

Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee

1 March 2023 – At a meeting of the Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee held at 10.30 am at County Hall, Chichester, PO19 1RQ.

Present: Cllr Linehan (Chairman)

Cllr Burgess	Cllr McGregor	Mr Cristin
Cllr Cherry	Cllr Mercer	Mrs Oldroyd, left at 1pm
Cllr Cornell	Cllr Payne	Mr Lloyd
Cllr Duncton	Cllr Smith	Cllr Nagel
Cllr Hall	Cllr Sparkes	

Apologies were received from Cllr Baldwin

Also in attendance: Cllr N Jupp and Cllr Russell and Cllr Baxter

43. Declarations of Interests

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

43.2 Mr Lloyd declared a personal interest as the Chair of Governors at Thomas Beckett Junior School under agenda item no 5.

43.3 Cllr Smith declared a personal interest as parent of two children registered as young carers under agenda item no 6.

43.4 Cllr Linehan declared a personal interest as the parent of a child with an EHCP under agenda item 7.

43.5 Cllr Cherry declared a personal interest as the Chair of Governors of the Burgess Hill Academy under agenda item no 7.

44. Urgent Matters

44.1 No urgent matters were raised.

45. Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee

45.1 Resolved – that the minutes of the meeting held on 18 January 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

46. Responses to Recommendations

46.1 The Committee noted the responses to the recommendations provided from recent meetings.

46.2 **Targets for EHCP assessments** - The Chairman asked about the progress of the plan with milestones in relation to Education Health and

Care Plan (EHCP) assessments. The response was that there was an action plan aiming to get EHCPs back to a pattern of completion within a 20-week deadline that it was in draft form, and it was being revised as part of a broader raft of actions. The Chairman asked that this item remain on the Recommendation Tracker and that the action plan be shared with members when available. A Member was also keen to highlight that they felt the minutes did not express as strongly the concern about the lack of ambition with the existing target as was raised in the meeting. Concern still remained that in the effort to move from 6% of assessments to 100% part of that could rely on de-escalating demand as this risks encouraging a perverse incentive. The Chairman highlighted to officers that it was hoped that there would be mention in the action plan on this matter.

46.3 Adult Community Education – Learners unable to complete courses – Mr Wagstaff updated that some learners had come forward to the County Council. The service was working with the administrators to obtain information on others unable to complete their courses. The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) had said they were happy with the actions taken and there would be no effect on the funding for the grant next year which would give students the opportunity to continue their courses.

47. Review of primary age pupil provision across Worthing and Durrington Areas: Publication of Statutory Notices

47.1 The Cabinet Member for Learning and Skills, Cllr N Jupp, introduced the report highlighting that the reason for reviewing pupil provision across Worthing and Durrington, had been as a response to an approach from schools in the areas asking the local authority to lead on this work as it impacted a range of schools. The County Council had led a well organised consultation which received a good level of responses and the recommendations in the decision report reflected the outcome and wishes of communities and schools.

47.2 The Assistant Director of Education and Skills reported that this work had been a piece of engagement, for over a year, with schools to model up solutions and proposals. The consultation had run from November 2022 to January 2023 and had two parts. Firstly, work on the Pupil Admission Numbers (PAN) which needed to be done by the end of January 2023 to implement by September 2024, and on capital reduction of temporary classrooms and investment of capital into SEND provision within the locality of schools. Secondly, potential work around three schools, two infants and a junior school, to find a more co-ordinated approach. The paper talked through how conclusions were drawn, and the aim would be for the Cabinet Member to take the key decision following consideration of any comments or suggestions by the scrutiny committee, in order to proceed to statutory notices in due course.

47.3 The Committee heard from Cllrs Smith and Baxter, as local Members for the three schools being considered for reorganisation, and they highlighted that:

47.4 Both Members supported the proposals being put forward around the three schools, particularly leaving Springfield as an standalone infant school.

47.5 The service should have involved local members sooner in the process so that they could help officers understand the needs of respondents in their areas.

47.6 The consultation had not been user-friendly, had only been provided online and had not been easy to find on the website. There had been no translated or printed versions. Future consultations needed to be inclusive and open to all residents.

47.7 There had been no support for the community in completing the consultation document. Schools had offered support for parents.

47.8 The questions in the consultation document were not clear and often there was no option to add comments. There had also been no option to continue with the status quo. The survey questions did not fully reflect the information in the consultation booklet.

47.9 Whilst it was good to have an additional 21 SEND places at Chesswood, should there be more aspiration for more places at Whytemead?

47.10 The sensitivity and timing of communications with schools as changes are implemented needed improvement e.g. not sending just before school close at the end of term, or at busy times of the year.

47.11 In future the service needed to involve local members more and earlier in the process.

47.12 The new governing body needed to consider changes in uniforms, etc, which might have cost implications for parents.

