

WESTMORLAND AND FURNESS COUNCIL CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE &  
FAMILIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Meeting of the **Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Committee** held on Thursday, 1 February 2024 at 6.00 pm at Council Chamber - Kendal Town Hall - Kendal Town Hall, Lowther Street, Kendal

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**PRESENT:**

Cllr P Dew (Chair)  
Cllr S Evans (Vice-Chair)  
Cllr J Battye  
Cllr J Drake  
Cllr M Robinson  
Cllr M Severn  
Cllr J Murray

**Officers in attendance:**

Mr A Farrar	Democratic Services Officer
Ms E Greenwood	Strategic policy and scrutiny adviser
Ms A Holliman	Assistant Director Quality, Resources and Transformation
Mr M Vasic	Director of Children's Services
Ms I Booler	Assistant Director, Education and Inclusion
Ms L Ormesher	Children and Families Public Health Lead
Mr D Stephens	Strategic Policy and Scrutiny Advisor

**PART I ITEMS CONSIDERED IN THE PRESENCE OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS**

**33. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Mr D Cassidy, Mr E Hennessy and Ms V Hughes. Mr J Murray was substitute for Ms V Hughes.

Apologies were also received from Ms S Sanderson, Portfolio Holder for Children's Services, Education and Skills.

**34. MEMBERSHIP**

There were no changes to membership.

**35. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST/DISPENSATIONS**

Councillor J Drake provided a declaration of interest in Item 9 as she was Chair of Trustees in the charity Family Matters.

### **36. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

**RESOLVED**, that the press and public not be excluded from the meeting during consideration of any item on the agenda.

### **37. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

#### **Correction:**

Page 10 Minute 28 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph

Replace “Cllr Drake was aware that in the past there had been a number of youngster that were repeatedly going missing from the Ulverston area, but this had seemed to have stopped recently. She asked the officer if there was a reason for this.”

with “Cllr Drake was aware that in the past there had been a number of youngsters that were repeatedly committing anti-social behaviour from the Ulverston area, but this had seemed to have stopped recently. She asked the officer if there was a reason for this.”

Page 11 Minute 29 Page 11 5<sup>th</sup> paragraph

Delete the words “took members”

The amended paragraph would read “The Senior Manager Early Help and Think Families highlighted the different levels of need in the report.”

**RESOLVED**, that subject to the corrections above, the minutes of the meeting held on 12 October 2024 be agreed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

### **38. 2023 ATTAINMENT REPORT: IDENTIFYING TRENDS, IMPROVEMENTS AND DISPARITIES IN PUPIL OUTCOMES**

Members received a report that provided information to Children, Young People & Families Overview & Scrutiny Committee about pupil outcomes for all Key Stages in Westmorland and Furness in 2023, together with an update on Ofsted School Inspection outcomes. Westmorland and Furness has a strong school-led system with a high proportion of good and outstanding schools. It was a reflection of the collective commitment that 92% of Westmorland and Furness pupils attended a good or better school, which is the fourth highest in the North West. Ofsted have judged 96% of Westmorland and Furness Primary schools as good or outstanding and 84% of secondary schools. 2023 pupil primary school outcomes were somewhat mixed. Although there were some improvements in pupil outcomes when compared to 2019 including in Early Years and Key Stage 1 Reading and

Mathematics, it was not a consistent picture. Early Years outcomes and Reading, Writing Maths combined at Key stage 1 and 2 were below national despite individual subjects being in line with national. It was pleasing to see that both Key stage 2 individual subjects in reading and mathematics were above national and therefore a key priority for Westmorland and Furness schools is Key Stage 2 writing. Phonics was also a strength; outcomes had improved and phonics outcomes were above national. Secondary school outcomes were also inconsistent. Westmorland and Furness could celebrate improving outcomes at both Key Stage 4 and 5. However it was disappointing to note that the progress measure at Key Stage 4 has declined from 2019 and was now a priority. Improving outcomes at all key stages to pre-covid levels remained a priority. However, when reviewing Westmorland and Furness outcomes there was an urgent imperative to focus on improving pupil outcomes for disadvantaged children and young people, particularly boys to ensure that many more achieve a 'good level pass', a grade 5 at English and Mathematics at GCSE.

