

Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee

10 March 2021 – At a virtual meeting of the Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee held at 11.30 am.

Present:	Cllr Hillier (Chairman)	
Cllr Lord	Cllr A Jones	Mrs Hill
Cllr Baldwin	Cllr Kennard	Mr Lozzi
Cllr Bridges	Cllr Oxlade	Mr Cristin
Cllr Burgess	Cllr Pendleton	
Cllr Hall	Cllr Wickremaratchi	

Apologies were received from Cllr Sudan and Mrs Ryan.

Also in attendance: Cllr N Jupp and Cllr Russell.

48. Declarations of Interests

48.1 No declarations of interest were declared.

49. Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee

49.1 Resolved – that the minutes of the meeting held on 7 January 2021 be approved as a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

50. Urgent Matters

50.1 No urgent matters were raised.

50.2 The Chairman invited the Director of Education and Skills to give a brief update on the full reopening of schools which had commenced on 8 March 2021. The Director reported that return numbers were above national and regional averages and that no issues had been raised by schools.

50.3 The Director also reported that work was progressing with schools to provide food vouchers to all eligible children over the Easter Holidays. Easter activities were also being planned for disadvantaged children. Funding for mental health first aid training in schools was available, particularly to help to support children as they return to school.

50.4 The Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, Cllr Nigel Jupp, reported that schools had appreciated the 2-week notice period given by the Government to prepare for the return to school and congratulated officers on the work being done on the Easter meals vouchers scheme.

51. Responses to Recommendations

51.1 The Committee welcomed the responses to the recommendations made by the meeting on 7 January 2021 and the information they contained.

51.2 The Committee highlighted the importance of reaching young people to gain their feedback as part of the Early Help Redesign consultation. Members of the Committee had received the communication plan for the consultation and were asked to let officers know if there were other stakeholders who could be added to the list.

52. Inclusion in West Sussex

52.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Education and Skills setting out the County Council's approach to inclusion.

52.2 The Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, Cllr Nigel Jupp, introduced the item reminding the Committee that the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Inclusion Strategy 2019-24 was now 18 months into its five-year term, and asked the Committee to look at how implementation was proceeding.

52.3 The Director of Education and Skills introduced the report which highlighted the key focus of the SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2019-24 and the aim to identify children's needs early and to focus on pathways to overcome issues of transition. The Director thanked all schools and officers who had been able to pursue the longer-term priorities of the Strategy despite the pandemic. The Chairman and Committee Members endorsed these thanks.

52.4 The Director reported that there had been a national increase in the number of children being identified as needing support and that those children had increasingly complex needs. The number of children being supported had also risen due to the extension of support of young people with Special Educational Needs Statements from 19 years to 25 years. However, the Government had not provided any additional funding to cover those added years.

52.5 The Committee heard that officers had worked with schools to produce the guidance they wanted and would find helpful. The approach focussed on improving mainstream processes and ensuring the right specialist support was in place.

52.6 The Committee heard from Mrs Val Evans, Chief Executive of the West Sussex Parent/Carer Forum, who highlighted the following:

- Welcomed that the Forum had been involved from the beginning in the Co-production of the Strategy.
- The Strategy was both robust and wide-reaching, and good progress was being made, particularly where teams were child centred.
- There could be wider marketing, for example in the launch of the Local Offer website and the co-production and promotion of the Easy Read version of the Strategy.
- There could also be more focus on providing tools and information to young people and families, especially on promoting the message and evidence around the importance of inclusion and how this is the best for most children with SEND.

52.7 The Committee heard from Mr Mark Wignall, headteacher of Downlands Secondary School and a member of the SEND and Inclusion Strategy Board. Mr Wignall highlighted the following:

- Good Progress had been made on the Strategy 2019-24, especially in the context of the current pandemic.
- It was now time to focus on the impact and outcomes of the Strategy implementation on SEND learners and ensure there was focus on areas where less progress had been made.
- Highlighted the importance of Special Support Centres (SSCs) and asked if the current plans for those due to open in 2023 could be accelerated.
- That the dashboard targets should be ambitious and benchmarked with national and regional statistics.

