

Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee

9 January 2020 – At a meeting of the Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee held at 10.00 am at County Hall, Chichester.

Present:	Mr Barling (Chairman)	
Ms Lord	Mrs Jones	Mrs Roberts
Mr Baldwin	Mr Lea	Mrs Ryan
Mrs Burgess	Ms Sudan	Mr Cristin
Ms Flynn	Mr Wickremaratchi	
Mr Hillier, arrived at 10.20am	Mr Lozzi, arrived at 10.10am	

Apologies were received from Mrs Bridges and Mrs Hall

Also in attendance: Mr Fitzjohn, Mr Jupp, Mr Marshall, Dr O'Kelly, Mrs Russell and Mrs Urquhart

52. Declarations of Interests

52.1 In accordance with the code of conduct, Mr Lea declared a personal interest in item 5 (Forward Plan of Key Decisions), item 6 (School Funding) as a member of Mid Sussex District Council.

53. Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee

53.1 The following amendments to the minutes of the meeting held on 4 December 2019 were agreed: -

- Page 9, bullet point two to read "Members familiar to the site agreed the fabric of the buildings and facilities were poor and totally unfit for purpose."
- Section 49.5, a sixth recommendation to be added - "Requests that the Business Planning Group consider, for each meeting of this committee, bringing forth an update on Woodland's Meed to that committee meeting."

54. Responses to Recommendations

54.1 The Committee considered responses to recommendations made at its last meeting from Mr Jupp, Cabinet Member for Education & Skills, who told the Committee: -

- Progress was being made on proposals for the Woodlands Meed College site with a discussion on this to be had by Cabinet at its meeting in public on 28 January
- Only option 1 would be considered as it states in the Special Educational Needs & Disabilities Strategy that due to inclusive policies

- Woodlands Meed College should only accommodate 100 students – copies of the Strategy would be made available to committee members
- The independent specialist survey had already been initiated with consultants appointed and inspections beginning shortly – the Cabinet Member would be in attendance for the first inspection
 - The Cabinet Member was confident that money would be available to bridge any funding gap
 - Discussions with relevant parties would take place to solve the issues with access to the site

54.2 Summary of responses to committee members comments and questions: -

- The report on proposals for Woodlands Meed College that was to be discussed at the Cabinet meeting on 28 January would be made publicly available
- The positive work that was happening would be in line with the view of the Committee
- The issue of access would be resolved, but it was confirmed that no planning application had yet been submitted
- The inspection report was expected before the 28 January – the Cabinet Member would consider this so that a decision on the direction of travel could be decided at the Cabinet meeting on 28 January

54.3 Resolved – that the Committee notes the response by the Cabinet Member for Education & Skills.

55. Forward Plan of Key Decisions

55.1 The Committee considered the Forward Plan of Key Decisions.

55.2 Resolved – that the Committee requests a special meeting be arranged with the Performance & Finance Scrutiny Committee to discuss the proposed decision on the Adoption of the West Sussex Children First Strategic Approach.

56. Report from the Small Schools Task and Finish Group

56.1 The Committee considered a report by the Chairman of the Small Schools Task & Finish Group (copy appended to the signed minutes) which was introduced by the Chairman, Ms Flynn, who told the Committee: -

- The Task & Finish Group had been concerned that data was challenged by the schools as being incorrect and the short timescale for Members to consider the information
- The Group had been helped by feedback from public meetings and additional information

56.2 The Committee felt the recommendations should be future facing and not a replacement for the scrutiny that did not take place on 4 September 2019

56.3 The Cabinet Member for Education & Skills told the Committee that he accepted the recommendations of the Task & Finish Group and that

there were no plans to carry out a similar exercise on any other schools in the immediate future.

56.4 Resolved – that the Committee endorses the report of the Small Schools Task & Finish Group.

57. Small Schools Proposals

57.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director for Education & Skills (copy appended to the signed minutes) which was introduced firstly by Mr Jupp, Cabinet Member for Education & Skills who told the Committee that he recognised the important input by school governors and the informative public consultation meetings. He added that the Cabinet would consider the proposals on 14 January and make a collective decision on the proposals.

