

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

### **Panel**

### **County Hall, Worcester**

**Thursday, 7 July 2022, 10.00 am**

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#### **Present:**

Cllr Steve Mackay (Chairman), Cllr David Chambers (Vice Chairman),  
Cllr Dan Boatright, Cllr Kyle Daisley, Cllr Nathan Desmond, Cllr Matt Jenkins,  
Cllr Tony Muir and Cllr David Ross

#### **Also attended:**

Jane Stanley, Healthwatch Worcestershire

Emma Brittain, Director of Early Help, Children in Need and Family Front Door,  
Worcestershire Children First

Phil Rook, Director of Resources, Worcestershire Children First

Hannah Perrott, Assistant Director for Communities

Nikki Jones, Assistant Director for Education Quality and Improvement,  
Worcestershire Children First

Mel Barnett, Director for All Age Disability, Worcestershire Children First

Hayley Durnall, Public Health Consultant

Clare Charlton, Advanced Public Health Practitioner

Samantha Morris, Overview and Scrutiny Manager

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 10 May 2022 (previously circulated).

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

### **534 Apologies and Welcome**

The Chairman thanked Councillors Daisley and Onslow, the previous Chairman and Vice-Chairman for all their work on the Panel and congratulated

them on their new roles. He also welcomed Councillor Desmond as a new member of the Panel.

Apologies were received from Councillor Jo Monk and from Councillors Andy Roberts, Tracey Onslow and Karen May (Cabinet Members with Responsibility).

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

Councillor Dan Boatright declared an interest in Agenda Item 5 (Strengthening the Youth Offer in Worcestershire) in that he was a Council nominated Trustee of the Pershore Riverside Centre.

### **536 Public Participation**

None.

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

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 10 May 2022 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the following amendment to Minute 532 (Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2020-21) which would be amended to read as follows:

- Asked about his own main areas of concern, the Independent Chairman highlighted:
  - o the importance of getting thresholds right so that responses were appropriate and timely. The effectiveness of the Family Front Door was paramount in this to ensure that focus was placed on those most at risk and that decision-making was strong. Last year's Ofsted report had scrutinised the Family Front Door arrangements and found that strong progress had been made in improving the quality of practice.

### **538 Strengthening the Youth Offer in Worcestershire**

The Panel considered a report that outlined the steps which were being taken to review and strengthen the Council's youth offer and inform the recommissioning of the Council's funded youth services.

The Public Health Consultant explained the Council's statutory duty in relation to youth services and activities for young people. The National Youth Agency defined youth work as a 'distinct educational process adapted across a variety of settings to support a young person's personal, social and educational development.' The Panel was informed that there were three evidence-based domains for youth work interventions, universal open access, detached youth work and one to one mentoring, all three of which were operated in Worcestershire via a range of statutory, voluntary and community sector organisations.

Since 2016, the Council had funded 14 Open Access 'Positive Activities' Contracts in the County and the infrastructure to support these. The recommissioning of these contracts was now overdue. Some additional short-term funding had also recently been made available to District Councils through the Contain Outbreak Management Fund for detached youth work and one to one mentoring support for those young people adversely impacted by the pandemic.

As part of the work to review the youth offer and to support the recommissioning work, an Adolescent Health profile for the county had recently been completed and whilst this showed that, overall, the county fared better than the England average, there were disadvantaged areas where young people faced poorer outcomes. A Youth Needs Assessment had also been carried out which mapped current provision. This process which had included engagement with a variety of stakeholders and young people and had identified some key findings to be taken into account for the development of the revised strategy, strengthened youth offer and re-commissioned Council youth provision.

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

- The Panel was informed that the 'youth offer' was a package specific to a location based on local need and that commissioning work needed to take account of that. Moving forward a Youth Outcomes Framework would be developed, in conjunction with young people and stakeholders to ensure that the services provided would meet specific local need and were able to be effectively evaluated.
- The National Youth Association offered guidance on the numbers of young people it was expected to be in regular contact with youth provision. Engagement with youth services in the county was measured and currently fell short of the expected levels. This was an issue being addressed as part of current work, which would take into account the voice of young people and their changing needs.
- In terms of the impact of funding youth services over the last decade, the Public Health Consultant confirmed that there had been issues caused by having some short-term funding which had led to problems with staff retention. With this commissioning process it would be ensured that there was longer term funding in place leading to a sustained approach aimed at building capacity locally to add skills to the workforce and meet local identified need.
- The Consultant explained that the needs assessment was currently in the process of being published, after which members would be able to look at detail relating to their area.
- A Member raised his concern about a February 2022 YMCA report which indicated that Worcestershire was not spending any money on young people. The Consultant advised she would look into this and report back.
- A Member highlighted that it was very time consuming for youth workers applying for bids and any support that could be provided would be

welcomed. The Consultant confirmed that this was an area that it was hoped support could be provided in.

