

Children and Young People's Services Select Committee

11 September 2019 – At a meeting of the Children and Young People's Services Select Committee held at 10.30 am at County Hall, Chichester.

Present: Mr High (Chairman)

Mr Jupp	Mr Lea	Maria Roberts
Ms Flynn	Ms Lord	Mr Cristin
Mrs Hall	Ms Sudan	
Mrs Jones	Mr Lozzi	

Apologies were received from Mrs Bennett, Mrs Bridges, Mr Cloake, Mr Wickremaratchi and Mrs Ryan

Also in attendance: Ms Goldsmith, Mrs Pendleton, Mr Parikh, Dr O'Kelly, Mr Burrett, Mr Marshall, Mr Simmons.

Part I

25. Declarations of Interests

25.1 The following personal interests were declared:

- Mr High declared an interest in item 7 (SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2019-2024) as a member of his family has an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP).
- Mrs Flynn declared an interest in item 7 (SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2019-2024) as a member of her family has Special Educational Needs (SEN).

26. Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee

26.1 Resolved that the minutes of the last meeting held on 17 July 2019 be approved as a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

27. Responses to Recommendations

27.1 The Committee considered a response from the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People and the Leader regarding the participation of young people at the Select Committee.

27.2 Members commented there was no date on the response letter to the Chairman of the Committee. It was later noted the date of the letter should be recorded as 30 August 2019.

27.3 Resolved that the Committee:

1. Note the response.

2. Recommend that, where appropriate, the relevant business areas ensure the views and experiences of service users (children and young people) are well represented in reports and are used to inform presentations to the Committee.

28. Children First Improvement Update

28.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services. The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People introduced the item as an update on progress within the service. Garath Symonds, Senior Improvement Lead, provided the following update:

- The Practice Improvement Plan had now been adopted as policy and submitted to the Department for Education (DfE) and Ofsted. Feedback would be provided on how well the plan reflects the areas that need to improve as laid out in the inspection report.
- The report included detail on the development of both the overarching Children First Strategy and Children First Programme.
- The Commissioners report on WSCC's capacity and capability to improve was expected at the end of September 2019.
- The first monitoring visit from Ofsted had been rescheduled for 3rd and 4th December 2019. Preparation for this was underway.
- The Senior Improvement Lead highlighted achievements in the areas of social work recruitment, caseload levels, work with NHS colleagues, particularly in respect of the improved timeliness of Initial Health Assessments (IHAs) for Children Looked After (CLA), fostering and compliance.

28.2 Andrew Ireland, Chair of the Children's Services Improvement Board, outlined the work of the Board so far including the development and monitoring of the Improvement Plan. He explained that his role as Chair of the multi-agency Board was to ensure that all partners were fully engaged in the process. The Chair of the Improvement Board echoed the Senior Improvement Lead in terms of the achievements made in respect to recruitment and advised he had spent a lot of time meeting frontline staff. Conversations with these staff had proven useful in order to feedback to the Director of Children's Services and his leadership team. The Chair of the Improvement Board felt the baseline position was clear and was hopeful that by the time of the first Ofsted monitoring visit the impact of momentum and drive exhibited throughout the service would be evident.

28.3 The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People advised that the vacancy gap had reduced significantly, however there was no complacency. He advised that staff would continue to feel supported in order to provide the best environment to ultimately improve outcomes for children and young people. The Cabinet Member thanked the Chair of the Improvement Board and its members for the work undertaken so far.

28.4 The Committee heard that one of West Sussex County Council's Children's Homes had recently been inspected and, whilst the outcome was subject to verification, it was the best possible outcome. The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People cited an enormous effort for the

improvement in a challenging environment and noted it was a credit to the team considering the wider context and turmoil of children's services.

28.5 The Cabinet Member advised the Children First Strategy was currently in development with all concerned partners. The Leader added she felt reassured by the work undertaken so far and reiterated how impressed she had been with the level of care provided at the recently inspected children's home. She added this demonstrated that the capacity and capability to improve was there. The Chairman agreed the service appeared to be on the right track, but that it was a long road.