57.2 Paul Wagstaff, Director of Education & Skills told the Committee: -

- The smallest schools benefitted least from Government funding, which was low for all West Sussex schools
- Schools whose viability was at risk had been identified and offered four options, apart from Rumboldswyke, which could only be offered two options due to its OFSTED judgement of inadequate
- Consideration had been given to feedback from public meetings, the consultation, stakeholders, the diocese and the Task & Finish Group – it had then been analysed and checked by another authority
- If the proposals were supported by the Cabinet, further consultation would take place in February on the three schools that could face closure

57.2 Mrs Urquhart, Member for Angmering & Findon spoke about Clapham & Patching Church of England Primary School:

- Clapham & Patching School had struggled with pupil numbers for some years and although it had around 50 pupils, many came from outside the area - restrictions on development in the South Downs National Park made it hard to increase numbers locally
- A new school planned for Angmering would put more strain on places at Clapham & Patching
- The school, which was rated as 'Good' by OFSTED, accepted change was needed, but would like consultation on the possibility of becoming an academy considered as well as closure
- Any consultation on becoming an academy would need to be completed before the end of the academic year so that parents were not put off applying for places at the school or lower pupil numbers would increase the likelihood of the school closing

57.3 Summary of responses to Members questions and comments regarding proposals for Clapham & Patching Church of England Primary School: -

- Discussions were taking place with a multi-academy trust – due diligence was expected to be completed by the end of January with feasibility established by mid-March. If this showed academisation was

the best option for the school, this could be agreed before the decision to close the school had to be made, whereas any extra delay could lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy of closure

- Any request for academisation had to be agreed by the Regional Schools Commissioner – the Council could not make that decision
- Any decision made at Cabinet on 14 January would have to clear the call-in period before taking effect, by which time it was hoped due diligence would be completed
- Six weeks was the statutory length of time for consultations
- The Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND) Strategy will enhance provision for children with special needs by providing more special support centres (SSCs), including at St Margaret's School in Angmering
- The Council would work with parents of children at Clapham & Patching School with SEND to find the right support centre for their children that provided progression to their local secondary school
- Plans for an SSC at St Margaret's School were described as advanced as work had been taking place on SSCs for nine months with St Margaret's School being identified as a school that would get funding for one
- The transition of children with SEND from one school to another could be managed to avoid negative impacts on the children and their education
- If children had to move to new schools it was intended to keep siblings together where possible

57.4 Dr O'Kelly, Member for Midhurst, spoke about Stedham Primary School: -

- Stedham Primary School was judged 'Good' by OFSTED, had a dynamic head teacher and had not lost any pupils since the consultation began, but nine families had decided not to enrol children for the next academic year
- The South Downs National Park wanted villages within its boundaries to thrive, but development restraints made it difficult to maintain school rolls
- Children from outside the area went to schools within the national park
- The consultation was unnecessarily damaging - Stedham Primary School should be allowed to develop a partner and form a federation

57.5 Summary of responses to Members questions and comments regarding proposals for Stedham Primary School: -

- The Committee felt that consulting on closure for Stedham and Clapham & Patching went against the School Effectiveness Strategy and that those schools were being treated differently to Compton & Up Marden and that the threat of closure was undermining confidence in the schools
- Compton & Up Marden was in an isolated position geographically meaning it would be more difficult for its pupils to get to other schools and closure would have more impact on the local community
- Possible federations for Stedham and Clapham & Patching were being investigated, but consultation on closure should continue alongside this

as there was no guarantee that at the end of the consultation period federation plans would be in place

57.5 Mr Fitzjohn, Member for Chichester South, spoke about Rumboldswyke Church of England Infant School: -

- An email had been sent from the Council's Director of Education to the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) on 14 June 2019 saying that the Council aimed to close Rumboldswyke School
- The RSC would not issue an academisation order till after consultation on closure – the consultation has shown parents are in favour of an all-through primary academy
- An academy was interested in this proposal, but parents have been told that, despite over 2,800 new homes to be built in Chichester there was insufficient demand
- The support given to the school by the Council had not been enough to stop its decline to inadequate
- The school should be allowed to pursue academisation

57.5 Summary of responses to Members questions and comments regarding proposals for Rumboldswyke Church of England Infant School:

- After Rumboldswyke had been judged as inadequate, the Director of Education & Skills had met with governors and parents of pupils of the school and told them that this meant the school either had to become an academy or close – he also reported that it would be difficult to find an academy to run the school because of its size
- No local academy trusts were willing to take on the school – the local High School might, but only if the school was an all-through primary school, however, there are surplus key stage 2 places in Chichester and if Rumboldswyke became an all-through primary school it would have class sizes of under 30
- Rumboldswyke had received more support from the Council than would be expected for a school of its size – OFSTED had reported in 2017 that the school's senior leaders and governors were over positive and in 2019 that the school had an over generous view of itself – the school had not been adhering the advice and support offered by the Council
- All housing development information from district and borough councils had been considered when planning school places
- There had been a fall of 50 pupils on roll in the Chichester area since October 2019 so no extra key stage 2 places were required
- School rolls were affected by parental preference