52.8 Members of the Committee then asked questions and a summary of those questions and answers follows:

- An Educational Need and Health Care Assessment (EHCNA) is an agreement to assess which leads to an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). Children can be on EHCPs for short or long periods of time or can go in and out of a plan as their circumstances change.
- There is a standard process for decisions on EHCPs and a quality assurance process to review decision making accuracy. Inconsistency of information provided can sometimes affect the decision process. Work is progressing to ensure SENCOs are part of the Panel to gain further knowledge and understanding of the process.
- Concern was raised on how teachers, and in particular supply teachers, are trained in SEND matters. It was agreed this should be a whole school approach and the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) in each school should ensure every teacher and member of staff is capable of supporting SEND in their school. Additionally, the County Council works with Chichester and Sussex Universities on this area with students and newly qualified teachers.
- The Committee recognised the importance of identifying children's needs early so that the right support can be put in place. The Director of Education and Skills confirmed that Early Years' service would be moving into his directorate from April 2021, which would further help to work more closely with Early Years to improve earlier identification and outcomes.
- Children without an EHCP can receive support through mental health teams, work with colleges, etc.
- A standard framework for Alternative Provision was being developed. A Service Level Agreements was also being developed with the Alternative Provision College to enhance their offer.
- Exclusions are a last resort. Schools work through many different options with pupils to establish the cause of problems before such decisions are taken. There is a comprehensive programme of training for Governors on the exclusion process

run by the County Council. County Council Officers attend Governors Disciplinary Committees and Independent Review Panels in LA maintained schools and if invited by Academy or Free Schools or the parents of children in these schools. Parents are supported through the process by County Council officers.

- Best practice for dealing with behavioural support is shared at Area and Inclusion Boards in West Sussex. Sometimes school to school support is commissioned.
- The Therapeutic Thinking programme had been in place during the pandemic and the workshops were open to most schools. Work continued to embed the programme so it can help communities.

1.08 pm Cllr Bridges left the meeting.

52.9 Resolved – That the Committee:

1. Thanks officers and schools for the progress they have made on the implementation of the SEND and Inclusion strategy 2019-24, recognising the delivery of outcomes should be considered in the context of the impact of Covid-19. The Committee welcomes the co-creation of the Strategy and is assured that those children who do not have a SEND diagnosis but are at risk of exclusion are not precluded.
2. Notes the importance of measuring outcomes and the impact of the SEND and Inclusion strategy on children and young people and requests that the progress update on the Strategy due in the Autumn is shared with the Committee to seek assurance that outcomes are being delivered and identify any potential areas for scrutiny.
3. Is glad to hear of the ongoing work to focus on professional development in teacher training and training for all school staff and governors to bring a more consistent level of awareness of SEND and inclusion across all schools in West Sussex.
4. Recognises the importance of identifying the issues of SEND in children and early as possible and supports the move of Early Years to Education and Skills so that this can be strengthened.
5. Agrees on the importance of a consistent framework for the assessment and outcomes of Education Health and Care Plans. The Committee supports the development of SENCO representation on EHCP assessment panels and that work continues with schools to identify and address inconsistencies.
6. Welcomes the ongoing work to share best practice on SEND and Inclusion and support for children at risk of exclusion. The Committee suggests a framework for schools could be developed to ensure best practice is shared and a consistent pathway for children at risk of exclusion is provided across West Sussex schools.
7. Recommends that the department works directly with schools with higher than average rate of exclusions and/or managed moves to

identify what support is needed to keep more children learning within the school

8. Highlights the importance of developing the Special Support Centres and new special schools at pace, and requests that these are prioritised in the Capital Programme to ensure there is the provision of improved learning opportunities and experiences for SEND learners and to reduce the pressure on the High Needs Block. The Committee further suggests the exploration of provision of SSCs or similar units for children without SEND diagnosis.
9. Recommends that the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills continues to lobby government on the review of the High Needs Block to reflect the extension of the SEND up to the age of 25.

1.37 pm Cllr Wickremaratchi and Mr Cristin left the meeting.

53. Children First Improvement Update

53.1 The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Cllr Russell, introduced the item reporting that phase one of the improvement journey had been completed in 2020, phase two had started in January 2021 and that crucial plans would be implemented during the year. The consultation for the Early Help Redesign had gone live and Members were asked to share the information as much as possible to enable members of the public and stakeholders to contribute.

