

Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee

7 June 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 Baldwin	Cllr Dabell	Cllr Mercer
Cllr Burgess	Cllr Evans	Cllr Smith
Cllr Cherry	Cllr Hall	Cllr Sparkes
Cllr Cornell	Cllr McGregor	Mr Lloyd

Apologies were received from Mr Cristin and Mrs Oldroyd

Also in attendance: Cllr Russell

1. Election of Chairman

1.1 Cllr Linehan was proposed for the position of Chairman for one year by Cllr Hall and seconded by Cllr Sparkes.

1.2 Cllr Smith was proposed for the position of Chairman for one year by Cllr Cornell and seconded by Cllr Mercer.

1.3 A secret ballot was held which was won by Cllr Linehan by eight votes to four.

1.4 Resolved – that Cllr Linehan is duly elected as Chairman of the Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee for a period of one year.

2. Election of Vice-Chairman

2.1 Cllr Baldwin was proposed for the position of Vice-Chairman for one year by Cllr Evans and seconded by Cllr Sparkes.

2.2 Cllr Mercer was proposed for the position of Vice-Chairman for one year by Cllr Cherry and seconded by Cllr Cornell.

2.3 A secret ballot was held which was won by Cllr Baldwin by eight votes to four.

2.4 Resolved – that Cllr Baldwin is duly elected as Vice-Chairman of the Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee for a period of one year.

3. Business Planning Group Membership

3.1 Resolved – that the Committee appoints the following members to its Business Planning Group: Cllr Linehan, Cllr Baldwin, Cllr McGregor, Cllr Mercer and Cllr Cornell.

4. Declarations of Interests

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

4.2 Cllr Smith declared a personal interest as the parent of a child who has been through the Early Help Service, under agenda item 8.

4.3 Cllr Dabell declared a personal interest as his daughter is the headteacher of Baldwins Hill Primary School in East Grinstead under agenda item 9.

4.4 Cllr Mercer declared a personal interest as the chair of the Orchard Hill College Academy Trust which has Brantridge School in West Sussex under agenda item 9.

5. Urgent Matters

5.1 No urgent matters were raised.

6. Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee

6.1 A Member asked that in minute 47.9 their suggestion be noted that the setting up of an SSC unit would be better at Downsbrook Junior School as it was a larger school site.

6.2 Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 9 March 2022 be approved as a correct record, subject to the amendment as reflected in 6.1 and signed by the Chairman.

7. Responses to Recommendations

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

7.2 Cllr Mercer confirmed he would continue as the Committee's representative on the SEND Strategy Board.

7.3 Members asked that the responses be returned to the next meeting as there had not been sufficient time to look at the revised document.

8. Early Help - Review of new service model

8.1 The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Learning and Skills, Cllr Russell, introduced the report which she felt gave a positive picture of the redesigned service which had been implemented in January 2022. She reported that initial challenges with recruitment had been resolved, that there was now good morale amongst staff and that the Ofsted inspection comments had endorsed the new service.

8.2 The Committee heard from Mrs Dickens, Assistant Principal at Midhurst Rother College and Designated Safeguarding lead. Mrs Dickens reported that the College had a Dedicated Schools Team (DST) worker who was available to discuss incidents or situations and how best to deal with them. They welcomed that from September the DST worker would be based in the school one day a week. The College worked in a collaborative way with the DST worker to make decisions or referrals. The DST worker also helped to support sessions, family meetings, home visits and provided tailored support to young people and their families.

8.3 The DST worker spends time in school with pupils running workshops on issues such as keeping safe on-line and health relationships, as well as supporting pastoral staff.

8.4 Mrs Dickens reported that DST workers were also working with primary feeder schools to help the transition of pupils to secondary school. Half-termly meetings were held to discuss new students, concerns and review progress of those pupils already being worked with.

8.5 Staff from the College had attended a DST training day which had provided helpful tools which were being used in the school.

8.6 Members asked Mrs Dickens if there were any areas where she, or her colleagues across the county, felt there could be improvement or development and were advised that schools would always welcome more support, particularly in dealing with things earlier, but that the service was hugely supportive and the introduction of the DST over the last year had made such a difference.

8.7 Mrs Dickens responded that where families do not give consent to being involved, the school continued to work with the student in school, but having consent gave the best support for the whole family.