47.13 Thought needed to be given to the use of any redundant buildings, e.g. for SEND support or with borough or district councils.

47.14 It was unclear if newly amalgamated schools would be able to apply for academy status?

47.15 Officers responded that:

47.16 The early co-development work with headteachers, chairs of governors and the County Council had been at the request of schools.

47.17 Schools had been asked to help parents and carers who needed support completing the consultation document. The offer for translated version had been extended but there had been no requests and one school had said they would manage it.

47.18 The consultation questionnaire had been reviewed by the County Council's Communications team for access and clarity but officers were grateful for the comments on how to improve consultations in the future,

and they would be reviewed. The intention had been to allow the opportunity for comments on a wider range of options, from which outcomes and suggestions could come forward.

47.19 The Governing Body of any newly amalgamated school would be able to decide if they wished to join an academy trust.

47.20 The suggestion of an 8 place Special Support Centre (SSC) at Whytemead was a lower number of places as it was intended to be for pupils with more complex needs.

47.21 Future use of any empty buildings would be considered by the County Council's Assets team. Consideration was always given to how a building can be used in different ways.

47.22 Members of the Committee asked questions and a summary of those questions and answers follows.

47.23 Falling pupil numbers were a concern in some areas of the county but the Planning School Places strategy showed how occupancy levels were, and had considered new developments, new towns, etc. Work was underway with a small number of localities where headteachers had raised issues within their communities. Analysis of local data and trends was critical and ongoing.

47.24 Springfield Infant School children moving into junior provision might not be guaranteed a place at the new Chesswood school. This was because many of the Springfield pupils come from a much wider catchment area and to guarantee places would disadvantage other children. Discussions would need to be had with the governing body of the new school to look at the implications and detail of any decision on admissions criteria.

47.25 For future consultations, it would be good for the Scrutiny Committee to hear feedback from school representatives on how the process went and what could have been done differently. Members also felt it was the County Council's responsibility to ensure that parents understood the survey questions and they were asked to explain their objections.

47.26 Language was an issue every year with the school's admissions process. Could this be looked at and more support given?

47.27 Modelling had started in 2021 with all Worthing schools and academies. There had been concern that a new 2FE primary free school in the area with a potential 420 spaces could impact numbers further in other schools. However, the DFE had now made the decision not to proceed with that school. Analytics were shared, alongside current pupil admission numbers and the impact of the large number of surplus places was looked at in terms of financial challenges for the schools. The views of schools and their local knowledge were acknowledged during discussions on possible reductions to the number of school places. Durrington Infant and Junior schools were admitting children from outside their catchment area, leaving other schools to be under capacity. The aim

was to encourage children to attend local schools as opposed to travelling to different catchment areas.

47.28 The modelling work with schools had raised a wish for more SEND provision across Worthing and Durrington. A survey question was included to gauge the feeling of the local community to support SEN places. This was an opportunity to put forward the right proposals for children who might not have much of a voice. The number of objections could be more to do with placement rather than the principle of creating more SEN places.

47.29 The Chairman challenged the inclusion of a question around a 21-place SSC, given the percentage of objections (around 14%). Officers expressed that they would have wanted to take account of the strength of feeling and had there been larger objections this is something they would have wanted to have regard to, and further stated that there could be uncertainty about what that (SSC) might mean for admissions to the school. The Chairman connected this to earlier comments which the Committee had made regarding respondents being well enough informed to understand all the consultation questions.

47.30 The Cabinet Member for Learning and Skills, Cllr N Jupp, thanked the Committee for their comments and questions and was heartened by the comments about the outcomes. Officers would take on board the comments about the survey questions for future consultations. He also thanked parents and children for the letters, emails and pictures that he had received.

47.31 Resolved – That the Committee:

1. Supports the proposals as set out in the draft decision report to meet the aim of reducing surplus places in the Worthing and Durrington area and welcomes how the consultation outcomes have been taken into account.
2. Have raised various areas of learning for future consultations to ensure they are inclusive and accessible as outlined in the minutes. The Committee asks that these are taken away to ensure the purpose of the questions and what people are being asked to respond to are clear in future consultations. Specific areas mentioned include support in other languages, short specific questions and further opportunities for comments to be made.
3. Asked that for future similar proposals, the service consider engaging with the relevant schools and local members at an early stage, including around the consultation content.

48. Support for Young Carers

48.1 The Cabinet Member for Learning and Skills, Cllr N Jupp, introduced the report highlighting that this service had joined Education and Skills in summer 2022 and it was a good time to hear what was being done and what was planned for the future.

48.2 The Committee heard from Ms Pope, Deputy CEO of Carers Support. Carers Support works under a contract with the County Council and has about 30,000 registered adult, friend and family carers, 327 of which are young adults aged 18-24 years. The last 12 months had seen a 34% increase in the number of carers coming forward.

