

West Sussex County Council – Written Questions

13 October 2023

1. Written question from **CLlr Cornell** for reply by **Cabinet Member for Children, Young People, Learning and Skills**

Question

West Sussex is one of 55 local authorities signed up to the Government's 'Delivering Better Value' contract with Newton Europe, which includes the delivery against target of a 20% reduction in Education and Health Care Plans (EHCP) issued. The Council's current situation is that it is achieving only 1% of EHCP assessments within the statutory timeframe. EHCP applications on the waiting list are assessed by a professional Educational Psychologist. Can the Cabinet Member confirm:

- (a) How this Newton Europe reduction target will be achieved, is it the right priority and, if achieved, how will it help overall to improve our support to this vulnerable group?
- (b) That in delivering the target, there will be no 'moving of goal posts' or 'watering down' of needs assessments; and
- (c) That the current criteria for awarding an EHCP, and the professional judgement of the Educational Psychologist will both be fully respected and maintained.

Answer

- (a) Delivering Better Value (DBV) is a programme working to identify and implement local and national opportunities to improve the outcomes for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). It is delivered by Newton Europe who were commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) and looks at how savings can be made by improving outcomes in terms of children accessing the right support at the right time.

The targets identified for West Sussex focused on the three areas below:

- Increasing Inclusion in Mainstream Settings
- Reducing Reliance on the Independent Sector
- Enabling a Stronger Multi-Disciplinary Response

There is no target to reduce EHCPs by 20%

- (b) Any reduction in requests for EHCPs will come from earlier effective intervention and support enabling children to access learning and make progress without an EHCP. Any children requiring the additional support required through an EHCP will continue to be assessed in the usual way.
- (c) The current criteria for issuing an EHCP is defined within the SEND Code of Practice and the advice from an Educational Psychologist is a statutory requirement.

2. Written question from Cllr Joy for reply by Cabinet Member for Children, Young People, Learning and Skills

Question

My question regards Reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC). I would like to pose a question to the County Council Cabinet. On the first day of term, West Sussex County Council sent out a message indicating that no schools in the county had any RAAC-related issues, even though a school in Horsham had been prominently mentioned in the press. It is worth noting that this particular school was originally a local authority school when it was constructed but has since become an academy. It appears that there may have been some reliance on technicalities in their response.

Currently, there seems to be a heightened sense of concern, as evidenced by the numerous surveys being conducted. Therefore, I would like to pose a straightforward and inquisitive question: How many schools in West Sussex can provide concrete evidence that they are genuinely RAAC-free?

Answer

There are no records indicating RAAC in any County Council maintained schools; however building records did not always detail the construction methods used. There are 114 maintained schools that have parts of the site that were constructed or modified during the period that RAAC was in use as a building material. Visual inspections were required at all of these schools, using the Department for Education (DfE) guidelines for RAAC identification. As a consequence of these inspections, one school did identify material that looked very much like RAAC but, after detailed survey investigation, has proved not to be. A further four schools have subsequently identified areas within the school that they have flagged as potential RAAC and detailed investigations are being arranged.

However, the County Council is aware that visual inspections alone cannot always entirely eliminate the possibility of RAAC being present. This is because there will be occasions where the structure has been obscured by panelling for example or requires void areas to be accessed and in some circumstances asbestos management is needed. To this end a programme of comprehensive building surveys by RAAC experienced professionals has been commissioned for all of the schools potentially containing the material.

The only school in West Sussex that has had RAAC positively identified remains Greenway Junior School near Horsham which is an academy. The Academy Trust is working with the DfE to resolve the issue. In the meantime the school remains open having reconfigured the teaching arrangements to avoid the area of concern.

3. Written question from Cllr O'Kelly for reply by Cabinet Member for Children, Young People, Learning and Skills

Question

Current contract arrangements for primary school meals are due to run until July 2026. The provision is based on the steamplicity model with meals prepared off-site and micro-steamed on-site.

Can the Cabinet Member please:

- (a) Advise whether he is aware of an alternative to the Steamplicity system that could provide the scale of school meals required without full kitchen facilities in schools?
- (b) Advise whether any action is yet underway to explore alternative catering options ahead of July 2026?
- (c) Confirm the level of capital investment that would be required to deliver what would be required for an alternative to the Steamplicity.
- (d) Advise if a school is unhappy with the current arrangements there is provision for them to exit the contract?
- (e) Provide a summary of satisfaction levels based on the annual surveys for the duration of the contract arrangements.

Answer

- (a) Yes. There was a full market consultation undertaken in 2015/16 prior to the school meal contract procurement and at that time several potential alternatives presented and were explored by officers as part of the market consultation process. As is standard with a contract of this size, alternative models will be explored with potential Service Providers as part of the preparation for tendering for replacement school meal contracts.
- (b) Officers will commence market scoping in 2024/25, this will include stakeholder and Provider engagement.
- (c) Unknown as it would depend on what alternative models were presented. Full feasibility projects would need to be undertaken on each school currently operating a Steamplicity service, circa 190 schools. Not all these schools are maintained by the County Council.
- (d) Yes, there is provision for early contract exit, the conditions for this are set out in the annual Service Level Agreement that schools enter in to with the County Council.
- (e) The Service Provider carries out annual customer satisfaction surveys. These are constantly reviewed and improvements in the service applied, according to the feedback received.

4. Written question from Cllr Smith for reply by Cabinet Member for Children, Young People, Learning and Skills

Question

Can you please provide the following data in relation to all children with Education and Health Care Plans (EHCP) in full time educational placements, both as a percentage and an actual number, broken down by maintained, non-maintained, special, mainstream, academies, free schools or independent schools?