8.8 Members of the committee asked officers questions and a summary of those questions and answers follows.

8.9 Early Help is a non-statutory service. Ofsted comments suggested the service was good making a positive difference to children's lives. The service has been on a journey since the redesign was implemented and there is a clear practice improvement plan. A key element for improvement is the time children wait to receive the service. This was a national issue and in later 2022 the County Council had seen an improvement in the numbers of unallocated cases and waiting times had been reduced. Officers would be happy to speak with Members who had individual reports of where the service was not meeting expected standards.

8.10 **Referral rates** into the service were 43% from schools, 18% self-referral, 15% from the Police and 11% from health professionals. The proportion of Early Help Plan referrals had stabilised since the redesign and there are reduced numbers of children returning to early help and reduced numbers going on to require a social care intervention following a successful early help plan. The DST teams and schools work closely with

the Special Educational Needs Assessment Team (SENAT) where Special Educational Needs (SEN) has an impact on families.

8.11 **Staff recruitment** had been an issue at the start of the redesigned service, when nationally it had been a difficult time for recruitment. A sustained campaign of working on a wider approach to attract new staff had been successful, there had been approximately 40 staff promoted internally and rates of vacancies were now at normal levels.

8.12 Children who might witness or be subject to **domestic abuse** are supported by the Domestic Abuse service. This service is well accessed and works in a similar way to early help by focussing support on the whole family and through linking with partners who might have contact with the family.

8.13 The Early Help service works in locality partnership groups with a range of partners, including health and midwifery teams, and providers and community groups to identify **pre-school age** children and families who might benefit from support. There is no dedicated early years team within the early help service but there are connections with the Education and Skills service who connect with nurseries and pre-schools. Members expressed concerns that pre-school age children may not be helped soon enough. It was reported there were nearly 600 early years settings in the county. Officers reported that there were a number of early years care advisers and the SEND Early Years Team who could work with families and advise them. It was suggested the Committee ask BPG to monitor the early identification of pre-school children and others not in school.

8.14 Developing a good **governance framework** is an important piece of work. Locality Partnership Boards have been established in every district and borough, are chaired by a community representative and are responsible for setting an action plan. They meet termly for discussion and planning and are arranging yearly event. Information then feeds into the Supporting Families Board, consisting of a more senior level of partners who discuss where there are issues and gaps and report into the Children First Board.

8.15 **Communications** with communities are being strengthened by the availability of localised information, greater understanding of local communities, their culture and languages with staff who can converse and understand cultural differences. Social media accounts have been consolidated to give consistent messages. A core group of staff have received social media training and are working with the Voice and Participation team to help improve engagement. Information can be found in libraries and other targeted public locations.

8.16 Work was underway across Children's Services to improve the voice of children and families, look at their suggestions, ideas and feedback. Members welcomed this and looked forward to seeing some information on feedback at a later Committee.

8.17 There were some clear, stable **performance measures** in the report but the move of early help data from a stand-alone case system into the main social care system along with the new offer meant that

effectively the service were starting to measure from October 2022. There was confidence that the new early help model was making an impact. Staff were clear about direction and felt better connected to social care colleagues providing a continuing improved experience for children.

8.18 Resolved – That the Committee:

1. Welcomes the progress made as a result of the redesign and particularly note the good work of the work of the Dedicated Schools Teams.
2. Highlights the importance of a focus on the early identification of pre-school age children and those not in school and the Committee will consider how to monitor the reach to those children.
3. Highlights the support for children with SEND and the importance for Early Help and SEND services to work together to support those children accessing both services.
4. Recognises that communication of the service is key to make sure families know where and how to access the service, welcomes the work being planned to widen the social media reach and asks the service to explore how they are ensuring there is a wide online diverse offer.
5. Asks that the Committee is provided with the outcome of the planned work to gain feedback from children and families using the service.

9. Performance and Resources Report 2022-23 - Quarter 4 - January-March 2023

Children and Young People

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

9.2 The numbers of external placements for children we care for had flatlined over the last three years and were at a level they would be expected to be at. The cost pressure was caused by the complexity of need increasing and a national lowering in capacity of mental health and youth justice provision. A lack of sufficiency in the market had led to a dramatic rise in costs and sometimes the Service had to resort to unregistered care options. These two elements were a national issue and Government reforms in social care were suggesting regional care co-operatives. The service would be pressing the Government to look at the supply side as well as commissioning. Covid and the cost of living crisis had also had an impact, particularly where providers had closed down provision. This had been reflected in the dip in **Performance Measure 7 – Stability of children looked after placements** – where a national provider had discontinued its work closing 27 homes and withdrawing 100 beds from the market.

