

## **CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

### **Minutes of a meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday, 14 July 2021 at 6.00 pm in Telford Room, Addenbrooke House, Ironmasters Way, Telford, TF3 4NT**

**Present:** Councillors M Boylan, I T W Fletcher, J Jones and A D McClements (Chair).

**Also Present:** Councillor S A W Reynolds

**In Attendance:** Jayne Clarke (Democracy Officer), Darren Knibbs (Strategic Lead: Practice Development and Innovation), A Lowe (Associate Director: Policy and Governance), Lorna Gordon (Democracy Officer (Scrutiny)), Richard Phillips (Service Delivery Manager: Legal & Democracy, Policy & Governance), Simon Wellman (Director: Education and Skills)

**Apologies:** Councillors J Loveridge and K Tomlinson and Co-optees L Fowler, C Morgan and M Ward.

#### **18 Declarations of Interest**

None.

#### **19 Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

**RESOLVED** – that the minutes of the meeting held on 17 March 2021 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

#### **20 Work Programme 2021/2022**

The Associate Director: Policy & Governance outlined the Committee's Work Programme 2021/2022 that the Scrutiny Management Board had recommended for consideration. This programme included areas that both officers and members had identified as areas for further scrutiny.

**RESOLVED** – that the Work Programme 2021/2022 be adopted.

#### **21 Family Safeguarding Model Implementation Update**

The Committee heard a presentation from the Strategic Lead: Practice Development and Innovation on the progress of the Family Safeguarding Model implementation. It was outlined that the Model sought to implement a partnership approach that used innovative methods focused on providing timely and high quality specialist support for families. Underpinning this was a single database for shared recording and case supervision.

The Strategic Lead: Practice Development and Innovation reported that during the implementation stage they had held 32 workshops, which were attended by 745 members of staff across Children's Services. This was in addition to 21 motivational interview training sessions that were attended by a further 88 staff. There had also been extensive efforts to recruit specialist staff. Through significant engagement with those who were involved in or governed services, it had allowed them to understand the needs of key partners. Members heard how they also took part in a peer review on current practices as they started working in a different way under the new Safeguarding Model.

The Strategic Lead: Practice Development and Innovation informed the Committee that, although implementing the Model under recent circumstances had been difficult, it had been supported by the team and partnership which allowed the Family Safeguarding Model to go live on 28 June 2021.

Members posed a number of questions:

*Did Social Services still fall under Telford & Wrekin Council?*

Service areas such as Early Help and Family Safeguarding all operated under the umbrella of social services. The Family Safeguarding Model formed part of the continuing support within children services but were all under the same organisation.

*Was there a good record of staff retention throughout the Coronavirus pandemic?*

Staffing levels had remained relatively stable despite ongoing challenges. When compared with other areas in the region, the picture in Telford and Wrekin remained positive. It was noted that the recruitment drive for family safeguarding had been successful, bringing in new skilled staff.

*How had the impact of Covid-19, particularly on children's mental health been incorporated into the Family Safeguarding Model?*

In the early stages of the pandemic modelling was carried out to predict how increased demand would have been handled. There had been no indication of a spike in Looked After Children (LAC) or demand for services, but the Authority were prepared should it occur. Emphasis had been placed on working together with partners and conversations around children's mental health. This involved working with schools to ensure that children's voices were heard about how the pandemic effected them using the Big Ask Questionnaires. Schools in the region had embraced this and continued to engage.

*Were there concerns that instances of domestic abuse had not been picked up on whilst children were not attending school during the pandemic?*

A large media campaign called 'Don't be Silent' ran throughout the pandemic which appealed to neighbours, encouraging them to report anything of concern. Additionally, school staff remained on high alert to this, which was illustrated in the data the team had received.

The Committee thanked the Strategic Lead: Practice and Development and the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People, Education and Lifelong Learning for their attendance and answering Members' questions. Members expressed an interest to review this in the future.

## **22 Belonging Strategy - Scene Setting**

The Committee received a presentation from the Director: Education and Skills on the background and context surrounding the Belonging Strategy. Members were informed that the strategy sought to support children's social, emotional, and mental health needs in an education setting.

It was noted that in order for the strategy to succeed consistency was required across the Borough, regardless of maintained or academy status. The Director: Education and Skills reported that belonging to a group can have either a positive or a negative effect on a child. Positive groups fostered good connections and outcomes, whereas the opposite was true for negative groups. Members heard that belonging in schools aimed to foster connections to positive groupings, and that negative reinforcement or exclusion may push a child towards negative groups.

The Committee heard how the Telford Education Strategic Partnership and the Belonging Strategy were created to instil collective ownership around the agenda. It was focused on building relationships, trust and respect amongst schools that led to them talking to each other and promoting the strategy externally. Members were informed that in order to promote further integration the board of the Partnership included Academy CEOs and individuals involved with mainstream at differing levels. The Director: Education and Skills reported that the support of schools and multiagency groups such as Family Safeguarding was needed to support families and, where appropriate, provided high quality alternative provision with minimal disruption.

The Covid-19 pandemic had created further challenges as many children had found it difficult to return to school due to gaps in their learning and prolonged isolation. It was highlighted that this only made belonging in schools more important and that schools had done a great job in achieving this. Members heard of the many steps taken during the pandemic to promote belonging, including school based mental health support teams, a pre-exclusion hotline and a formal review of alternative provision. During this time, a number of Telford Head Teachers took part in a research project that reported on their

leadership journeys during the lockdown phase of Covid-19, between May and July 2020, which would be published in an UCL Journal.

The Director: Education and Skills reported that moving forwards the focus of the belonging strategy was based around pupil voice. They sought to promote a whole system approach to restorative practices, developing online programmes and future school leaders.

Members posed a number of questions:

*Did the strategy incorporate teacher's sense of belonging or just children?*

Staff and students were incorporated as a positive environment for all was required to promote belonging. From a national perspective there had been a focus on staff wellbeing meaning this was key. They sought for all to have a sense of belonging not just to their school but to Telford and Wrekin. It was noted that the introduction of a weekly notice board for the Borough's schools had been well received and the use of school buildings for community activities was encouraged.

*How would belonging be measured?*

Each school was its own institution and had its own culture, but data around EHCPs and exclusions provided key indicators. Since schools began publishing data they found that schools compared their performance to others. This was further aided by head teacher's forums and monitoring pupil's voice.

*What would be the next steps for the strategy and was there anything further scrutiny could do?*

It was intended that the strategy be re-launched alongside pupil voice and they were looking for more schools to get involved following the success they had had with the pilot schools. It was suggested that Scrutiny could visit one of the pilot schools. The Director: Education and Skills agreed to formulate more proposals on how Scrutiny could be involved and coordinate with the Committee regarding a school visit.

## **23            Chair's Update**

The chair updated the Committee on the progress of the School Streets Working Group which was now coming to the end of its review. The Chair informed the Committee that the report would be circulated and was intended to go to Cabinet in October 2021.

The meeting ended at 7.01 pm

**Chairman:** .....

**Date:**            Tuesday, 23 November 2021