- (a) Children in full time school placements
- (b) Children currently on reduced timetables

- (c) Children currently receiving full time (Education Other Than At School) EOTAS support, including in-person tutoring or virtual support?
- (d) Children currently receiving part time or reduced EOTAS support?
- (e) What is the percentage of all children, and how many children in total with an EHCP are currently on waiting lists for a school placement? This includes children whose current placement is no longer meeting their needs, children who have been excluded from school and children missing education altogether as they are off role due to being de-registered?

Answer

- (a) We know which children are on roll in which type of provision at present; however, data on full-time, and part-time arrangements is not currently held. Mainstream covers providers of universal services who accommodate all needs within their setting.
 - 2,436 (35%) mainstream (including maintained, academies, free schools, and independents)
 - 2,807 (41%) Special or alternative provision
 - 1,389 (20%) Nursery or FE college (pre and post school age)
 - 278 (4%) other, such as apprenticeship, EOTAS, Elective Home Education, awaiting provision
- (b) This is not currently captured in a way that can be reported upon. A new working group has been established to explore future ways of working more closely with schools to communicate when changes to a child's full-time attendance in education is altered. This group is called Not in Receipt of Fulltime Education (NIRFE) and will include all children across the county, not SEND alone.
- (c) As at the start of September there were 104 children with EHCPs aged 0 to 25 that were recorded as EOTAS. This is 1.5% of all children with EHCPs for which West Sussex are responsible for. 60 of the 104 that are EOTAS are Elected Home Educated (0.9% of all children with EHCPs).

For children of compulsory school age (4 to 16 or Year R to 11) 71 children (1.3%) are recorded as EOTAS. 51 of these are Electively Home Educated (0.9%).
- (d) Any EOTAS provision for a child is their full-time provision in that it is their only provision. This may not be 'full-time' in the traditional sense of full-time education (i.e. 25 hours per week), but it is their only provision and what is deemed as appropriate for that child. Any child that is on a school roll would not be classed as EOTAS.
- (e) 61 (0.88%) of children with EHCPs are currently recorded with a SEN placement of Awaiting Provision/Awaiting Provision – in an education setting or another setting (age 5 to 15)/Awaiting Provision – not in education setting awaiting placement (age 5 to 15)/Awaiting Provision (16 or over).

Four children with EHCPs have been permanently excluded, however they are none of those shown as awaiting provision.

5. Written question from Cllr Joy for reply by Cabinet Member for Community Support, Fire and Rescue

Question

How is West Sussex County Council supporting Ukrainians in their efforts to secure private rental accommodation? A staff member attempting to transition into private rental housing has encountered obstacles, with letting agents unwilling to consider them as tenants.

Although it required the involvement of two English-speaking staff members to uncover this information, it appears that the County Council is aware of the issue and willing to intervene with landlords.

How are they addressing this situation to ensure that individuals who wish to avoid becoming a burden are not trapped within the system?

Answer

In response to the launch of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, the County Council has established a Ukraine Support Team to deliver the practical support requirements placed on local authorities as set out in the national guidance. This support includes assisting guests following the end of their hosting arrangements to find suitable accommodation and assistance with independent living.

The Ukraine Support Team has staff dedicated to delivering the locally designed Accommodation Pathway Scheme offering end-to-end assistance from initial thoughts of living independently through to the point of moving into a property. This approach was designed to support Ukrainians wishing to live independently following the end of their hosted placement with a Sponsor or where private rented arrangements best suit their specific individual or family circumstances.

Staff working within the Accommodation Pathway Scheme (APS) proactively engage with Lettings Agents and Property Owners to increase understanding of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, providing clarity on rights/status and entitlement under 'right to rent' as well as assisting with any practicalities regarding translation/interpretation. The scheme is widely promoted to guests, but it is acknowledged that many individuals/families are keen to be entirely independent opting to engage directly with Letting Agents and Property Owners but when faced with unfamiliar processes or unexpected obstacles may then reach out for assistance.

Engagement with individuals/families is on a 1:2:1 basis to tailor an appropriate package of support following an affordability assessment to ensure that any tenancy can be independently sustained for the duration. Support offered includes; assistance with the search for properties, engagement with Letting Agents and Property Owners to assist with the practical elements of viewing property and the subsequent steps for completion of a tenancy agreement and move-in. Circumstances will vary and a tailored package of support could include financial assistance with an initial security deposit (to take property off the market), rent deposit and/or a rent guarantee.

So far this year 66 individuals/families have moved into independently rented accommodation with support provided by the Accommodation Pathway Scheme with a further 130 individuals/families currently engaged in the process.

Support extends to ensure a smooth transition into the privately rented property with the Homes for Ukraine Team able to assist in the navigation of processes including help setting up council tax and utility accounts, and practical advice for matters such as recycling.

Once guests have settled into their independent accommodation, they are still able to access the wider support offer included under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme regarding access to language training, employment support etc.

The housing market in West Sussex is one of the most challenging in the Southeast with all statutory agencies struggling to obtain a regular supply of private rented accommodation despite offering incentives and support for landlords. The package of rent guarantees, rent and security deposits has proved a necessary measure to provide Landlords operating in a highly competitive marketplace with the assurance needed to support our guests.

In all cases officers seek to find suitable and appropriate accommodation, irrespective of whether the guest is a WSCC staff member or otherwise. The circumstances of each case remain confidential, but all cases are regularly reviewed whilst actively seeking rental accommodation and contact maintained with those who have successfully moved into independent accommodation.

It must be noted that irrespective of the support described above, the Homes for Ukraine Scheme remains a programme which primarily matches guests to local hosts and most hosted guests remain in their host arrangements for more than a year.