28.6 Members of the Committee were grateful that the information regarding the difference between permanent and agency staff had been provided in the most recent update. A summary of the key questions and responses were as follows:

- The Committee questioned if there was one area of concern where progress or change was slow or particularly difficult, what this was, and how the service planned to remedy it. The Director of Children's Services advised the CLA service had been a concern for a significant period and required the most amount of work to improve. The CLA service along with the Assessment and Intervention team were being prioritised.
- The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People advised the stability of workforce remained a huge challenge. The numbers had improved but it remained fragile. Members considered how best the Committee could monitor these areas and suggested that they were either considered at the BPG, or as future items for scrutiny.
- Members noted the ambition for better outcomes for children and young people, however sought assurance for children already engaged with the service that their needs were being sufficiently addressed and resourced. The Director of Children's Services advised investment had been made to adequately resource the department and that all children and families were receiving better standards of care and support.
- Members questioned who set the caseload targets and considered if staff found them to be reasonable and achievable. The Director of Children's services advised caseload targets were sourced from national research and Ofsted and noted that variation in these numbers was key depending on the type of work, complexity and social worker experience. The Director of Children's Services suggested a report could go to the BPG which could provide further detail. The Committee welcomed this suggestion.
- Members requested further detail on the experience, types of work undertaken by social workers, salary ranges and prospects. The Director of Children's Services advised this detail would be provided in the October update to the Committee, but noted the competitive job market and varying responsibilities of different levels of qualified social workers.
- The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People advised the Committee of the recruitment and retention offer which had attracted a significant sign-up, and the new incentive of an interest free loan.

28.7 Resolved that the Committee:

1. Receives baseline data and trends at each meeting on caseloads and ratios of agency and permanent staff, including the vacancy gap.
2. Requests an update on the development of the Children First Strategy at the October meeting.
3. Requests a detailed report to the BPG on Assessment and Intervention.
4. Requests a detailed report to the BPG on caseloads.
5. Requests the Director of Children's Services and BPG consider how best the Committee receive the risk register as part of the Total Performance Monitor (TPM).

29. Small Schools Assessment

29.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Education and Skills. Tony Kershaw, Director of Law and Assurance, introduced the item to outline the role of the Committee at this early point in the timeline of the small schools assessment process. The Director of Law and Assurance noted an awareness that representations had been received by members of the committee in respect of the draft decision report. He advised the role of the Committee should be to consider the rationale for the commencement of a consultation for the development of the proposal and how this subsequently informed the Cabinet Member prior to the decision being taken.

29.2 Andy Thorne, Strategic Finance Business Partner for Education provided a brief update on school funding as part of the item. The main points were as follows:

- Central government had announced a funding increase for mainstream schools over the next three years.
- This would see a 4% increase in the national funding rates for mainstream schools in 2020/21 together with an increase in the Minimum per Pupil Funding levels for secondary schools from £4,800 to £5,000 next year, and for primary schools from £3,500 to £3,750, with a further increase to £4,000 in 2021/22.
- The funding would also include an additional £66m nationally for Early Years and £700m for High Needs in 2020/21.
- The High Needs funding formula would ensure that every local authority receives an increase of at least 8% per head through the funding floor, which for West Sussex would equate to at least £6.5m.
- The potential impact of the minimum per pupil funding level suggests that in 2021/22, over 60% of West Sussex secondary schools and 80% of larger primary schools could benefit from the uplift in per pupil funding.
- Modelling had shown that aggregate funding could increase by around £19m across all West Sussex schools, however due to the way this was calculated, very few of the 53 small primary schools would attract any of this additional funding.

29.3 Paul Wagstaff, Director of Education and Skills provided the following contextual information on the Small Schools assessment:

- The School Effectiveness Strategy was conceived on the basis that circumstances for schools were changing in terms of financial pressures and their associated viability which needed to be addressed.
- This was not a proposal to consult on closing schools, but to consult on the options available. There was a genuine desire to widen the discussion and hear the views of parents, staff, governors and the broader views of the communities in which schools are situated.
- The proposal was to begin a conversation with schools, stakeholders and other interested parties. The Cabinet Member would then consider the results of the consultation.
- In January 2020, any specific proposals on the preferred options would be published, with a final decision to be made in March/April 2020.

29.4 The Cabinet Member for Education and Skills reiterated the desire to dispel myths that this was a consult to close exercise and advised the Committee that he had received a high volume of correspondence from concerned parents and governors. He added this was very much a consultation about a range of options for change and that closure was not the preferred option but a last resort.

