

Children and Young People's Services Select Committee

23 October 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 Barling (Chairman)

Mrs Burgess	Ms Lord	Mr Cristin
Mr Hillier	Ms Sudan	Mr Jupp
Mrs Bridges	Mr Wickremaratchi	Mrs Russell
Ms Flynn	Mr Lozzi	
Mrs Hall	Maria Roberts	

Apologies were received from Mr Baldwin, Mr Lea and Mrs Ryan

Absent: Mrs Jones

Also in attendance:

Part I

36. Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee

36.1 The Vice-Chairman requested that under minute 29.6 it be added that a vote took place by the Committee as to whether to hold the Small Schools Task and Finish Group or not.

36.2 The Vice-Chairman requested that further clarification be provided in minute 31.2 regarding if Woodlands Meed was still due to open in 2021.

36.3 Resolved – that subject to the above amendments being made, that the minutes of the last meeting held on 11 September 2019 be approved as a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

37. Responses to Recommendations

37.1 The Chairman drew members attention to the response from the previous Cabinet Member for Education and Skills. He noted his intention for the Committee to undertake more proactive scrutiny and the role for the Business Planning Group (BPG) to play in this respect. Mrs Flynn requested that she join the BPG if there was a vacancy.

37.2 Resolved –

- i. That the Committee note the response
- ii. That Mrs Flynn be appointed to fill the vacancy on the BPG.

38. Forward Plan of Key Decisions

38.1 The Committee considered a tabled paper which was a new version of the Forward Plan dated 22 October 2019 (copy appended to the signed minutes). This version of the Forward Plan was not included in the

Committee papers as it had been published following the statutory despatch of the agenda.

38.2 Members considered if the decision on the allocation of funding for project delivery at Woodlands Meed should be scrutinised by the Committee in consultation with members of the Mid Sussex County Local Committee (CLC). The Chairman sought the views of the Committee and there was support for a special meeting to be organised before the December Committee meeting and the decision being taken.

38.3 Members of the Committee requested that the in-house residential care strategy be revisited during implementation.

38.4 Resolved – that the Committee:

- i. Ask Democratic Services to organise an additional meeting in November to scrutinise the Woodlands Meed decision.
- ii. Ask the BPG to consider an item on the implementation of the in-house residential care strategy return to the Committee at the appropriate time.
- iii. Notes the Forward Plan.

39. Children First Improvement Update

39.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services. The newly appointed Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Jackie Russell, introduced herself as the lead member for the portfolio however the Leader, Paul Marshall, would retain the statutory responsibility for the area for the current time.

39.2 The Director of Children's Services introduced some of the new leadership team who each outlined their areas of responsibility as follows:

- Sally Allen – Deputy Director – Frontline teams including the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and social work teams.
- Jackie Wood – Assistant Director Corporate Parenting – fostering and adoption, residential care and placements and Children Looked After (CLA).
- Ann Marie Dodds – Assistant Director Early Help – Early Help Hubs, young carers, Voice and Participation, Pause and Care Leavers.

39.3 The Director of Children's Services advised the Commissioner's report was expected at the end of October and a review would be published once the Secretary of State had made a decision for future service delivery. The following update was provided on workforce and caseloads:

- The workforce had stabilised and staff were committed.
- The vacancy gap was now under 2%.
- Caseloads were reducing enabling better quality practice.
- Benchmarking data was being gathered.

39.4 The Committee considered the following points in discussion:

- Members considered what recruitment processes were in place to reduce the reliance on agency staff. The Deputy Director advised the service were working with the communications and IT teams to create a more savvy approach to recruitment. A change in imagery had resulted in more hits on the website and social media was enabling the campaign to reach out further than West Sussex.
- Members asked if there were specific teams with a vacancy gap bigger than 1.8%. The Deputy Director advised some areas were more challenging to recruit to, such as Assessment and Intervention and therefore these teams consequently had higher caseloads, but that these were coming down. The Deputy Director advised part of that solution to bring these down was the use of agency staff.
- The Committee noted the requirement for children engaged with the service to experience consistency and considered the stability of agency workers within that context. The Deputy Director advised it was critical there was consistency for children and families, but noted the challenge of keeping agency staff in frontline teams such as the MASH. She advised this was improving however, and that in some cases agency staff had either become permanent, or left and then returned to WSCC on a permanent basis.
- The Committee asked about the numbers of unallocated cases and those held by managers. The Deputy Director advised scrutiny of daily lists of unallocated and manager allocated cases was undertaken and responses sought from service leads around those. The Deputy Director further explained these cases tended to be in transition, and there was a clear line that there was to be no unallocated cases and a zero tolerance for managers holding cases. The Director of Children's Services advised a short report on unallocated cases could be produced for the BPG if desired. The Committee agreed this would be useful.