53.2 The Children's First Transformation Director introduced the report highlighting the following key areas:

- Ofsted monitoring would continue, and the next focussed visit is programmed for 18/19 May 2021 looking at permanency for children looked after. The next regular monitoring visit would likely be in the Autumn 2021.
- The Children's Commissioner had updated County Councillors on 22 February on the improvement progress. The Commissioner would be monitoring progress against a set of criteria to provide a view and recommendation on whether the Children's Trust was required. The first formal review on progress would take place in July 2021.
- The demand in referrals is expected to increase now schools have fully returned and numbers are being closely monitored. Plans are being developed for social workers to return to face to face meetings.
- Performance remained robust and the latest lockdown had seen little impact on staffing capacity. Staffing statistics are regularly monitored and could be included in future updates. All frontline staff had been offered Covid vaccinations.
- A simplified management structure would go live in July 2021 along with the new social work offer.

2.28 pm Mrs Hill left the meeting.

53.3 Members of the Committee then asked questions and a summary of those questions and answers follows:

- The major challenge in the next 12 months would be creating the right environment for social work to flourish and ensuring high quality support to children all the time from all workers whatever the issue. Seeing progress would take time.
- Working with families who were hard to reach, reluctant or who would not engage was a challenge. There is statutory guidance for the local authority to decide when it is felt there is risk of significant harm. If that threshold is not met parental consent is needed for any intervention but other work can be done with schools, agencies and support services.
- Work on early identification included working with health visitors and partners and included pre-birth assessments. The Family Safeguarding Model would target the 0-12 years. Work was taking place on services for adolescents.
- Work was progressing on the production of a Children and Young People Plan to improve the hearing of the voice of all young people and their families in the county. Updates on progress would be given to the Committee.
- The Committee were keen not to duplicate areas of feedback on the Improvement Journey, for example to County Council, and agreed to consider specific areas of the improvement work that they would wish to scrutinise at future meetings. The Early Help Redesign consultation outcomes and the Foster Service Review were already programmed into future scrutiny meetings.
- Committee Members highlighted the role that county councillors can play to support the promotion of key service initiatives such as the "See something, say something" campaign.

53.4 The Chairman offered his apologies to the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People as there had been insufficient time for her to do her final summing up on the item.

53.5 Resolved – That the Committee:

1. Welcomes the continuing pace and progress of the Children First Improvement Programme to provide improved outcomes for children and young people as reflected in the recent Commissioner update and thanks the staff and leadership for the ongoing progress.
2. Agrees to explore focusing on specific areas of the Improvement Programme at future Committee meetings, particularly where the Committee can provide useful input to assist with the ongoing improvement journey. The Committee agrees that one of these areas should include social worker workforce proposals as part of the Family Safeguarding Model and will explore further areas of focus at its Business Planning Group.
3. Highlights the importance of engagement with all children and young people and families, to ensure their voice is heard, in the co-production of services and that the Committee continues to be updated on this work.

4. Welcomes the offer from the service to use County Councillors as a communication channel to the local community on key messages from the service, including the 'see something, say something' Campaign.

54. Work Programme Planning and Possible Items for Future Scrutiny

54.1 The Committee reviewed and agreed the current draft work programme and the Forward Plan of decisions.

54.2 The Committee received an update on the Woodlands Mead College project from the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, Cllr Jupp, who reported that a contract had been signed for the construction of the new building. The planning application would be reviewed at Planning Committee on 30 March. It was hoped to start work over the summer with building being completed in December 2022.

54.3 The Committee agreed to discuss School Place Planning at a future Business Planning Group to assess whether it was a priority to add to the Committee's work programme.

55. Requests for Call-In

55.1 There had been no request for call-in to the Scrutiny Committee within its constitutional remit since the date of the last meeting.

56. Date of Next Meeting

56.1 The next meeting of the Committee would be on 30 June.

56.2 Any member wishing to place an item on the agenda for the meeting must notify the Director of Law and Assurance by 17 June 2021.

The meeting ended at 3.16 pm.

Chairman