

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday 30 January 2025 at 6.00 pm in Council Chamber, Third Floor, Southwater One, Telford, TF3 4JG

Present: Councillors J Jones (Chair), C Chikandamina, A R H England, A S Jhawar, L Parker and K Tonks

Also Present: Councillor S A W Reynolds (Cabinet Member for Children, Young People, Education, Employment & Skills)

In Attendance: J Britton (Executive Director: Children's & Family Services), R Carey (Achievement & Enrichment Service Delivery Manager), J Clements (Independent Chair, Telford & Wrekin Safeguarding Children Board), D Knibbs (Director: Children's Safeguarding & Family Support), E Harvey (Lead Lawyer: Property & Commercial), J Power (Organisational Delivery & Development Service Delivery Manager), P Starkey (Senior Democracy Officer (Scrutiny)) and S Wellman (Director: Education & Skills)

Apologies: Councillors S P Burrell, P Davis and J Urey
Co-Optees: S Fikeis and C Morgan

CYP36 Declarations of Interest

None.

CYP37 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting held on 7 November 2024 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

CYP38 Education Attainment 2023/24

The Director: Education & Skills and the Achievement & Enrichment Service Delivery Manager presented an update to the Committee on the education attainment statistics for the 2023/24 academic year.

The presentation highlighted that the Council was the accountable body responsible for performance for maintained schools whilst academies would be required to report to the Department for Education (DfE). Statistical data released by the DfE showed that in Telford and Wrekin, 70% of primary schools were schools which were maintained and 92% of secondary schools were schools which were academies, both of which were above the national average at the time of the meeting.

Members heard that the national picture for education was continuously evolving and it was predicted that 69% of children in Telford and Wrekin would reach the expected standard of learning at the end of early years foundation stage and 62% would reach the expected standard of learning at the end of Key Stage 2 (KS2), both of which were above the national average at the time of the meeting. For Key Stage 4 (KS4) pupils, 39% of children were predicted to achieve a Grade 5 in English and Maths which a total attainment score of 43.3 which was just below the average score for the West Midlands of 44.5.

Over the past three years, Telford and Wrekin had consistently edged above the national average across various areas of learning and development which showed that children were either meeting or emerging towards the expected standards. The percentage of children in Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) who were expected to reach a good level of development for 2024 was in line with the national average with 69% of pupils expected achieve a good level of development in Telford and Wrekin compared to 65% of pupils for the West Midlands. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, schools have provided targeted intervention to support children transitioning from EYFS to KS1 (Year 1) who may have not met early learning goals or good level of development. This included initiatives such as Talk Boost which had supported over 500 children and trained over 220 professionals to enhance language development. More than three quarters of pupils had met the expected standard for early learning goals for physical social education, communication and language.

The Government had set clear targets for schools for children to be able to successfully decode words to help with development of early reading skills. There was a requirement as part of the DfE approved programme for phonics tests to be taken by pupils in Year 1. Members heard that the percentage of children who had passed phonics tests in Telford and Wrekin was in line with both regional and national averages. For Telford and Wrekin schools, 80% of pupils were achieving the expected level in phonics decoding in 2024.

Over the last two years, KS1 statutory assessments have been removed, however assessments were still being undertaken in schools and all children would be required to sit Year 6 SATs at the end of the Summer term. The number of pupils in KS2 achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and maths combined and in greater depth was in line with national figures with an average of 62% of pupils in Telford and Wrekin when compared to 60% for the West Midlands. For children who were disadvantaged, attainment data showed that more disadvantaged children were reaching the expected standard when compared to their peers regionally and nationally. Nearly one third of children had achieved a greater depth in reading whilst writing had taken the longer to improve post the Covid-10 pandemic.

For KS4 pupils, the average attainment score was measured across 8 qualifications with scores for Maths and English double weighted and 90 points being the maximum score available to achieve. The attainment 8 score was in line with the regional average with a score of 43.3 for Telford and Wrekin, however scored slightly below when compared to the national

average of 46.1 for England. The percentage of pupils achieving a 5-9 pass grade in English and Maths for Telford and Wrekin was slightly lower at 39% when compared to the percentage of pupils in the West Midlands at 42%. In the current cohort of 2,400 pupils at the time of meeting, 58% of pupils in Telford and Wrekin had achieved a pass grade in English and Maths which was 7% below the national average with 39% of the cohort achieving a grade between 5 and 9.

Members heard that the next areas of focus for the Council would include the introduction of IDAMs to report national attendance complemented by termly attendance advisor visits. The performance of children in disadvantaged and vulnerable cohorts would continue to be monitored which would include the introduction of networking sessions for pupil premium leads and a continual review of pupil premium strategies in line with quality assurance processes. The Council would also be working to continue to deliver the Talk Boost programme to support children with early communication and barriers which would see 209 staff trained by the end of the Summer term and 56 intervention groups delivered with 447 participants.

Following the presentation, Members asked several questions:-

How did you define "disadvantaged" children and was it based on children with social deprivation and/or special education needs?