39.5 The Assistant Director - Corporate Parenting, Jackie Wood, provided an update to the Committee on the Improvement Plan objective of life story work. The Committee heard the following key points:

- Life story work maps the life of a child in the care of the local authority, and is used as a therapeutic tool by social workers to help the child understand their journey.
- Ofsted identified life story work as an area that needed to improve.
- Training was being undertaken with social workers, foster carers and residential workers via an online forum.
- The work culminates in a life story book, which was a priority for children being adopted.
- Improvements would be evidenced through quality assurance monitoring.

39.6 The Committee considered the following points in discussion:

- Members asked if they could observe the training. The Assistant Director – Corporate Parenting advised members would be welcome to attend the foster carer training.
- The Committee asked how the service planned to keep track of targets in terms of quality and timeliness when life story work was an ongoing process. The Assistant Director advised the service

were looking at how life story work was recorded and undertaken through Mosaic, which is a system used by social workers to record chronologies and case management. She added that colleagues in QA and performance would undertake thematic audits which would include quality and timeliness of life story work which would happen on a quarterly basis.

39.7 Ann Marie Dodds, Assistant Director – Early Help provided an update to the Committee on the development of the Children First Strategy. The Committee heard the following key points:

- The Children First Strategy would be a collective and co-produced document. Consultation had taken place with over 100 professionals and children and youth groups to ask how WSCC could better work with partners to improve outcomes.
- The service were working hard to establish a strategic intent with the headline statement of what WSCC wanted for its children, and how this is achieved in partnership. The challenge was identifying the set of behaviours that genuinely puts children first.
- Engagement and workshop events were ongoing due to high demand and attendance and expected that on 19 November 2019 the strategic intent would be launched. The intention was to bring the strategy to the next meeting of the Committee on 4 December 2019 which will hopefully capture the collective desire across West Sussex to put children at the centre of the decision making.
- The Chairman requested that information regarding the launch be shared with members.

39.8 Resolved that the Committee:

1. Notes the conclusion of the work of the Commissioner.
2. Notes that Ofsted has confirmed that the Practice Improvement Plan satisfies the requirement to suitably address all the matters of concern raised in the inspection report of May 2019.
3. Notes the leadership and workforce improvement narrative.
4. Requests officers provide the BPG with options to ensure voices of staff and partners are heard.
5. Notes the preparatory work on a Children First Strategy, its scope and purpose, and agree to preview the decision at its meeting on 4 December 2019.

40. School Funding

40.1 The Committee considered a report by the Executive Director People Services and Director of Education and Skills. The newly appointed Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, Nigel Jupp, introduced himself and advised that he looked forward to working in partnership with the Committee. The School Funding report was introduced by Andy Thorne, Strategic Finance Business Partner, who took the Committee through a presentation (copy appended to the signed minutes). The following key points were highlighted:

- Nationally, school funding is set to rise by £2.6bn in 2020/21 which includes £700m for high needs and £66m for early years.