A member commented that Westmorland & Furness had a mix of urban and rural areas and did that account for any of the differences between large urban schools and smaller rural schools. A member remarked that it would be useful to have the data available for each Locality Board.

The Assistant Director - Education & Inclusion noted that it took time to disaggregate the systems and it was hoped to have that level of detail next year and noted that nationally disadvantaged pupils have done well in urban areas.

A member remarked on the devastating effect that Covid and lockdowns had on young people and what steps the Authority could take to reverse the trend.

The Assistant Director - Education & Inclusion offered caution with Key Stage 4 comparisons as the comparison for 2022 was with 2019. She acknowledged that Key Stage 2 figures were below the national average and that there was a model for improvement and there were projects to help disadvantaged pupils.

A member noted that there was nothing new with the figures and was very pleased that Attendance Officers were in place.

The Director of Children's Services noted that it was great to have the Attendance Team and that at Staff Roadshows links were made with Social Workers to help support and that there was a collective ambition as a Children's Service to help reverse the trend.

The Chair requested an assurance that advantaged schools would not be left behind or disadvantaged.

The Assistant Director - Education & Inclusion provided that assurance.

**RESOLVED,** that the Committee

- (1) noted these results within a context of higher than national absence rates and class closures during Covid leading to loss of learning in the two academic years prior to these national tests.
- (2) noted the impact on outcomes due to disadvantage and supports the inclusion of actions to mitigate disadvantage on educational outcomes in Council plans
- (3) considered and commented on the appropriateness of the next steps in regard to ensuring improved outcomes for all Westmorland and Furness children including those who are disadvantaged, Cared for and have identified Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

### **39. CARED FOR AND CARE EXPERIENCED STRATEGY**

Members received a report which provided the Children, Young People & Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an overview of the new draft strategy for cared-for children in Westmorland and Furness. Unlike the preceding county strategy, concluding in 2023, this new strategy was tailored specifically to our local context. The final version of the strategy would be approved by Cabinet in April 2024.

The Director of Children's Services presented the report and brought out 5 key points from the strategy.

- Home – stability and security
- Education, employment and training
- Health and emotional wellbeing
- Relationships with carers and families
- Steps to independence

A member queried what was the end date for the process, how it would be endorsed and as homecare was provided by Cumberland Council was this compatible with their strategy.

The Director of Children's Services commented that after Corporate Parenting Board it will be presented to Cabinet in March. After the Corporate Parenting Board and before Cabinet there will be sessions with young people. The homecare service was hosted by Cumberland Council and the physical establishments within Westmorland and Furness are visited by officers to ensure that care is delivered to standard that officers are happy with.

A member commented that they had attended the Foster Carers event and that the cost of living crisis had made this more difficult and had this resulted in Cumbrian children taken out of county.

The Director of Children's Services remarked that there was Department of Education funding to recruit and retain foster carers and it was important to support the Local Authority offer. Westmorland and Furness Council was not reliant on

independent foster carers. Westmorland and Furness Council are looking at what can be done, that would be training, allowances and potential around Council Tax.

A member noted the section on Employment and what work was done within Westmorland and Furness Council and what can be done with other employers.

The Director of Children's services commented that Westmorland and Furness had 6 apprentices and BAE Systems supported 10 to join their apprenticeship scheme. There had been a lot of work completed by the Apprenticeship Team.

**RESOLVED,** that the Committee

- (1) Reviewed the draft Cared for Children and Care Experienced Young People's Strategy, providing observations and input to support the further development of the strategy.
- (2) Considered and discussed how broad the spectrum of the council can contribute to the development and the delivery of the strategy.

