. The Director assured the Panel that the Council continued to actively lobby on this matter. The Panel supported this approach and would await a further update.
- It was clarified that £1.3m had been included in the 2022-23 WCF Budget for pay inflation. The Panel was informed that the 2021-22 pay award had not yet been settled, but the Director of Resources (WCF) advised that 3% (an estimated 1.75% for 2021-22 and 1.25% for 2022-23) was deemed to be a realistic increase in budget, in line with the approach of other local authorities. The Panel asked to be kept informed of the progress of negotiations.

During the discussion, further points were raised by Members, which were responded to as follows:

- The Cabinet Member and the Director of Resources (WCF) provided some clarification on the process which took place between the Council and WCF to agree a contract price for WCF for services for the following year. The Director of Resources (WCF) highlighted that WCF also had its own governance requirements to adhere to, including agreement of the budget by the WCF Board.
- With respect to the Transport budget of £19.372m, the Home to school element of this was £18.289m and the remainder of the budget related to travelling costs incurred by WCF employees, such as social workers visiting clients.
- It was clarified that the looked after children and fostering budget, was contained within the CSC Placements and Provision budget.



- In response to a query about whether WCF needed to pay more to retain key staff, the Director of Resources (WCF) commented that there was always pressure on the placements budget, but that salaries compared well with those in the County Council.

## **511 Update on the Assessment Pathway for Children and Young People who may have Autism**

In attendance for this item:

Sally-Anne Osborne - Associate Director for Children, Young People and Families and Specialist Primary Care, HWHCT.

Susanne Friess - Consultant in Paediatric Neurodisability, HWHCT.

Jenny Dalloway – Lead for Mental Health, Learning Disabilities and Children, HWCCG.

Sarah Wilkins – Director of Education, Early Years and Children with Disabilities, WCF

Tina Partridge – Group Manager, SEND Support Services, WCF.

The Panel received a report which provided an update on the Umbrella assessment and diagnostic pathway for children and young people who were or might be on the autistic spectrum. The Panel was reminded that the pathway provided a multidisciplinary assessment which included agreed referral criteria, triage, and multi-professional planning. Following this a diagnostic discussion took place and the decision made was detailed in a final report which was shared with the CYP and family.

The Panel was informed that the Service aspired to have a maximum waiting time of 6 months, and there had been significant challenges with meeting this timeframe over recent years. Following a review in February 2021, a commissioner led task and finish group had been set up to support the services contributing to the Umbrella Pathway to establish ways to have a sustainable improvement. The CCG had then provided additional funding to help bring in extra capacity to assess and diagnose the CYP who had been referred prior to 1 April 2021 and were still awaiting diagnosis. The Associate Director was pleased to be able to report that as a result of this the backlog of cases had now largely been cleared, with only 21 children now remaining on the waiting list from within the identified cohorts of CYP.

The Consultant explained that it was acknowledged that as changes to the pathway were required, the overarching emphasis was that autism had to be everyone's business with professionals needing to work closely together. To work towards change, in conjunction with partners, a systematic review of every step of the assessment process had been carried out to establish what streamlining could take place and what improvements could be implemented. In terms of referrals, it was important to gather vital information from all those who know the child best so that the relevant information was presented in a timely way to those who carried out the assessment process. Two specialists would then carry out the assessment using standardised tools to establish whether a diagnosis could be made. The Consultant explained that as the quality of the assessments had been improved, and with surety of diagnoses

there has been less need for further assessments to be arranged, hence speeding up the process. There were plans for the future to invite other professionals to carry out checks on a child's mental health history working to the same thresholds, which should work well. Long term plans were to develop a one-stop assessment service.

Members asked a range of questions which were responded to as follows:

- The Associate Director advised that waiting times were currently averaging 8 months, although there was a continual improvement towards the 6 months aspirational target. The Consultant added that, the time from referral to diagnosis was 8 months, but from the point of triage to acceptance following a referral, was currently 3 weeks.
- The Lead for Mental Health commented that the autism pathway in Worcestershire compared very well to others across the country. The Team were praised for listening to the feedback received and the early response had proved to be very helpful. The Consultant added that feedback from parents had been positive about the quality of the service currently being provided.
- The Chairman praised the recent performance in reducing waiting times and queried what would happen when the CCG funds were no longer available. The Lead for Mental Health advised that the additional investment was specifically agreed with the service as the amount required to complete the outstanding assessments of those CYP whose referrals had been delayed by the pandemic.
- In respect of the wait between a referral and diagnosis for autism in CYP, the Panel was keen that it be ensured that the current service and the improving trajectory were maintained.
- A Member asked whether the numbers being diagnosed with autism had been impacted by the pandemic. The Consultant reported that diagnoses figures had been below national average levels. It was agreed that the Panel would be supplied with specific figures on the numbers of CYP being diagnosed.
- A Member raised a concern about whether there was under-diagnosis of autism due to unmet need ' The Director of Education advised that education worked in partnership with health colleagues to identify those children with signs of autism at an early stage. Autism awareness was also promoted in schools.
- A Member queried whether it was more difficult to diagnose girls who had autism as the signs were more difficult to spot. The Consultant explained referrals from schools were generally of a good quality, but she accepted that girls could be difficult to diagnose. Work was ongoing to upskill Paediatric staff to help with diagnosis and if a second opinion was needed, a referral would be made to Great Ormond Street Hospital.

Following a question about the process for referral to the Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) pathway, it was agreed that it would be added to the Panel's work programme.

## **512 Work Programme**

The Panel were invited to review its current Work Programme. There were no alterations made.

The meeting ended at 12.37 pm

Chairman .....