- According to the Institute of Fiscal Studies, spending per pupil has fallen by 8% over the last ten years. The recent three-year funding announcement represents a 7.4% increase in spending per pupil, which means in real terms per pupil spending levels in 2022/23 will be at about the same level as 2009/10.
- Minimum per pupil funding levels are set to rise from £3,500 to £3,750 for Primary pupils, and from £4,800 to £5,000 for Secondary pupils in 2020/21. The primary rate will increase further to £4,000 per pupil in 2021/22.
- For the first time since the National Funding Formula (NFF) was introduced in 2018/19, West Sussex will receive its full allocation next year as the government has removed the funding cap.
- Excluding pupil growth, which will be announced in December, West Sussex will receive an increase of £24.5m on its Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) schools block next year. However despite this increase the county's unit of funding rates still remain in the bottom 10 in the country.
- 80, mostly secondary and larger primary, schools in the county will benefit from the uplift in the per pupil funding rates, however very few primary schools with less than 250 pupils will attract any of this additional funding.
- Schools have yet to move to the 'hard' NFF when they will receive their budget allocations directly from the Department for Education. In the meantime, local authorities will still have some discretion over their local schools funding formula.
- One area of the local formula which needs to be consulted on is the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG), which can be set at a rate of between 0.5% and 1.84%. This funding will help protect the smaller primary schools but will require a transfer of funds from the larger schools, who are gaining more through the formula changes, to support them.
- The local authority is able to transfer up to 0.5% of their Schools block funding into other DSG blocks with the agreement of the Schools Forum. If there is a desire to transfer over the 0.5%, or Schools Forum do not agree to any proposed transfer up to 0.5%, West Sussex are able to make a disapplication request to the Secretary of State.
- For the DSG high needs block, West Sussex will receive an increase of £7.5m (9.34%) in 2020/21. This additional funding will cover existing funding pressures, however, a request to transfer funds from the DSG schools block to the high needs block will still be required in 2020/21 in order to pay for the expected continued growth in Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) numbers next year.
- The Schools Funding consultation would run from 23 October to 13 November, with the outcome being discussed at Schools Forum on 28th November.

40.2 The Committee welcomed two witnesses, Jules White, Head at Tanbridge House Secondary School, and Thomas Moore, Head at Bury Primary School. The witnesses provided the Committee with information on their funding pressures in the context of a small rural school, and a larger secondary school. The Committee heard the following:

- There was disparity for a small school against a larger school with the funding increase, which was a concern for those with small pupil numbers.
- Staff at Bury school were not seeking incremental pay rises in view of the funding pressures.
- The Head at Tanbridge House advised the funding announcement was no great step for West Sussex schools and was predicated on no additional or unexpected costs. He added that salaries equated to 85% of school budgets. High needs and special education areas were under duress.
- The Head at Tanbridge House provided some comparative funding figures for different counties against West Sussex which highlighted the disparity in funding levels.
- The Director of Education and Skills advised the Committee that small schools were encouraged to consider new ways of working to ease financial pressures.
- The Committee heard that some schools relied heavily on grants and parental contributions.

40.3 The Committee were grateful to the witnesses for sharing their experiences, the following points were raised in discussion:

- Members of the Committee asked if it was possible to add into the school funding survey whether and how teachers were funding their own classroom resources to further highlight the issue of the funding gap. The Director of Education and Skills advised this could be built into the annual survey.
- The Committee asked the Head teacher witnesses and Director of Education and Skills how they planned to make savings in order to reach teaching salaries, and what would need to be cut to enable this.
- The Head at Tanbridge House advised that IT, books, equipment and, most profoundly, staffing were the key areas, with higher numbers of children in classes and fewer Teaching Assistants (TAs) to balance the books.
- The Head at Bury school advised there wasn't anything to cut but staff, and that schools needed pupils to cover costs. The Director of Education and Skills advised TAs were often first to go and that the service was seeing a move to mix-age classes, fewer administration staff, Heads teaching and schools often unable to accept EHCP children due to limited budgets.

40.4 The Chairman thanked the witnesses for their contributions, and considered in agreement with the Vice-Chairman and wider membership what the Committee could do to give support to the issue of school funding.

40.5 Resolved – that the Committee:

1. Notes the information as set out in the report and consider the implications of the NFF on the local funding formula for mainstream schools as well as the impact of funding on spending pressures for schools and on high needs expenditure.

2. In broad terms, welcomes the funding increase however asks the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills to write to the Secretary of State for Education and local MPs to make representations on school funding, and the need for transformation.
3. Requests the BPG consider when next to look at school funding when planning future work programmes.

41. Reduction in the Post-16 Support Service

41.1 The Committee considered a report by the Executive Director People Services and Director of Education and Skills. The report was introduced by the Director of Education and Skills, Paul Wagstaff, who provided the following information to the Committee:

- Local authorities have a statutory duty to track the destinations of 16 to 18-year-olds. WSCC currently go beyond this through one-to-one support, careers guidance and intervention for those not in education, employment or training (NEET).
- WSCC has been identifying potential savings options following reductions in government grants. Post-16 support has been identified as a possible area for saving through reducing the level of support provided.
- Two options have been identified; option 1 suggests reducing the level of support provided by the post-16 team by 50% from April 2021. Option 2 suggests complete withdrawal from the provision of post-16 support from April 2021.

