

Standards Committee

17 September 2021 – At a meeting of the Standards Committee held at 2.15 pm at County Hall, Chichester, PO19 1RQ.

Present: Cllr Bradbury (Chairman)

Cllr Burrett (arrived at 2.25 p.m.), Cllr Cherry, Cllr Gibson, Cllr Kenyon and Cllr Sparkes

Apologies were received from Cllr Wickremaratchi, Cllr Johnson, Cllr A Jupp and Mr Cooper (Independent Person)

Also in attendance: Mr Donaldson (Independent Person)

Part I

9. Declarations of Interest

9.1 None declared.

10. Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee

10.1 Resolved – that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 14 June 2021 be approved as a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

11. Report by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

11.1 The Committee considered a report by the Executive Director Place Services and Director of Communities (copy appended to the signed minutes). The report advised of a Public Interest Report issued by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

11.2 The report was introduced by David Tominey, Complaints Manager, who advised that the report had been issued in relation to two aspects of a children's services matter, access to education for a child with special educational needs and the social care decision not to assess the child. The Ombudsman had found faults with the Council's handling of the matter and had set out its findings and remedies. He confirmed that the Council has accepted the findings and is in the process of implementing the remedies and recommendations made by the Ombudsman.

11.3 The Committee expressed disappointment that the matter had not been resolved prior to the case being referred to the Ombudsman. It acknowledged that lessons had been learned and hoped that the changes being implemented would ensure that children in a similar situation in future would have their needs met in a more timely manner. It noted that the County Council had made efforts to find an appropriate education setting for the child involved in the case and the lack of suitable placements was indicative of a wider problem in the area.

- 11.4 Paul Wagstaff, Director of Education and Skills, reported that work had been undertaken to improve mapping of the range of complex special educational needs that were occurring within the county. He advised that the sites providing Alternative Provision in the county perform well in many cases, but the learning there is not always equivalent to mainstream or specialist education. In this instance, the County Council had approached seven educational establishments to find a placement for the child, but none had been able to accept the placement either due to lack of space or concerns about their appropriateness.
- 11.5 The Director confirmed that a report was going to the County Council's Executive Leadership Team to recommend that investment be made in specialist children educational services, to be able to provide a wider range of specialist support services within West Sussex within the next three to four years, which would reduce out of county placements and provide a better solution for many children.
- 11.6 Justin Colman, Head of Child Disability Services, advised that criteria on assessments for children with disabilities was currently being revised to ensure that children with additional needs were either assessed by the Children's Disability Team or by the mainstream Assessment and Intervention Service with a Section 17 assessment. Doing this work would ensure that the assessment would be undertaken in the right part of the service. The particular complexities (attachment, trauma, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)) relevant to this case would now be covered by this new criteria and work had taken place to co-produce this with parents and carers in West Sussex. Workshops had taken place with the relevant team managers to learn from this case and more are planned to ensure that the pathway is strengthened at the point of referral to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).
- 11.7 The Committee welcomed the updates from officers and the reassurances that lessons had been learned which should lead to better standards of educational support for children with disabilities in future.
- 11.8 Resolved – That the report be noted and the actions taken by the Council following the Ombudsman's final decision be supported.

12. Date of Next Meeting

- 12.1 The Committee noted that the next meeting is due to be held on 29 November 2021.

The meeting ended at 2.55 pm

Chairman