29.5 The Chairman advised the comments by the Director of Education and Skills and Cabinet Member were reassuring, and he added that he too had received a number of concerned representations about the proposal to consult on options. The Chairman proposed that a Task and Finish Group (TFG) be established to enable proper scrutiny of the small schools assessment.

29.6 Members of the Committee agreed with the idea of a TFG, however were concerned that the representations received would not be considered as part of the decision to commence a consultation. After some discussion, it was decided that the first meeting of the TFG would take place before the Cabinet Member decision to commence a consultation was taken. The output of from this initial TFG would be shared with the Cabinet Member prior to him taking the decision.

29.7 The terms of reference were established for the TFG (copy appended to the signed minutes). The membership would comprise Nigel Jupp, Hilary Flynn, Dawn Hall, Karen Sudan, Kirsty Lord and Maria Roberts. The TFG would consider what evidence, witness and stakeholder input would be required and how best to enable these representations.

29.8 Resolved that the Committee:

1. Agrees a TFG be established which will meet up to three times.
2. The first meeting of the TFG is to be before the Cabinet Member decision to commence a consultation is taken.
3. The output from the first meeting is shared with the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills.

30. SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2019-2024

30.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Education and Skills. The Director of Education and Skills introduced the report, and provided the following overview of the new strategy:

- WSCC's current SEND strategy would come to an end this year. The Education and Skills directorate have been working with stakeholders in the development of a new SEND and Inclusion Strategy which will lead the authority through the next five years.
- Through various consultation and engagement events, a co-created strategy had been developed which will improve WSCC's SEND provision, ensuring all children get the best start in life.
- The new strategy would see the service working in partnership with NHS colleagues, Public Health and Early Help. A mental health strategy and reducing exclusion figures were key priorities within the Strategy.
- With the increasing cost of transport and out of county placements, additional Special Support Centres (SSCs) would bring expertise back into the county and reduce the pressure on transport requirements.
- The strategy was now being developed with various detailed action plans with key performance indicators (KPIs) in order to hold the service to account and ensure delivery of improvement.
- The service would also receive scrutiny from the Schools Forum who had delegated responsibility for the high needs block, to ensure that the strategy was deliverable within the funding resource.

30.2 The Director of Education introduced two witnesses to provide their views and experiences of working with the county council in the development of the new SEND and Inclusion Strategy. Helen Williamson, Head teacher of Billingshurst Primary School, made the following comments:

- Schools in West Sussex have a range of approaches to inclusion and are trying to meet the needs and expectations with limited resources, which was challenging.
- In previous years, there had been an absence of looking inwardly at the county's existing resources and expertise, and how better this could be used to support children locally.
- A good strategy will meet more children's needs through re-evaluating and redistributing resources across the county, such as SSCs and expertise.
- Crucial to the strategy's success would be the buy in of all head teachers. Supporting the use of local provision would ensure the strategy was implemented and functional, meaning schools could become more inclusive.
- Too many SEND children were excluded because schools lacked the resources to manage and support these children, or the manpower to deal with highly complex needs, which sometimes impacted on other children.
- A significant number of workshops took place with input from different agencies including health which considered how SEND children were better supported in West Sussex.

30.3 Val Evans, Chief Executive Officer of the West Sussex Parent Carer Forum and parent of a child with SEND provided the following comments:

- In the last 15 years, significant improvement had been made in support for SEND children.
- A common frustration was the attitude that children with SEND were the same, and there was a hope this would be addressed as part of the new strategy.
- The meetings of stakeholders that took place over the last year developed good proposals for the new strategy. There were however questions about the resources in place to achieve the aims as set out in the strategy, and would the individuality of children be taken into account in the rolling out of these proposals.

30.4 The Chairman and Director of Education and Skills thanked the witnesses for their input, and noted he was pleased to hear the positive comments about the collaborative approach with stakeholders. In terms of the comments regarding adequate resourcing to meet the aims of the strategy, the Director of Education and Skills drew the Committee's attention to the financial and resource implication section of the draft decision report which signalled a commitment to increase and improve provision. Furthermore, the service had been working with the NHS around funding for mental health workers, and 8 had now been appointed. The Director of Education and Skills also highlighted WSCCs commitment to capital expansion to ensure the increased number of specialist places in schools, plus an additional 11 SSCs.

30.5 The Cabinet Member for Education and Skills supported the comments made by the Director of Education and Skills and thanked the witnesses for attending and sharing their experiences. He added that the considerable capital investment toward additional SSCs and classrooms was very much required having visited some of the schools mentioned in the report, and was pleased this was being addressed as part of the capital programme.