57.6 Resolved – that the Committee recommends: -

- i. That the consultation to consult on closure on Clapham and Patching be postponed until all options are available to consult on
- ii. To progress the federation proposals for Stedham, and Compton and Up Marden and not consult on closure
- iii. To pursue other options for Rumboldswyke before any consultation on closure

and

- iv. Supports the progression of consultation on the proposals as listed in the draft decision report for Warninglid

58. School Funding 2020/21

58.1 The Committee received a report by the Director of Education and Skills (copy appended to the signed minutes).

58.2 Resolved – that the Committee: -

- i. Agrees the proposals in relation to the local funding formula for mainstream schools as set out in the report
- ii. Agrees to funding any transfer to the High Needs block, if approved by the Secretary of State for Education, by not increasing the basic entitlement unit value and the Minimum per Pupil Funding Level rates to the full National Funding Formula rates

59. Children First Improvement Update

59.1 The Committee considered a report by the Executive Director of Children, Young People and Learning (copy appended to the signed minutes) which was introduced by Mrs Russell, Cabinet Member for Children & Young People who told the Committee: -

- The letter from OFSTED reporting on its monitoring visit to the Council was in line with the Council's self-assessment. It noted tentative improvements in social work with children and the expanded senior leadership team's progressing of plans for children in need whilst acknowledging areas of weakness remain
- The Cabinet Member thanked the staff of schools she had visited in the north of the county where she had learnt about relationships between the schools and social workers

59.2 Garath Symonds, Senior Improvement Lead, highlighted the following from the report: -

- The monitoring visit reported a clear vision and workforce stability with fewer social worker changes and caseloads more manageable
- Key areas of development included oversight and quality of social work specific to the designated officer function
- There were concerns over private fostering
- Service improvements included recruiting a permanent director for children, young people and learning, the number of leavers reducing and permanency planning

59.3 Jackie Wood, Assistant Director - Corporate Parenting, told the Committee: -

- Permanency was planning for children when they entered the care system regardless of their length of stay and supported them into early adulthood
- The Council was part of the regional adoption agency which had a large pool of adopters

- Permanency could be permanent fostering, adoption, living with family or friends or special guardianship
- The number of West Sussex children being placed with family was increasing with special guardianship parents getting the same services as adopters

59.4 Sarah Foster, Service Lead Fostering and Adoption, Jill Seeney, Advanced Practitioner (Fostering) and Melissa Paton, Adoption Practice manager, talked through a presentation (copy appended to the signed minutes) and showed two videos available online at <https://youtu.be/CCobHATEEDY> and <https://youtu.be/8hHsy1b9kFo>.

59.5 The Committee heard from an adopter who said: -

- 10 years ago transitions were set for 2.5 weeks and were well planned and structured, but there was no opportunity to meet the child before adoption
- Phone calls were allowed with the child's foster family
- More recently when adopting a second child there had been a ten day transition and the adopter had met the foster family
- Now adopters can glimpse children before they go to the adoption panel and have play days with them so they get to know each other
- Contact is kept with the foster family for the children's sake

59.6 Summary of responses to Members questions and comments: -

- Adopted children were placed in 38 households in West Sussex
- There was a pool of 300 adopters across the four authorities in the regional adoption agency, but there were still more children in need of adoption than adopters
- The wishes of the children were taken into account when considering adoption placements
- 17 children were known to be in private fostering arrangements
- The home moves experienced by children in care could be for any reason
- If a child was unhappy in care, meetings were held and assessments carried out to see if the situation could be stabilised or the child allowed home
- Contract arrangements as part of permanence plans allowed for contact between birth parents and adopted children via letters, cards, photos
- Some preferences/views of birth parents were considered when looking for adopters
- Social workers and other experts worked with families who were providing children with special guardianship

59.7 Resolved – that the Committee notes the report.

60. Business Planning Group Report

60.1 The Committee received a report by the Chairman of the Business Planning Group (copy appended to the signed minutes).

60.2 Resolved – that the Committee notes the report.

61. Possible Items for Future Scrutiny

61.1 The following subjects were put forward for consideration by the Committee's Business Planning group: -

- Home Education
- Services for children excluded from school
- Special guardianship children
- Recruitment and retention of school governors
- Retention of Children's Services staff
- The allocation and funding of special educational needs and disabilities provision in early years settings

62. Date of Next Meeting

62.1 The next meeting will be held on 4 March.

The meeting ended at 2.16 pm

Chairman