9.3 **Performance Measure 8** - Support for care leavers to achieve aspirations – The percentage of care leavers in employment, education or training had increased but still one in three were not covered. This could be due to health needs or vulnerability and the figure is in line with statistical neighbours. Members asked if the County Council could offer an apprenticeship role within the authority for care leavers to help fill vacant posts. The idea was supported by officers who advised that the Care Leaver's Advisory Board were taking this idea forward as part of the local offer for care leavers.

9.4 **Performance Measure 9** – Positive outcomes on child protection in 12 months - The County Council's numbers were shown broadly in line with the increasing national average, where previously they had been higher, and more recent data showed even better progress. The emphasis of the Family Safeguarding Model was to provide support to families to make the changes needed which would result in a reduction in the number of child protection plans

Learning and Skills

9.5 Members of the committee asked officers questions and a summary of those questions and answers follows.

9.6 The **Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) recovery plan** contains a range of initiatives including employing an external organisation to help, agreement to triage cases to get them done in appropriate timescales and the release of funding to schools when assessments reach 20 weeks, where there is confidence that the child going through the assessment will lead to an EHCP. Members welcomed this and would appreciate seeing some data on this at a future meeting.

9.7 Work was underway in preparation for the upcoming **SEND Area Inspection** with an improvement plan being prepared, governance being reviewed, and an independent Chairman being sought. A Government sponsored initiative, Delivering Better Value, had opened up a funding stream. The Government was also planning to release funding to increase training for educational psychologists. Locally the service were also linking with universities, taking on locums and looking at internal staffing opportunities. East Sussex County Council would be reviewing the way the service operated to see if lessons could be learned, and a group of authorities with the same issues were meeting to see if any learning could be shared.

9.8 **Home to School Transport** – Children with EHCPs in mainstream schools do not automatically receive transport support. Transport is only supplied where needs are complex, individual or specialist transport is required. Parents could not always continue to transport their children to school post-EHCP, due to children going to different locations and therefore needing transport. The majority of the cost rise was due to the increased cost of single use taxi transport and the escorts. Limited success had been achieved in supporting families to continue to provide transport on a mileage rate.

9.9 Performance Measures 27 and 29 – The Education and Learning Strategy has a clear range of actions to help children regain expected standards. Nationally standards at the end of Key Stage 2 had fallen since the Covid pandemic, although in West Sussex there had been a greater issue with writing achievement. Work was taking place with schools with specific issues, and with all schools in relation to writing. It was a challenge to predict when the levels would be back on target, and it was agreed the Committee should add the measures to the Work Programme to monitor.

9.10 Improved School Trading Offer – The County Council offered a range of services to schools, including legal, human resources and leadership. As more schools become academies less schools are taking up the services. Government had also made a decision to remove local authorities from the organisations that could offer an Early Career Framework which had resulted in a reduction in income.

9.11 Resolved - That the Committee:

Children and Young People

1. Recognises the financial pressure and challenges around placements for children we care for and welcomes the work being done at a local level to address this.
2. Welcomes that there have been improvements in the number of care leavers in Employment, Education and Training but is pleased to hear the raised aspiration to meet a higher target for that cohort and asks that there is exploration of an apprenticeships and work opportunities offer for care leavers at the County Council and district and boroughs councils in West Sussex.

Learning and Skills

3. Highlights the continued challenge on the timeliness of EHCP assessments and welcomes that funding is being provided to schools for those waiting beyond 20 weeks and asks that figures and details on that work is provided to the Committee.
4. Welcomes the work to improve governance around SEND and asks that the Committee is kept updated on that work.
5. Recognises the impact of Covid on the attainment levels at Key Stage 2 and on disadvantaged children. The Committee will add this to the Committee's Work Programme for consideration for future scrutiny.

10. Work Programme Planning and Possible Items for Future Scrutiny

10.1 The Chairman reported that responses to the outcome of the Children's Services inspection report would be reviewed at the September meeting and any matters for scrutiny could be added to the work programme following that discussion.

10.2 The BPG were asked to consider reviewing the Capital Programme as a potential item for future scrutiny, to assess the progress of the Education Capital Programme to increase SEND places, as well as the opportunities to meet needs for children we care for placements.

11. Requests for Call-In

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

12. Date of Next Meeting

12.1 The next meeting would be held on 13 September 2023 at 10.30am.

The meeting ended at 1.06 pm

Chairman