41.2 The Committee considered the following points in discussion:

- Members asked how the service tracked young people. The Head of Post-16 and Compliance, Danny Pell, advised that school data was provided to the county council which was followed up with the destinations to confirm if the young person had indeed transitioned to their further education, employment or training. The Head of Post-16 and Compliance advised there was a challenge for all local authorities in tracking those that don't want to engage post school. Phone calls, email, social media and meetings were undertaken in order to re-engage and locate provision that meets their needs.
- The Committee asked if either option would result in staff redundancies. The Director of Education and Skills advised the service was currently part funded by a European Social Investment Fund (ESIF). When the ESIF ends, some of the team who were employed on fixed term contracts would leave, and this would be the case regardless of any savings.
- If the service was removed completely, the full team would be made redundant. If the 50% option was chosen, half the staffing budget would remain, staff would be consulted on what the future team would look like.
- Members of the Committee asked if the service had the data on the proportional percentage of Children Looked After, Care Leavers and SEND who were NEET, and cautioned against the removal of the service from this vulnerable cohort. The Head of Post-16 and

Compliance advised this data was available and tracked, and that grant funding had enabled a high level of support in these areas. To remove the service entirely would have a drastic impact on the most vulnerable.

- The Chairman suggested at this point that option 2 (to completely withdraw from the provision of post-16 support) be removed from the proposal, the Committee agreed.
- Members of the Committee further considered the potential consequences of option 1, and felt that even to reduce the service by half was not a sensible proposal in view of the local authority's duty to look after the most vulnerable 16 to 18-year-olds.
- The Committee asked how effective telephone and web-based interventions were and if there was evidence of this if option 1 was chosen. The Head of Post-16 and Compliance advised market research provided a mixed response but did not identify that one method (telephone or web) was markedly more or less successful.
- The Committee considered if the service was able to apply for the ESIF grant again, or if there were other funding streams available. The Head of Post-16 and Compliance advised the ESIF fund came to an end in 2020, there was potential to look at other options, but that she was not aware of anything other than the EU grant. The Director of Education and Skills added that WSCC was one of three other local authorities to have received the ESIF, and that work to date had resulted in rewarding interactions which were valued by young people.

41.3 Resolved – that the Committee:

1. Considers the draft Cabinet Member decision report and does not endorse the proposed decision to support either option 1 or option 2 to reduce or withdraw the provision of Post-16 support.
2. Writes to the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills to formally record their opposition to any reduction in the Post-16 support service from April 2021 and urges the Cabinet Member to avoid making this saving decision.
3. Requests officers consider how best the post-16 service is promoted more widely, including to all members.

42. Creation of Additional Special Support Centres

42.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Education Skills. The report was introduced by Paul Wagstaff, Director of Education and Skills, who advised the purpose was to increase provision within the county for those with SEND to enable them to be educated locally in Special Support Centres (SSCs) attached to mainstream schools. The first tranche was currently in development with a proposal to undertake phases 2 and 3 at the same time.

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

- Members of the Committee asked if SSCs were Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) in the context of children with social, emotional or mental

health (SEMH) needs. The Director of Education and Skills advised SSCs weren't PRUs and that they were attached to or within the school.

- The Committee asked if access to SSCs were permanent or short-term. The Director of Education and Skills advised it was being piloted currently but that it would likely be mixed with some time spent in an SSC and the rest in school, or if a child had an EHCP it could be a more permanent arrangement.
- The Committee considered that 84 places seemed low for a county the size of West Sussex. The Director of Education and Skills advised there were already 32 SSCs around the county and these were additional spaces. This was the beginning of a 5 year SEND and Inclusion Strategy and that it was likely SSCs would be expanded further in the future.

42.3 Resolved – that the Committee:

1. Endorses the recommendation to support the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills to approve the second phase of the project for opening additional SSCs places attached to schools for opening in September 2020 and bring forward from 2021 to 2020 phase 3 of the SSC investment programme.

43. Requests for Call-In

43.1 The BPG received a request to call-in the proposed decision by the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills concerning the Small Schools Assessment (ES02 (19/20)) – decision published on 25 September 2019. The BPG declined the request.

44. Date of Next Meeting

44.1 The Committee noted that the next scheduled meeting will be held on 4 December 2019 at 10.30am at County Hall, Chichester.

The meeting ended at 1.56 pm

Chairman