

CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Monday, 31 January 2022

Present: Councillor W Clements (Chair)

Councillors	K Cannon	H Collinson
	C Cooke	C Povall
	C Carubia	P Stuart
	M Booth	A Wright
	D Brennan	

62 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Chair opened the meeting and reminded everyone that the meeting was being webcast and a copy is retained on the Council's website.

63 APOLOGIES

Councillor Samantha Frost had given her apologies for absence.

64 MEMBERS CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Members of the Committee were asked whether they have any personal or prejudicial interests in connection with any application on the agenda. There were no declarations of interest.

65 MINUTES

Resolved: That the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 23 November 2021 be agreed.

66 PUBLIC AND MEMBERS QUESTIONS

Three questions had been received.

Question 1 from Paul Cook

Regarding cuts to services, what impact (short and long term) will there be to children and young people if youth services (the Hive etc.) are cut with loss of provision, resources and staff?

Answer

The reduction of £100k from the Council budget to The Hive Youth Zone is being offset by a £100k donation from local business regeneration. In the short-term this will mitigate against potential reduction of services for young people. In the long-term The Hive Youth Zone is increasing it's own capacity

for fundraising and will work in partnership with the Local Authority to increase external grant income.

In the 2021-22 budget setting process, the Council invested additional funding into its own Youth Services. Over £100k of this funding was allocated for weekend activity which was surplus to the core youth offer. The proposal is to cease the additional activity and protect the core neighbourhood offer, which will continue to deliver with the existing resource of highly experienced and skilled staff.

Question from Dr Rhona O'Brien

According to every reliable data source published, violence against women and children is a regional, national and international epidemic with lethal and longitudinal consequences. How will Wirral Borough Council offer preventative, early intervention and healthy relationship education to help reduce the number of children placed on Child Protection Plans, whilst simultaneously cutting funding to children and young people's services?

Answer

Thanks to Dr Rhona O'Brien for raising this very important question. Preventing violence against women and children is a priority for Wirral Council and its partners. We are very aware of the impact domestic abuse has short term and long term on children and young people. In October 2021, this committee recommended to Council adopting a Prevention Policy and Prevention Framework. The recommendation was agreed and a commitment to prevention implemented. Since 2019 this committee has consistently supported investment in early help and prevention services, with the overall service budget increasing and funding for domestic abuse services also increasing. It is this investment in prevention, and implementation of key strategies such as the partnership Domestic Abuse-No Excuse Strategy and Breaking the Cycle programme, that are contributing to a reduction in demand for children's social care.

Preventing violence is a whole-system responsibility, requiring strong and purposeful partnerships. In Wirral, we benefit from proactive partnerships such as the Domestic Abuse Alliance, Community Safety Partnership, and Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements for both adults and children. Senior Leaders work together with the Violence Reduction Unit and Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner to ensure we are intervening early and providing high quality healthy relationship education. One of the priorities of the domestic abuse strategy is to achieve *Brighter, kinder futures for the next generation*, and we are working with our vibrant third sector to achieve this. In the last 12 months this has included the launch of a Healthy Relationships app by the Paul Lavelle Foundation, delivery of healthy relationships programmes in schools, further education colleges, and in youth clubs. In addition to this, external funding in excess of £400k has been invested in community organisations to tackle domestic violence and abuse. We are in the process of co-producing a local Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy and intend to publish this later in the spring. None of the saving

suggested by children's services will impact reduce our current investment in this important work.

Question 3 (name and address supplied)

Following a parental complaint in 2019 about a child with SEND left without education, which was subsequently upheld by the Local Government Ombudsman, the Chief Executive agreed to hold a review. The Liberal Democrats presented a notice of motion to Council asking the review to look at the behaviours of LA SEND team and lack of support for children with SEND. At the time, the then Children's Director acknowledged to the parent that the biggest issue was culture change.

In September 2021 Ofsted carried out an inspection which highlighted a number of areas for improvement. Many parents believe vulnerable children have suffered irreparable damage with many children's needs escalating resulting in significantly higher costs to support. The "Wirral Way" culture of parent blame and hostility towards parents and children with SEN needs to be changed to a culture of working together in the best interest of the child. Concerns have been raised for a number of years to numerous councillors about Wirral LA SEND team, with many parents and carers of children with SEND often feeling unheard when they have turned to their local councillors for support, and many are left questioning whether committee members could have done more to challenge the LA SEND team. What are the top three things Wirral councillors are going to do differently to ensure the necessary improvements will be made?