48.3 Carers Support work with young carers transitioning into the adult services through the 'My Futures' project, working with 16–19-year-olds, introducing them to the adult carer service before they move over to their support. Carers Support had also been involved in setting up the Young Carers Partnership with local Sussex clubs and the Young Carer Team (YCT) to bring some additional support to young carers, particularly on the respite support, peer support and opportunities to meet other young carers. The group had met to discuss lots of themes impacting young carers including the cost of living and mental health.

48.4 Young carer groups had stopped during the pandemic but were now building back up, however many young carers faced challenges in attending groups either because travel was difficult or caring roles had become more complex and more intensive.

48.5 As a voluntary sector group/charity Carers Support could gain access to grant funding to support some of the residential and peer activities as well as fundraising for work with 11–16-year-olds. A current focus was a campaign aimed at giving young carers back their childhood. Holiday activities for young carers from 7-11-years of age are also run by Carer Support. A primary care project was underway trying to raise awareness with GPs of the support routes for young carers.

48.6 Work was also underway with the University of Chichester as many young carers struggled balancing their caring role with progressing into further education, especially if it meant moving away from the family environment.

48.7 Members of the Committee asked questions and a summary of those questions and answers follows.

48.8 The YCT are working on building up data on disadvantaged, BAME, etc, carers for incorporating into future reports.

48.9 Due to the 43% increase in referrals, the assessment of a young carer could take about three months to get them allocated to a worker. Every case is triaged on entry to ensure there were no safeguarding issues and identify if the young carer/family had support from other agencies. From 1 April 2023 the YCT would have access to additional financial resources to employ key workers to undertake assessments. Refusal to assess was very rare. Self-referrals mostly came from older teenagers, particularly as they moved on in education, and it was felt young children were often not aware that what they did at home was anything other than normal. Members felt partners along the journey, for example pregnancy, early years, pre-school, schools, etc, needed to be trained and supported in identifying and referring young carers.

48.10 The County Council were currently working on a strategy with schools to support of the most vulnerable children including young carers. It was hoped that schools would be supportive of young carers, for example by having flexible attendance policies to avoid persistent absence and flexibility on sanctions like detentions, among other support, but the County Council could not dictate these to schools. It was difficult to balance carer needs with the benefit of them being in school receiving an education. The YCT were using Young Carers Action Day on 15 March 2023 to share resources packs to raise awareness in schools and offer guidance and advice.

48.11 It was hoped that the new IT system, Bromcom, implemented in schools would help provide data on attendance to highlight trends and patterns. The 2021 Census had also allowed people to record information on carers, so it was hoped that once that information became available it could be used help identify young carers and families who were not receiving support. It was estimated that there were 6,000 young carers in the county with the YCT being aware of 2,400. Currently the largest number of referrals came from schools, but work was in progress to equip other partners, e.g. GPs, health professionals and social care partners, to identify to young carers and their families and refer them to YCT.

48.12 There was no formal process of inspection for this area of work, although the Care Quality Commission were looking at whether it is a next step. There was no national benchmarking or review of young carers. Some local authorities dealt with support for young carers in-house and some commission out the services. The County Council were already working on developing this area of data and would reach out to other authorities to see if data was available and seek out examples of best practice.

48.13 The youngest assessed known young carer in West Sussex was 5-years-old. Assessment was about establishing if young carers were undertaking inappropriate caring for their age and helping families to put in place appropriate support so that did not need to happen. Siblings were considered as the family is looked at as a whole unit as part of the assessment. The Committee highlighted that very young children did not always recognise that they were carers and therefore it was import to be proactive in identifying them.

48.14 The Cabinet Member for Learning and Skills, Cllr N Jupp, thanked the Committee for their comments and questions. He also reported that raising the voice of the child might be shared through the Youth Cabinet. The Cabinet Member looked forward to providing a further update to the Committee in the future.

48.15 The Chairman welcomed being able to hear about the ongoing work going to support young carers, noted the increase in the numbers of young carers coming forward and welcomed the additional resources being put in place to address this.

48.16 Resolved – That the Committee:

1. Highlights the importance of promoting the identification of young carers and asks that the support and guidance provided to schools and other partners focuses on how they can proactively identify young carers, including suggesting schools ask specific questions regarding caring responsibilities at school entry stage.
2. Asks that the suggestion of a flexible attendance and behaviour policy for young carers is included as part of the support and guidance provided to schools.
3. Agrees to write to the Chairman of the Health and Adults Services Scrutiny Committee to highlight the importance of the role of GPs and health professionals in identifying Young Carers and ask to explore if there are any areas to consider for scrutiny.
4. Suggests that the service explore if there are opportunities for peer review or benchmarking with local authority partners to ensure the service is able to learn from any best practice, and the potential development of a policy for young carers.