The Director: Education & Skills advised that the terminology around disadvantaged children is one which is used nationally not just in Telford and Wrekin and refers to children who are in receipt of pupil premium funding. Children with special educational needs are not included in the cohort of disadvantaged pupils.

Did the Council monitor the management of pupil premium funding in academies?

The Service Delivery Manager: Achievement & Enrichment advised that each child has a specific amount of funding allocated and each school must have a strategy in place to ensure they are held accountable for supporting and raising positive outcomes for children. Whilst schools were able to decide how to spend the funding received for each child, there were clear guidelines on how funding should be used, and schools could seek further guidance from the Education Endowment Foundation. Pupil premium strategies should be reviewed annual by schools to assess the overall impact of funding.

What support was available for children who were not eligible for pupil premium funding and did not have an EHCP but have experienced physical health issues, family traumas or the loss of a parent?

The Service Delivery Manager: Achievement & Enrichment confirmed that the Council work closely with schools to identify vulnerable children regardless of if they are recognised by a category such as disadvantaged or SEND. A range of support services were also in place in schools including Educational

Psychology Teams and children's Mental Health services to provide various pathways to support children.

What did you think were the reasons behind the decline in targets for KS4 pupils, particularly in English and Maths where performance had been initially on target?

The Service Delivery Manager: Achievement & Enrichment advised that following the complexities children have faced with returning to secondary education post Covid, the Council had observed significant gaps in the time needed for pupils to catch up with the curriculum and the benchmarks that had been set prior to the pandemic were no longer appropriate. Additionally, there had been an increase in teacher assessments during the pandemic which had since declined and schools had returned to normal marking practices.

CYP39 Telford & Wrekin Local Safeguarding Children's Board Annual Report 2022/23 & 2023/24

The Independent Chair of the Telford and Wrekin Safeguarding Children Board and the Service Delivery Manager: Policy & Development presented the annual report of the Telford and Wrekin Safeguarding Children Board covering the 2022/23 and 2023/24 financial years.

Members heard that the Telford and Wrekin Safeguarding Children Board was a partnership board responsible for multiagency safeguarding arrangements to protect and safeguard vulnerable children and was funded by Telford & Wrekin Council in equal partnership with the Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin Integrated Care Board and West Mercia Police.

The core focus of the Board was to:-

- Put the person who had been harmed or at risk at the centre of everything and listen to their views about what could be done to improve the safety of people;
- Hold members to account;
- Collect and share information about how people are kept safe;
- Make sure workers and volunteers receive the training needed to provide safe services and to share concerns if they believe a person is being hurt or abused;
- Review policies and guidance to make sure there is constant improvement; and
- Raise awareness of safeguarding issues and what to do.

A summary of key achievements of the Board over the last three years included addressing child neglect and exploitation in Telford and Wrekin. Significant progress had been made in addressing neglect following work undertaken by the partnership to consult with partners, families and children to review practice and engagement with families from Family Connect referrals. The introduction of various initiatives including the development of a neglect

windscreen, multi-agency file audits and the roll out of additional Family Hubs has led to a reduction in neglect-related assessments and contacts.

Members heard that Telford was in a strong position in relation to its response child exploitation with the work undertaken to date validated by Tom Crowther KC. The Board had undertaken a two year review to examine the implementation of the inquiry's recommendations. As part of its priorities, the Board had developed a multi-agency data set to analyse trends and emerging needs to help tailor services and support. The Child Exploitation contextual safeguarding model was also created to address strategic barriers and prevent exploitation.

At the time of the meeting, the Board was in the process of reviewing its priorities for 2024/25 which would include a focus on improving responses to children's emotional health needs and prevention of harm to children through the provision of early support. The Board would also continue its focus on partners response to child exploitation which included the development of a co-produced Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy with lived experience consultees.

Following the presentation, Members asked several questions:-

How was neglect identified? Did teachers, social services, GPs and other professionals who may identify aspects of neglect communicate with one another and did we talk to the child about their experiences?

The Independent Chair of the Telford and Wrekin Safeguarding Children Board advised that part of the Board's aims was to ensure that partners were alert to neglect and aware of its prevalence. Neglect was one of the most damaging forms of abuse that could be encountered. From the moment that a person reports a pregnancy, GPs and midwives are vigilant for signs of neglect and nurseries, schools, colleges, police officers who may have contact with a child had been trained to recognise symptoms early on.

The Director: Children's Safeguarding & Family Support advised that the voice of the child had been a huge area of focus for the Council over the last 12 months. The Safeguarding Team had been working to support families by clarifying the meaning of neglect and how it can encompass a wide range of harm, including emotional as well as physical neglect. The Council had been collaborating with a group of parents, known as the Dandelion Group, to help improve service delivery from a parent's perspective whilst focusing on the voice of the child. Changes had also been made to how information was written on a child's file so that professionals were writing directly to the child so that records were no longer purely professional documents but records for the child which they can understand.

The response to the CSE report was brilliant and the recommendations implemented have had a huge impact. As the focus had shifted towards child criminal exploitation, what were the key priorities in addressing this issue?