30.6 The Committee considered the following points in discussion:

- Members were concerned about the lack of focus within the report on children with physical disabilities. Helen Johns, Head of Inclusion, advised the number of those with physical disabilities was a small number in comparison to those with SEN requirements, but that the department was looking at a review of their physical and sensory support service. SSCs were also being considered for their capacity to support those with visual or hearing impairment or physical disabilities.
- Members of the Committee noted the pilot of the Intensive Planning Team (IPT) and that if rolled out it would be fully chargeable. They questioned if the schools would be paying for this from their budget. The Head of Inclusion advised this would be paid from the school's allocation of central government funding.
- The Committee considered how the strategy would meet the needs of those currently home educated because schools were not currently adequately equipped to support them, and how the

service planned to bring those children back into schools. The Head of Inclusion advised the IPT would bring together services including health and social care to enable home educated children to return to school.

30.7 Resolved that the Committee:

1. Support the draft Cabinet Member decision to approve the SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2019-2024 and accompanying implementation plan for publication.

31. Forward Plan of Key Decisions

31.1 The Committee considered the Forward Plan dated 2 September 2019 (copy appended to the signed minutes).

31.2 The Committee asked if the decision regarding the allocation for funding for project delivery at Woodlands Mead College Site was still on track for September. The Cabinet Member for Education and Skills advised everything possible was being done to ensure that this happened.

31.3 Resolved – that the Committee notes the Forward Plan.

32. Children's In-house Residential Service Strategy

32.1 The Committee considered a report by the Executive Director People Services. The report was introduced by Kim Curry, Executive Director People Services who took the Committee through a presentation to highlight the key themes. A summary of these included:

- The residential improvement board was set up in September 2018 in response to the closure of Seaside children's home. On reflection, the residential service has come a long way in the last year.
- A measured strategic framework was developed which focussed on four key areas of work:
 - In-house services – supporting complex and vulnerable children on the edge of care
 - Best outcomes for children – keeping children at home, or as near to home as possible where safe and appropriate to do so
 - Flexible approach – ability to respond to a wide range of needs
 - Opportunities to be innovative – develop a wrap-around service.
- The strategy aims to keep children in West Sussex avoiding out of county and private high cost placements.
- The proposed changes at phase 1 impacted Seaside, May House and Cissbury Lodge, which were currently closed. The remaining homes: Teasel Close, High Trees and Orchard House were currently operational and rated good or better by Ofsted.
- A focus on staff and culture would be central to the in-house residential strategy, learning from previous experiences. Training, development and management oversight were key to foster the right culture and environment.

- Seaside, May House and Cissbury Lodge would hopefully be reopened at the end of 2020. At this point, feasibility work at Teasel Close, High Trees and Orchard House would commence as phase 2.
- Through the closure of Cissbury Lodge there had been a loss of long-term bed space. A bridging amount of £2m was required due to sourcing placements elsewhere during this period of closure, plus additional expenditure in staffing and training. Through cost avoidance models the service was confident that net changes in cost to the council would be neutral.

32.2 A summary of members questions and their responses were as follows:

- The Committee were interested to learn how the service was changing its approach to recruitment, particularly in view of the difficulties in recruiting Registered Managers. Jackie Wood, Assistant Director Corporate Parenting, advised a new recruitment campaign for Registered Managers had been established, and the development of the residential estate offered scope for career progression. Positive feedback had been received from engagement events.
- Members of the Committee asked when the new Registered Managers would be in post. The Assistant Director advised some were in place already, interviews were taking place in October and successful candidates would be in post before the end of the year, allowing them 12 months with the authority before the homes reopened.
- The Committee considered how WSCC monitored the care provided by private or out of county placements. Stuart Gibbons, Strategic Market Development Manager, advised Regulation 44 visits were undertaken to check the safety and wellbeing of these children. Additionally, the Commissioning Team were undertaking the Children's Cross Regional Arrangements Group (CCRAG) monitoring regime. This work, undertaken with partners, set out a method to ensure WSCC children were receiving the best care and outcomes, using the national benchmark framework. Members of the Committee considered that some of the financial aspects of the report were confusing and sought clarification as to whether the anticipated borrowing level of £500k was per annum. The Executive Director People Services advised this would be the annual borrowing cost if it was required.

