

Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee

12 January 2022 – At a virtual meeting of the Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee held at 10.30 am.

Present: Cllr Hillier (Chairman)

Cllr Baldwin	Cllr Cornell	Cllr Sparkes
Cllr Bennett	Cllr Hall	Mrs Hill
Cllr Burgess	Cllr Mercer	Mr Cristin
Cllr Cherry	Cllr Smith	Mrs Ryan

Apologies were received from Cllr Linehan, Cllr Charles, Mr Lozzi and Cllr Evans

Also in attendance: Cllr N Jupp and Cllr Russell

37. Declarations of Interests

37.1 In accordance with the County Council's code of conduct, the following declarations of interest were made:

- Cllr Mercer declared a personal interest as the Chair of the Orchard Hill College Academy Trust.
- Cllr Hillier declared a personal interest as a member of Mid Sussex District Council.

38. Urgent Matters

38.1 No urgent matters were raised.

39. Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee

39.1 Resolved – That, subject to the removal of the word "and" from the declaration made by Cllr Mercer under item 28.1, the minutes of the meeting held on 1 December 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

39.2 Committee members asked what progress had been made on the children's mental health and emotional wellbeing briefing. The Chairman reported that plans were in train for all-member day on this item to update members on how the system works, its frailties and a chance to explore where the scrutiny process could add value. The Chairman requested that officers take away the Committee's wishes that the member day was given the highest priority.

39.3 The Executive Director Children, Young People and Learning, Mrs Butler, informed the Committee of some exceptional work that the authority had undertaken over the summer following some particular mental health concerns in the Horsham area. She explained that a multi-agency triage team (including Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services - CaMHS) had been working in schools and with district and borough councils, which had led to holiday activities and walk in centres being

available over the summer holidays. Funding had been built into the 2022-23 budget and it was hoped to continue this triage work and expand it across the county.

39.4 The Committee were informed that the Youth Emotional Support (YES) service, which was commissioned and funded by the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), was delivered by the County Council. The CCG had not recommissioned an extension to the contract to provide the YES service in its entirety. The County Council had offered to run the service this year and next to allow the CCG to run a full procurement process. The offer had been well received and confirmation was awaited.

40. Responses to Recommendations

40.1 The Committee noted the responses to the recommendations made at the meeting on 1 December 2021.

41. Achievement and Attainment of Children in West Sussex

41.1 The Cabinet Member for Learning and Skills, Cllr Nigel Jupp, introduced the item stating that he felt the report provided an honest and clear review of where we were to date and the plans for the future. Cllr Jupp said the report showed that secondary school outcomes in West Sussex were higher than the national average and that vulnerable children were doing well against national figures comparatively. The work on a new Education and Skills Strategy would give an opportunity to pull the sector together and achieve the ambitions we would wish to see.

41.2 The Executive Director Children, Young People and Learning, Mrs Butler, highlighted that the County Council had experienced challenges around the attainment of disadvantaged children caused by the pandemic but that this was in line with other authorities in the south east region.

41.3 The Director of Education and Skills, Mr Wagstaff, said the report gave an overview to the period up to 2019 for which quantifiable data was available. There had been no quantifiable data available during the pandemic.

41.4 The Committee heard from Mr Shaun Allison, Director of the Durrington Research School. He explained that the research school had been running for five years and was funded by Education Endowment Foundation, a charity committed to improving outcomes for disadvantaged children. The aim of the organisation was to help busy school leaders and teachers to use evidence to help their school improvement work including looking at pupil premium provision, online training programmes led by them and wraparound support in various forms. The Research School were currently working with 46 schools with plans to increase that number, maintain progress, work with school governors and with the advisory team. The hope was to build best practice in these 46 schools, who could then share this learning with their peers in further schools across the County.

41.1 Members of the Committee asked Mr Allison questions and a summary of those questions and answers follows:

- The **definition of disadvantaged pupils** could cover a wide range of factors and could be temporary or longer term. Levels varied from school to school and community to community. Schools receive funding for identified students known as Pupil Premium.
- How do schools deal with challenges like dyslexia? Mr Allison reported that school leaders were thinking much more deeply about individual pupils and advocating a model for each rather than a blanket approach. It was important to understand the challenges faced with a strong diagnostic assessment so that the best support could be given.
- How might **cultural capital** have a role in disadvantaged status? Cultural capital is the knowledge about the world that a pupil brings to school having learnt through home and life experience. Disadvantaged children are less likely to have that learning and teachers need to work out how to build that knowledge. Work is ongoing with parents to help them understand the importance of activities like homework and reading with their children.

41.2 Members of the Committee then asked the Cabinet Member for Learning and Skills and the Director of Education and Skills questions, following their discussions with schools and parents, and a summary of those questions and answers follows:

- **School readiness** – Concerns were raised that some children were entering school not fully prepared and how could better support be given? Mr Wagstaff reported that a tool kit to assess readiness was used, based on Department for Education guidelines, covering social skills, emotional separation, independence, and willingness to learn. The Director advised that it was not felt the lack of readiness was due to Children and Family Centres being unavailable, however some Members' schools felt otherwise. The Director added that school readiness had been a concern for some time, but that pandemic restrictions might have had an impact on sociability. The Schools Forum had agreed extra funding for additional staff to work in early years to help. The Government had prioritised reception and year 6 children during the pandemic to help with readiness and transition. All under 5s had been able to access enrichment activities alongside disadvantaged children.
- Where **school attendance** had dropped, had mental health be sighted as increasing reason? It was acknowledged that mental health and wellbeing was a big issue for staff and pupils. Schools were supporting young people on issues of anxiety and bereavement. The County Council had provided training on health and wellbeing and for mental health first aiders. Consideration needed to be given to what should happen next

and what level of services should be offered. Work was taking place on the impact of long covid on pupils and teachers and the County Council were working with schools to ensure support packages for children who were long term absent from school.