#### **40. SCHOOL ORGANISATION UPDATE**

Members received a report from the Director of Children's Services that provided an update for Scrutiny regarding the Local Authority's School Organisation/Pupil Place Planning function, an overview of the role of the School Organisation Team and its work programme for the coming year. This included the establishment of a School Organisation Review Group to oversee the development of a Westmorland and Furness School Organisation/Pupil Place Planning Strategy and a review of the Local Authority's School Organisation Decision Making Process. The report also provided for information, detail relating to the Local Authority's current School Organisational Proposals: a proposal to close North Walney Primary and Nursery School and a proposal to expand Beaconside CE Primary School building and establish key stage 2 resource provision at the school.

The Chair commented that after disaggregation was there enough capacity within the School Organisation Team and he hoped that the Committee would have input into the School Organisation Strategy.

The Assistant Director – Quality, Resources and Transformation remarked that the School Organisation Team was doing well. There had been some very positive recruitment with a very experienced Senior Manager and noted that although it was a small team they worked well with other colleagues.

The Director of Children's Services commented that sufficiency needed to be in 1 single place. There was a very good team in place and they needed a set of values and principles to help. It was important to understand Westmorland and Furness, to understand the context. It was important not to jump to conclusions as schools smaller than North Walney are viable.

A member commented that future housebuilding was to take place in Barrow and had this been taken into consideration.

The Assistant Director – Quality, Resources and Transformation confirmed that it had been taken into consideration.

A member noted that 1,000 homes were needed in the future for Eden and what would be the unintended consequences.

The Assistant Director – Quality, Resources and Transformation commented that it was around future-proofing the provision in the area.

The Director of Children’s Services noted that unitary authorities had all services together and colleagues would raise issues with him and if not he would raise issues with them and that it was rare that decisions happened in isolation.

**RESOLVED,** that the Committee

- (1) noted the role of the Local Authority’s School Organisation Team, its statutory functions and the team’s proposed work programme for the forthcoming year.
- (2) noted the current School Organisation Proposals currently being progressed through the statutory process, relating to Beaconside and North Walney.
- (3) requested a further update regarding the development of the Local Authority’s School Organisation/Pupil Place Planning Strategy and the review of the Local Authority’s School Organisation Decision Making Process later in 2024.

#### **41. MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN**

Members received a paper on the current issues relating to children and young people’s mental health. It outlined the support available within Westmorland and Furness and sets out the national context for this provision, specifically the policy and legislative framework for mental health services and various statistics and research reports highlighting concern about this. The paper provided a basis for the Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider which, if any, issues would be suitable for further consideration as part of a short task and finish review by the Committee, or as the subject of recommendations by the Committee. There was clear evidence that the prevalence of mental health issues among children and young people was increasing; this was the case prior to 2020 but has undoubtedly been exacerbated by the pandemic. However, there were nationally recognised challenges with the provision of mental health support to children and young people; staff shortages, coupled with the increasing numbers experiencing mental health issues, were leading to long delays in those with more serious mental health issues accessing support. These problems were affecting services Westmorland and Furness as they were impacting in other parts of the country. Mental health support for young people was provided based on a needs-

led Thrive approach. Alongside a focus on enabling those who were 'thriving' to maintain their emotional wellbeing and mental health through prevention and promotion, support ranges from Getting Advice, Getting Help, Getting more help through more specialist services and finally providing risk support to those experiencing the most severe issues/risks and those who are not able to access the support available. Schools and colleges were usually on the frontline in providing the first level of support to children and young people experiencing mental health issues; the Government was currently rolling out its commitment to establishing mental health support teams in schools – these were now in place for almost all secondary schools in Westmorland and Furness and some primaries – with schools also encouraged to identify senior mental health leaders. As in other areas of health, there had been an increasing focus on boosting preventative measures and early help support; however, as was also the case in other areas, it was challenging to rebalance funding from higher end/crisis level support to earlier level interventions at the local level. Westmorland and Furness Council's (W&F) own direct financial investment in this area is around £54k for online emotional support (Kooth), although the children and families Public Health team were working hard to support schools in particular with this agenda, and there were a number of related initiatives taking place. In common with other areas there were locally and nationally recognised challenges with deteriorating mental health of children and young people overall, and with the provision of support for those who need it. This was linked to a lack of system wide funding and capacity, meaning that there were both shortfalls in specialist support provision as well as a lack of resources to support preventative and early intervention measures to a desirable level. W&F experienced additional challenge linked to the complexity of local health structures; with the Westmorland and Furness footprint split across two integrated care systems and differences between the delivery of services in the two areas, the council and its partners (such as schools) must work with and support two separate pathways for those receiving care in each ICS area. Addressing and reversing trends in mental health issues, funding and expanding all levels of support and resolving the issues caused by local health structures were all difficult, complex issues that were not within the gift of the Committee. However, this paper set out areas where the Committee could usefully explore the specific local context in more detail with a view to making recommendations about steps W&F could take to improve support across Westmorland and Furness.