49. Performance and Resources Report 2022-23 - Quarter 3 - October-December 2022

49.1 The Committee considered the Performance and Resources Report for Quarter 3 which covered October-December 2022.

Children and Young People

49.2 The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Cllr Russell, introduced the report highlighting that much of the improvement journey had become business as usual for the service whilst it waited for the anticipated full Ofsted inspection. The Cabinet Member felt things were moving in the right direction whilst acknowledging that there were still challenges, e.g. placement sufficiency, for which a recovery plan was in place; recruitment and retention, which was improving now that the social workers from overseas were being onboarded. A correction was highlighted on page 19, paragraph 31, second bullet point should read Orchard House not Cissbury Lodge.

49.3 Members of the Committee made comments and asked questions and a summary of those questions and answers follows.

49.4 KPI 1 - Percentage of referrals to Children's Social Care within 12 months of the previous referral – A very close eye was kept on re-referrals with the Performance Board reviewing data and issues raised being investigated and reported back. Looking at information monthly could be misleading as one large family could cause a spike in numbers. It would be better to look at figures as a rolling total. Our benchmark level is on par with statistical neighbours. All trends and spikes are investigated to under what had happened, why and how to learn from these experiences.

49.5 KPI 2 – Percentage of Early Help Plans closed with outcomes met - Whilst there had been a struggle to recruit to Early Help, most posts

had now been appointed to. Where families were waiting to access an allocated worker there was a robust system in place, whereby a manager had contact with the family on a regular basis to review the situation and prioritise action if needed. Information on timescales was held and could be shared with the Committee.

49.6 KPI 9 – Positive outcomes on child protection in 12 months – A positive outcome was a family stepping down within 12 months of being on a Child Protection Plan, this could be due to the child becoming looked after, which could be in the best interests of the child but is not always viewed as a positive. A more beneficial way would be to look at the number of children subject to child protection plans for 2 years plus which was at 1%, which was very good compared to statistical neighbours and the south-east.

49.7 KPI 7 – Stability of children looked after placements – The restructure of the Commissioning Service had helped with stability of placements; a lower figure was better for children and we compared well with statistical neighbours. Work was in process to look at the best use of resources for appropriate placements including a campaign to recruit more in-house foster carers.

49.8 External Residential Placements – The process when a child became known to the authority was to first look for a placement in-house, e.g. a foster carer placement. If the child had complex needs, they may need support in a residential setting. The County Council has some residential settings, but they were at high occupancy levels. Since the Covid pandemic there had been an increase in children with complex needs who required bespoke arrangements, often only available in the private sector.

49.9 The Government changes to the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children the County Council could support as part of the National Transfer Scheme could mean the use of external placements.

Learning and Skills

49.10 The Cabinet Member for Learning and Skills, Cllr N Jupp, introduced the report highlighting three main points of performance: that Ofsted inspections of schools continued to provide positive outcomes with 93% of children attending Good or Outstanding schools; the Education and Learning Strategy was now a live document and moving forward; and a High Needs Recovery Plan was now in place to address the growing impact of the increasing number of children identifying with special needs on the budget.

49.11 Members of the Committee made comments and asked questions and a summary of those questions and answers follows.

49.12 Members asked that a full list of projects under the **Capital Programme** be included in the next PRR so that the Committee had an overview of all the capital projects within the portfolio.

49.13 **KPI 27 – Percentage achieving expected standard in read, writing and maths combined at the end of Key Stage 2** – Back in 2018 the target had been on track, but levels had fallen away over the pandemic period. Work was being done on this area. Additionally, what was not shown in the paper was that there had been a national decline over the pandemic period

49.14 **KPI 29 – Percentage attainment gap of disadvantages pupils compared to non-disadvantaged pupil peers at end of Key Stage 2** – The gap between the two groups had started to close this year. A number of actions were underway e.g. moderation to make sure targets were not over ambitious, a review of schools to ensure things were being done correctly.

49.15 Resolved – That the Committee welcomed the updates on the performance and finance within the portfolios and the responses given to questions:

Children and Young People:

1. The Committee were reassured by the quality assurance process in place for children social care re-referrals.
2. Asks for detail on the timescales for those children and families in early help awaiting allocation.

Learning and Skills:

3. Asks that the full list of Capital Programme projects are included in the Q4 PRR report when it comes to Committee.

50. Work Programme Planning and Possible Items for Future Scrutiny

50.1 Resolved – That the Committee agreed the draft work programme prepared by the Business Planning Group following their meeting on 1 February 2023.

51. Requests for Call-In

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

52. Date of Next Meeting

52.1 The next meeting would be held on 7 June 2023 at 10.30am.

The meeting ended at 1.32 pm

Chairman