Answer

Members of the Children, Families and Education committee want all children with SEND to be able to achieve successful outcomes. The committee will have the following priorities in making sure the improvements required will be made.

The committee will take note of the actions that are needed as detailed in the Local Area SEND inspection that took place last term and will respond positively to the changes needed by all local area partners involved. A clear action plan will be developed that gives milestones, success criteria and evidence of impact in the areas raised as serious weakness by the inspection. As part of this action plan will be focused on improving communication with parents.

Secondly, the committee will continue to review and monitor the progress being made in the areas that need to be addressed most urgently. The committee will receive quarterly updates of the action plan to ensure progress is made.

Finally, members are keen to work with parents/carers in co-production to assure the councils involvement in addressing the concerns that have been raised during the inspection. Members will want to consider their role in co-production alongside parents/carers and partner agencies in making sure the

actions taking place are the right ones and progress that is made in the future, has an impact on young people with SEND.

Members are pleased to hear that several parent/carers have been involved this month, with LA officers and partners in attending workshops to make sure the voice of parents/carers are at the centre of the action plan that is being produced.

The committee looks forward to making sure the improvements that are made, lead to positive outcomes for young people with SEND.

67 **SOCIAL CARE WORKFORCE STRATEGY 2022-2025**

The Assistant Director of Children and Families presented the report of the Director of Children, Families and Education which detailed the strategy difficulties in recruitment of social workers. The Strategy set out how the Council would attract, retain and support a stable and committed workforce. Governance arrangements and performance were also detailed.

Members queried details in the report which confirmed

- Agency workers did not just cover vacancies but also covered maternity and sick leave
- Agency workers accounted for around 16% of the workforce
- There was an intention to continue an apprenticeship programme to grow our own social workers.

Resolved – That:

- (1) the Social Care Workforce Strategy 2022-2025 attached at appendix A to the report be endorsed; and,**
- (2) an update be received in 12 months on the progress towards implementation of the Strategy.**

68 **LOCAL AREA SEND INSPECTION UPDATE**

The Assistant Director of Education presented the report of the Director of Children, Families and Education which provided an overview of the Wirral local area response to the findings from the joint local area inspection into the effectiveness of the local area in implementing the special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) reforms as set out in the Children and Families Act 2014. The overview was a joint statement of actions of the Council and Clinical Commissioning Group, to make Members aware of the actions and the governance arrangements. The report provided a summary of the key areas of development identified by the inspection and the local area response in addressing them, which will form the written statement of action required.

Members questioned different aspects of the report, including recruitment of specialist officers such as educational psychologists and teams that can go out to a school and create bespoke care packages. They indicated that they

would appreciate a 'dashboard' of information around Special Educational Needs statistics.

Resolved: That -

- (1) the information contained within the report be noted;**
- (2) the actions carried out to date and the proposed actions to be included in the development of the Written Statement of Action to be submitted to Ofsted be endorsed; and,**
- (3) the Director of Children's, Families and Education be requested to submit a progress report in quarter 2 of the calendar year.**

69 **ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS FOR COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY CONTROLLED PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS AND THE CO-ORDINATED ADMISSION SCHEMES FOR 2023-24**

The Assistant Director of Education presented the report of the Director of Children, Families and Education which invited the Committee to determine the Authority's admission arrangements for community and voluntary controlled primary and secondary schools and the co-ordinated schemes for 2023-2024, including a proposed change at Woodfield School. This was a statutory requirement.

Resolved: That -

- (1) the proposed admission arrangements for community and voluntary controlled schools and the Wirral co-ordinated schemes for 2023-2024 as set out in the appendices to the report be agreed.**
- (2) the proposed change in the Published Admission Number (PAN) for Woodchurch Road Primary School to 30 be agreed.**

70 **POLLING PLACE REVIEW: SCHOOLS**

The Electoral Services Manager presented the report of the Director of Law and Governance which set out the findings following a review undertaken in respect to the use of the 41 Schools which had been used as polling places within Wirral for the purposes of Local Authority, Parliamentary and other elections. It was noted that following investigation of alternative venues, the number of such schools had been reduced to 34.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

74 **POLLING PLACE REVIEW: SCHOOLS - EXEMPT APPENDIX 2**

Resolved:

That the appendix which was exempt from publication be noted.