The Director: Children's Safeguarding & Family Support advised that the Council had a strong partnership response and at the time of the meeting had worked with charities Climb, Stay Clear and St Giles, programmes which support the protection of criminal exploitation by offering support for people to make safer choices as well as supporting people who faced disadvantages such as poverty, unemployment, homelessness and abuse. The Council's CATE team had also focused work on raising general awareness around criminal exploitation.

Taking into consideration that not all victims report domestic abuse, how did we seek support for children who didn't have a voice and may have been subjected to abuse and how did we support these children who may have or may have not been experiencing this daily?

The Independent Chair of the Telford and Wrekin Safeguarding Children Board advised that the partnership was aware of how harmful domestic abuse could be and that it was an issue which was difficult to address. Members were informed that if West Merica Police became aware of a case of domestic abuse involving a child, the school would be notified so that when the child arrives at school, the school would be in a position to better support the child whilst in a school setting. Nurseries and preschools were also on alert for any signs from children of domestic abuse at home. The Board continuously works to gather information from various sources as part of a multi-faced approach to help identify and support children who may have been subjected to domestic abuse.

The Director: Children's Safeguarding & Family Support confirmed that from a service delivery approach, the Council had worked with a number of families with a range of needs and any child who had been affected by domestic abuse would be able to speak to a member of the team directly. If Teams suspected that there had been domestic abuse, the Council's Domestic Abuse Practitioners would work with social services and speak to the child's parents or carers. Through Family Safeguarding teams, the Council also worked with victims of domestic abuse to provide support around staying safe. When domestic abuse had been reported at an acute level, Probation Officers would also undertake targeted work, focusing on children and working with survivors. The Council had acknowledged that there was not just a focus on female victims but also the male victims and sometimes the abuser who had a responsibility to keep children safe.

As part of your efforts to reduce the number of children in care and focus on early intervention, the number of children on a child protection plan and the number of Section 47's undertaken had fallen rapidly between 22/23 and 23/24. Was the total reduction for both of these data sets what you had expected to see?

The Independent Chair of the Telford and Wrekin Safeguarding Children Board confirmed that the Board had undertaken work on the type of referrals coming into the Council which identified that a number of referrals were not necessarily safeguarding concerns.

The Director: Children's Safeguarding & Family Support advised that it had taken two to three years to see the reduction in the number of children on child protection plans and at the time of the meeting, work was still ongoing to monitor referrals through the Council's Family Connect service which would see teams assess the level of need and make decisions based on the information provided for each child. If the Council felt it was necessary to undertake a Section 47, this would still be the approach taken. The Council also offer a robust Early Help programme which includes the Family Hubs service to ensure families are supported at the most appropriate level. Members heard that the Council were continuing to monitor the number of children on child protection plans and the number of children who go back onto these plans.

How far did the support offered extend? Many high-risk families were often reluctant to get involved in formal programmes. Could Parish Councils offer clubs or other informal support options?

The Independent Chair of the Telford and Wrekin Safeguarding Children Board advised that the support offer available was designed to reach as many families as possible and professionals were available across various organisations to help provide support. There had been a real commitment from the Board to find the best person to communicate with each family based on their circumstances.

The Director: Children's Safeguarding & Family Support advised that the Council's Strengthening Families Team offered a family drop-in session at Southwater Library which was co-led with a parent peer advocate aimed to reduce barriers by creating a non-threatening environment where parents could share their experiences and receive early help and family support services. Members heard that the library setting had allowed parents and families to approach the right support without the need to go through social services.

What mental health and emotional support was available for the Council's Safeguarding Team and if there was not sufficient support available, what steps could elected Members have taken to ensure support is available?

The Director: Children's Safeguarding & Family Support commented that he was proud of the mental health support available for teams within the Children's Safeguarding & Family Support service. The Council also offered an Employee Assistance Programme and various support options for staff including a systemic psychotherapist who was able to discuss experiences of individual staff members, how they felt in certain situations and assist with identifying the most suitable support options available to them. Members were informed that if there was a significant incident, the team would undergo a formal debrief and followed by regular check in sessions. On a quarterly basis, Service Delivery Managers would provide a formal report which would include indicators of the overall wellbeing of the workforce to ensure the Council were providing the necessary support needed.

Were county lines a problem in Telford & Wrekin?

The Director: Children's Safeguarding & Family Support advised that it was difficult to provide Members with specific data relating to county lines but the Council recognised the challenges in the Borough and had continued to regularly respond to cases where children had been impacted by this type of harm.

CYP40 Work Programme

The Senior Democracy Officer (Scrutiny) presented the updated work programme to the Committee. The next formal meeting was scheduled to take place in March 2025 where Members would receive an update on School Admissions and Placements. A further meeting of the Committee would take place in May 2025 which would look at the Council's SEND offer.

Members were also informed that work had commenced on the next two year Scrutiny work programme and Members would be invited to make suggestions for the 2025/26 municipal year.

CYP41 Chair's Update

Following the lengthy discussion had by Members during the meeting, the Chair suggested that a visit to the Council's Family Hubs be arranged.

The meeting ended at 7.32 pm

Chairman:

Date: Thursday 20 March 2025