32.3 Resolved that the Committee:

1. Recommend additional explanation is provided in the decision report to assist with clarifying some of the more complex financial information.
2. Suggests information regarding whether WSCC has a freehold interest in the children's homes is added to the decision report.
3. Supports the Cabinet Member decision to approve the strategy for the in-house children's residential service.

33. Formation of a Regional Adoption Agency

33.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services. The report was introduced by Jackie Wood, Assistant Director Corporate Parenting who provided the following key points regarding the new arrangement:

- The concept of Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs) was conceived in 2016 by central government who were unhappy with the number of children waiting for adoptive parents, and the types of adopters being recruited.
- The rationale for a RAA is to speed up matching and place children with families at a much earlier age to allow them to become settled. Additionally, the ambition is to improve adopter recruitment nationally.
- RAAs would see a decrease in costs; currently for WSCC to place a child with a neighbouring authority the associated cost would be upwards of £27k per child. By joining an RAA, there would be a central pool of adopters and therefore fewer costs involved.
- Most importantly, the RAA scheme would see improvements to children's lives, with fewer transitions between foster carers.
- 50% of local authorities were already in RAAs, with the remainder planning to go live by 2020 which is a government requirement.
- The RAA would consist of WSCC, East Sussex County Council (ESCC), Brighton and Hove City Council (BHCC) and Surrey County Council (SCC).
- Discussions and project groups have taken place with WSCC staff and the partnering authorities. It has been decided a hub and spoke model would be adopted with ESCC as the host authority. Staff responsibility would remain with the relevant local authority, however new staff in the RAA would adopt ESCCs terms and conditions.

33.2 The following points were raised in discussion:

- Members considered the financial and staffing complexities implicated within such a partnership. The Director of Children's Services advised the RAA model was being well developed across the country. ESCC hold an Outstanding Children's Services Ofsted rating and therefore was much for WSCC to gain from this partnership in terms of improvement, quality, a greater range of adopters and potential financial savings.
- Wendy Wood, Group Manager for Adoption and Permanent Placement Support, advised the partnership agreement would be taken to an executive board comprising directors from each local authority. Each authority was also seeking legal advice to ensure that all were equally represented and have an active input into the final agreement.
- Members asked how many RAAs there would be nationally, and who decided which partners would form the RAA WSCC would be involved in. The Assistant Director Corporate Parenting advised that geographically WSCC was already working with ESCC, BHCC and SCC and therefore there seemed to be a natural alliance. The Director of Children's Services advised there were approximately 30 RAAs across the country.

- Members of the Committee considered if the funding was proportionate. The Group Manager for Adoption and Placement Support advised the funding was calculated in accordance with the number of children WSCC had over the past three years with placement orders, alongside the adopter sufficiency for the County.
- Members considered the role of members on adoption panels, and if they would still be involved. The Group Manager advised a workstream was looking at the constitution of panels for the whole of Adoption South East (ASE) and clarity would be provided on this after the proposals were considered at a high-level workshop at the end of September.
- The Chairman asked about the level of response to consultation. The Group Manager advised two staff consultation events had taken place, with another scheduled. Special Guardianship officers would not be transferred as part of ASE. The service were currently liaising with UNISON to ensure the process for staff was fair and transparent.
- Members considered the risks and possible unintended consequences of the RAA. The Director of Children's Services advised this was a secure initiative.

33.3 Resolved – that the Committee:

1. Suggest an item on the effectiveness of Adoption South East (ASE) return to the Committee after April 2021, once the agreement has been in place for one year.
2. Recommends that, before the County Council enter into a member's agreement with Brighton and Hove City Council, East Sussex and Surrey County Councils, the Committee have sight of the partnership agreement.

34. Business Planning Group Report

34.1 The Committee considered a report from the Business Planning Group which was held on 8 July 2019. The report was introduced by Rachel Allan, Senior Adviser Democratic Services.

34.2 Information on School Place Planning would be incorporated into the 21 October Capital Programme day. Democratic Services would work to establish the format and content of a possible member day on the afternoon of 4 December 2019.

34.3 Resolved that the Committee endorses the contents of the Business Planning Group report.

35. Date of Next Meeting

35.1 The Committee noted that the next scheduled meeting will be held on 23 October 2019 at 10.30am at County Hall, Chichester.

The meeting ended at 15.46pm

Chairman