A member raised the distinction between mental illness and emotional wellbeing and the concern about the transition from Young People to Adults so that no-one was omitted.

A discussion took place around promoting a physical education curriculum and the difference this had made in the past in outcomes not just within the physical education curriculum.

A member commented on the use of Family Hubs and Children Centres and how they were supporting the work.

The Children and Families Public Health Lead remarked that it was important to look at the long term offer and that 1 size does not fit all.

A round table discussion took place to add a recommendation on the Arts curriculum, it was universally agreed to add a recommendation with similar wording to the physical education curriculum recommendation.

The Chair noted this was a very good starting place and there was a need to gather facts.

**RESOLVED,** that the Committee

- (1) Added value by targeting its insight and recommendations on local challenges and / or council specific issues, rather than replicating work on broader children's and mental health issues already being considered by other partners such as the ICB's, or nationally.
- (2) Should therefore focus in particular on the specific local landscape of children and young people's emotional wellbeing and mental health and support, with a focus on prevention and early intervention, and W&F's role in it, rather than issues outside of the council's control for example capacity issues and delays in CAMHS
- (3) Had scope to influence/clarify W&F's work which could be the subject of further work or immediate recommendations including:
  - a) Summarising the mix of financial and workforce investment currently directed towards children and young people's mental health within W&F. This will inform the creation of a W&F vision and offer, which will provide evidence for any need for additional internal investment and improve partnership working.
  - b) Supported and encouraging the finalisation of the Public Health data dashboard on mental health trends in W&F.
  - c) Clarified the governance across the system and internally for W&F with clear accountability and reporting based around the data dashboard.
  - d) Explored the consistency of support that schools are providing (through Mental Health leads, Mental Health Support Teams, MyTime and other support for social, emotional and mental health) and identifying any gaps.
  - e) Explored current provision and best practice regarding infant mental health, to align with other agendas such as Family Hubs and Start for Life
  - f) Reviewed the information relating to mental health issues on the W&F website to streamline, update and simplify
  - g) Promoted a physical education curriculum in schools that is better tailored to the needs and interests of young people, which will thereby boost both physical and mental wellbeing
  - h) Promoted an arts, drama and music curriculum in schools that is better tailored to the needs and interests of young people, which will thereby boost both physical and mental wellbeing.



#### **42. PORTFOLIO HOLDER BRIEFING**

In the absence of the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills a written update had been provided and this was noted by the Committee.

#### **43. CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**

The Strategic Policy and Scrutiny Advisor presented the report which provided the Committee with the Forward Plan of Key Decisions for consideration and a draft work programme for consideration and discussion. It was noted that the following items would be included in future meetings:-

- Annual Report for Safeguarding (Childrens)
- Attainment 24
- Sufficiency Strategy

It was noted that Mental Health Support for Children would return to the Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

A member commented that it was important that when the Attainment Report came to the Committee that more locality based data was included.

A member remarked that it was important to note update on items at each meeting.

The Strategic Policy and Scrutiny Advisor outlined that the Committee Briefing item could be where progress was noted.

**RESOLVED,** that the Committee

- (1) noted the Cabinet Forward Plan.
- (2) discussed and developed its work programme to ensure effective, impactful scrutiny activity.

#### **44. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee will be held on 18 April 2024 at 6.00 pm.

The meeting ended at 7.50 pm