- In response to a query regarding the number of young people who had provided input into the youth needs assessment, the Panel was informed that 120 young people had contributed (via 8 focus groups) and that the Youth Cabinet had also been consulted. A Member suggested that schools could have been included in the process and that Members of the Council might have also offered their support. These suggestions were welcomed and would be acted upon going forward.
- The Advanced Public Health Practitioner confirmed that all of the stakeholders who had been consulted on youth provision in the county had provided input. The input had been obtained via face-to-face conversations rather than via a questionnaire. It was agreed that the feedback received from stakeholders from the Needs Assessment process would be shared with the Panel.

### **539 Update on the support being provided to the children and families living in Worcestershire as part of the Ukraine Settlement Schemes**

The Panel received a report which gave an update on the support being provided to the children and families living in Worcestershire as part of the Ukraine Settlement schemes. The Assistant Director of Communities and the Assistant Director for Education Quality and Improvement (EQI) were in attendance to provide further background information and respond to Members questions.

The Panel were informed of the latest figures with 474 Worcestershire households having been matched with 1145 Ukrainian guests. Approximately 60% of the guests had arrived in the county and of those 35% were school age children. As of the 1 July, the Assistant Director (EQI) advised that 235 applications for school places had been received, with 223 offers made to date for schools across the county. Only 2 children had been unable to be placed in a school of their choice, but these children had now been successfully placed. Where a child could not be placed in their parent's first choice of school, transport was being arranged to take them to their nearest available school.

The Panel received details of the funding per pupil that the Department of Education would provide to Councils supporting Ukrainian guests. This funding had not yet been received, but it was anticipated that it would be issued by the end of the academic year along with detailed criteria as to how it could be spent. This was important as it would allow schools to plan their services accordingly and it was hoped that it might be able to support some additional staffing.

The Assistant Director of Communities highlighted that in addition to the specific funding for education services, the Council also received £10,500 per Ukrainian guest, which could be spent to meet a range of needs, including adult learning and transport.

Members were given the opportunity to ask questions and the following main points were made:

- In order to make the application process for a school place more user friendly, it was suggested that the application form could be made available in the Ukrainian language.
- Members reported that some guests were very keen to take up employment but were struggling to obtain the correct 'right to work' document. The Assistant Director for Communities advised that a meeting was taking place that day with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to see how this situation could be addressed.
- Schools had been offered the opportunity to take part in a specialist programme of trauma support, of which 106 schools had already taken the opportunity to do so. Whilst this was a positive step, there was concern that schools were having to offer this type of support and that additional specialised support would be necessary. It was acknowledged that this would be needed by children and adults alike and that liaison was taking place with health colleagues to determine who best to support this need. The £10,500 funding per guest, referred to above, could be used to provide support for individual needs which were identified. SSAFA, the Armed Forces charity was also suggested as a body to approach for this specialist trauma support. This would be followed up by the Assistant Director for Communities.
- With reference to a query about the data in tables at paragraphs 8 and 24, the Assistant Director (EQI) informed the Panel that not all the children had arrived as yet and that there was a lag in the figures. Discussions were taking place with schools where they were close to their Published Admissions Number (PAN) and flexibility was being applied where necessary. Most schools were demonstrating a very positive approach and were working hard to meet the needs of the Ukrainian guests.
- It was confirmed that the Council had no input as to which location in the County the Ukrainian guests were initially placed, therefore there was no opportunity to consider school places in advance as part of that process.
- To enable comparison of the levels of funding per pupil between the amount obtained for UK children compared to that being provided for Ukrainian guests, the Director of Resources advised that for UK children, the funding was £4,200 for primary children and £5,525 for secondary children per annum, whereas for Ukrainian guests, it was £6580 for primary children and £8755 for secondary children.
- The Panel was informed that Ukrainian guests were provided with a health service guide in their own language to help them to access all types of medical and dental services. Support needs of families were also checked at various points in the process and ongoing support was offered through Here2Help. The Council maintained regular contact with the families who were sponsoring the Ukrainian guests and those sponsors were also supplied with extensive information packs to help them support their guests.
- In response to a query as to whether the 3-month free bus pass provided to guests could be extended, the Panel was advised that it

was anticipated that by the 3-month stage most guests would have access to universal credit and be making their own way. It was anticipated that there might be other pressing needs to resource by that stage hence the cautious approach to extending all bus passes.

The Panel requested that a report be presented to the Panel meeting in September to provide an update on:

- School admission forms
- The outcome of the meeting with the DWP regarding 'right to work' documents
- How mental health concerns were being dealt with.

## **540 Performance and 2021/22 Year End Budget monitoring**

The Panel was updated on performance and financial information for services relating to Children and Families.