- **Government Catch Up funding** was directed to schools for individual tutoring and as a result schools had seen a reduction in the availability of supply teachers. Many seemed to be tutoring instead.
- How would **best practice** be shared amongst schools? The Education and Skills directorate undertake a range of activities to disseminate and share best practice including virtual learning including case studies, regular head teacher briefings, discussion groups on key themes and sharing through locality groups.
- How could the Committee engage at the earliest possible time with the work on the new **Education and Skills strategy**? It was agreed that committee members should review the existing School Effectiveness strategy so that they could highlight what they would like to see in the new one.

41.7 Resolved – That the Committee:

1. Consider School Readiness and Mental Health support to be key areas that impact on the attainment of children and that these are focused on in the development of the Education and Skills Strategy.
2. Will review the data on this year's academic performance once it is available and assess whether there are any areas where scrutiny can add value.
3. Requests to see the breakdown by area of the attainment gap at end of key stage 2 between disadvantaged pupils and their peers (2019) to understand how the gap varies across the county.
4. Requests to be involved in the development of the Education and Skills Strategy from an early stage.
5. Highlights the importance of having robust measures in place to share best practice to ensure learning on attainment and achievement is shared across all schools in West Sussex.

42. Children First Improvement Update - Children We Care For in West Sussex

42.1 The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Cllr Russell, introduced the item and welcomed the timeliness of the discussion as it would feed into preparation for the next Ofsted monitoring visit which would be focussing on this area.

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

- Are there any plans for future advertising campaigns for **the fostering service**? There would be a focus on a market recruitment retention hub as part of the development of the Foster Service Initiative. It was noted that the average age range of people applying to be foster carers had reduced in West Sussex as it had nationally. The Committee were informed that the new recruitment campaign was designed to address this reduction.
- How are the levels of **social workers**? The pay and reward package had attracted new social workers but there would always be regular movement. A County Council social worker had received the Social Worker of the Year award this year and this had a positive impact on reputation as a good employer. Recruitment campaigns, exhibitions, meet the team sessions and social media promotions were under way to support recruitment of the right people.
- Who assesses the age of **Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)**? An initial age assessment is completed by Border Force. Social workers would then use a tried and test highly accurate model. It is a rigorous process which can be elevated to Assistant Director or Executive Director for a decision if required.
- How prepared are we to deal with the complexity of needs of UASC? The County Council has a well-positioned dedicated team for UASC who have strong links with Border Force and the Home Office, can specialise in mental health support and education links to develop language. It was reported that the biggest pressure was on placements.
- How satisfied are you that the measures for completing **initial health assessments** on time would be met if Covid impacted on staff levels? The Assistant Director acknowledged that performance in this area is not at the level expected and that there was a range of activity being undertaken to tackle this. A problem-solving exercise has been planned with health colleagues to address the issues and challenges arising in practice to achieve the improved performance required for initial health assessments. However, it had been difficult with health staff being drawn away to support vaccination programmes and other pandemic matters. Other lockdown complications such as dentists closing and ceasing to take referrals had caused problems. The Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee would be looking at the impact of Covid-19 on access to dental services at its meeting on 21 January 2022. Everything that can be done to improve initial health assessments is being done.
- With the drop in **Child Protection statutory visits**, how many of our most vulnerable children are we not seeing? The Assistant Director confirmed that every vulnerable child was regularly seen in compliance with good practice standards and national guidance. The issue being reported related to the

timeliness of recording the visits and the latest information showed that the situation had improved. **Action:** The Assistant Director Corporate Parenting agreed to circulate the latest performance information outside of the meeting.

42.3 Resolved - That the Committee:

1. Wish to pass on their thanks to the Cabinet Member and officers on achieving an Outstanding Ofsted rating at three Children's residential homes in West Sussex.
2. Agrees that the performance of initial Health Assessments continues to be an area of focus for improvement and requests that the Committee is updated on the progress in the summer to see how performance is improving.
3. Requests a short briefing on Child Protection Statutory Visits and Initial Conference timeliness performance.

43. Work Programme Planning and Possible Items for Future Scrutiny

43.1 The Committee agreed the draft work programme and suggested that the following items be explored as potential areas for future scrutiny:

- Sufficiency
- School Readiness (and consider if this could form part of the Early Help Service – review of new model item).

43.2 It was also reported that work on the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group looking at Needs Assessments and EHCPs had been moving forward and it was hoped the first meeting would take place soon.

44. Requests for Call-In

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

45. Date of Next Meeting

45.1 The next meeting would be held on 9 March 2022 at 10.30am.

The meeting ended at 1.26 pm

Chairman