### Year-End Budget Monitoring

The Director of Resources highlighted the following points:

- The Cabinet had been presented with the provisional financial results for the Council on 1 July 2022 which was an overall overspend of £1.3m on a £355.5m budget.
- The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) had an in year overspend of £4.8m resulting in a cumulative deficit of £11.3m for 2021/22. This was a deteriorating position and the predicted deficit position at the end of 2022/23 was around £19m. The deficit would sit on the Council's balance sheet as an unusable reserve and be carried forward against future DSG income. However currently the legislation enabling this to happen would expire at the end of 2022/23.
- High Needs funding and deficits were a national problem and the Government had recently issued a Green Paper for SEND. To address the future sustainability the DfE was investing a one-off £85m over three years in the Delivering Better Value in SEND (DBV) programme. This would support 55 local authorities with deficits to reform their high needs systems, addressing the underlying issues that lead to increased pressure, and putting them on a more sustainable footing. Worcestershire was one of the 55 Local Authorities and was participating in the DBV programme which was being supported by Newton Europe and CIPFA. For information Authorities with the highest deficits would participate in the safety valve intervention programme.
- Worcestershire was confirmed in Phase 1 - tranche 2, which would start in January to June 2023. The Panel would be kept updated on any developments regarding the expected expiry of the legislation next year.
- WCF's Outturn at the end of 2021/22 was an underspend of £51k, so effectively a break-even position. This was a good performance, as

a result of the £3m savings target having been achieved as part of the 2021/budget.

- The WCF external audit had been completed at the end of June. The WCF Risk, Governance and Audit Board would meet in early July to review the accounts and sign them off, and the financial results would be fed through to the Council's Group accounts.

Responding to Members' questions, the Director of Resources agreed to provide:

- The costs of the legal fees for SEND and
- Clarification on the details of the CSC Safeguarding budget on the Outturn figures.

### Performance Information

The Director of Early Help, Children in Need and Family Front Door (FFD) gave an overview of the key points relating to the Social Care data.

- Pressure on contacts and referrals to the FFD had remained consistent. This situation was being monitored closely to check what the ongoing trend would be and demand with partners was also being reviewed to see whether the trends were similar.
- The Director was concerned at the end of Quarter 4 with the fluctuations in the Social Work assessment data, although this situation was replicated in other local authorities. A deep dive had been undertaken to check whether there had been a significant change with the data at the end of Quarter 1.
- Whilst there was a fluctuation in the number of CYP having a Child Protection Plan, the data set was stable and consistent.
- In terms of Children in Need (CIN), there was a new entry on the data set showing the Supporting Families First function provided by a multi-agency team. This team was working intensively with families seeking to make positive and sustainable changes. The work of this team was being monitored and the impact that it was making would be seen in the data as the year progressed.
- Children Looked after – the Director advised that although there were lower numbers of children coming into care, these were the right children. Work was currently being focussed on exit strategies for those older CYP where this was applicable. The pandemic had played a part in delaying this process and strategies were now in place to enable this to take place with the appropriate support for the CYP and for their carers.

Members raised a number of questions, and the following main points were made:

- With reference to the 73% of CIN cases having been able to be closed, the Director explained this positive move had been made possible because of a close working relationship with the Courts and their timely decision-making relating to CYP with care proceedings. WCF had also been closely looking at the care plans of those CYP with kinship carers and care leavers to see how to achieve what was best for those individual CYP going forward.
- Referring to mental health as being one of the areas of concern which led to a Child Protection Plan, the Director explained that the mental health could be referring to that of the child, the parent or both. Through the CIN work and the family safeguarding approach, the teams were keen to understand the needs of the family as a whole so that the factors placing a CYP at risk became apparent.
- The peak in child exploitation figures was raised as a concern. The Director explained that with the Get Safe work which raised awareness as well as carrying out disruption activities and specific operations, it was expected and reassuring to see the rise in numbers showing the success of those activities. There was also much ongoing prevention work which was carried out including within schools with the Designated Safeguarding Leads which they worked closely with, and also with youth services.

The Assistant Director (EQI) drew members attention to key aspects of the Education data:

- The details for Q4 showed that there had been 38 Ofsted Inspection reports published between September and March. This number had now increased to 55, although not all of the reports had been published. The Director had been expecting a delay in the Inspection schedule, but with only 2 weeks left of term, the numbers were still 15 below what was anticipated at this stage.
- The Panel was informed that 6 Academies had not been inspected since they converted to academies. Normally inspections would have taken place by this stage and so these schools were technically without an Ofsted judgement at this time, despite being rated 'inadequate' or requires improvement' prior to academisation.
- Given the outcomes of the local authority SEND reinspection, there had been a focus on SEND provision within the schools' inspections. The Panel was informed that 25 of the 38 schools inspected had been judged very positively for their SEND provision. The School Improvement Team were working closely with the 3 schools whose SEN provision had been judged to require improvement.
- The Panel was informed that the service was working closely with a Research school using their expertise and support for a project with all schools to ensure that every day teaching was as inclusive as it could be. Sixty schools had already signed up for the project, and in time they would be able to support other schools with this work. As part of this project, a Quality Inclusion Mark had been launched to recognise those schools on this journey.
- Attendance figures in secondary schools had been heavily affected by the impact of Covid in the Autumn and the Spring. Whilst the figures



showed a dip in March, attendance figures had improved since that time, although they were still lower than pre-covid times. It was recognised that some CYP faced a barrier due to anxiety and the trauma informed support was there to help staff support CYP in that situation. The Assistant Director also referred to a Department for Education Attendance Guidance Report recently published which was welcomed by the authority, as it stipulated that all schools had to work with local authorities to demonstrate how they were seeking to improve their attendance figures.

Members raised a number of questions, and the following main points were made:

- In order to be able to compare fairly and accurately local authority maintained and academy schools, a Member requested that a further table be added to the data, which excluded those schools which had recently converted to an academy but not been inspected. The Assistant Director agreed that this would be provided.
- In respect of the increased numbers of elective home educated CYP, the Panel was informed that this number was not static, there had been changes between home and school and vice versa. After educating their children at home during the pandemic, some parents preferred this option. Communication with parents was key and the Team were ensuring that schools were having informed conversations with such parents to ensure they were aware of all the implications of their choice.
- The increase in the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs) for Q3 and Q4 was queried. The Panel was advised that there was always an increase in September as young people were leaving school and in the process of securing a college place or job, and then the numbers reduced once this information was known. This year, however, there had also been an increase in Q4 because of increased numbers of young people withdrawing from college courses or apprentices. The Assistant Director advised that work was currently being carried out by the Careers and Skills Lead on this area, looking at this issue and how to support CYP effectively during the transition stage. In response to a question, it was also clarified that an unknown NEET was the number of young people, of which their situation was as yet unknown.

The Director of All Age Disability provided an overview of the SEND data, highlighting the following aspects:

- The Q4 data illustrated that there was an increased number of requests for Education and Health Care Plans (EHCP's), with the number of children with an EHCP in June at over 4,700.
- With regard to the statutory timescales, whilst there had been some progress from Q3, the figure for those where a decision was made within 16 weeks as of March was 34%. There had since been a positive change in May, with the figures rising to 69.8%. For the percentage completed within the 20-week deadline, the May figure was 67.8%, although the Assistant Director wished to place a caveat on that figure

in terms of the challenges that had been faced and how the figures had been compiled and she was therefore looking at processes and systems.

- The Panel was advised that in terms of the SEND Accelerated Progress Plan, there was a Monitoring visit on 22 September. The Assistant Director explained that she was the Lead on the workstream for the quality of EHCP's.

Members raised a number of questions, to which the following responses were made:

- A Member sought clarification on the numbers of EHCP's which had been finalised. The Director explained that all 4,700 had been finalised, that involved an assessment being carried out and a plan issued. These plans would then need reviewing 12 months after having been issued. It was agreed that the Director would provide additional explanation and clarification outside of the meeting.
- The capacity issue was raised and queried. The Panel was advised that some minor adjustments would be needed within the All-Age Disability Team structure, but in terms of the Education Psychology team, there was a capacity issue, which was a national problem. The Director was looking at a number of related issues including working smarter with partners, the importance of retaining staff and how to address the longer-term issue, by liaising with the Universities and becoming an employer of choice.
- A Member asked that an update be provided on the Plan of a Page – 'Effectiveness of Leaders and Managers' outside of the meeting. The Director agreed to provide this.
- With reference to changes in processes that the Assistant Director had referred to earlier, it was confirmed that work on this had already started. In terms of numbers of EHCP's the Panel was assured that the focus was not on reducing numbers but ensuring that CYP received the right support when they needed it. Early intervention was important and could be of significant help.
- In response to a Member's request, the Director agreed to supply details of the number of tribunals that WCF was involved in.

## **541 Work Programme**

The Panel reviewed its current work programme, which as part of the overall Scrutiny Work Programme had been to the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board the previous week, then forwarded to Council on 14 July for approval.

The Chairman advised that in liaison with Officers he would look at dates that the outstanding items on the work programme could be fitted in to meetings in the year ahead.

A Member requested that the school nurse service be added to the work programme, in terms of what the current service provided and what the plans and aspirations were for the future. The Director of Early Help commented that

the service was provided by Public Health but suggested that the scope of the report be widened to include Emotional and Well Being Practitioners. The Panel agreed to add this item to the Work Programme, covering both services.

The meeting ended at 12.10 pm

Chairman .....