

## **Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee**

15 January 2025 – 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 Dabell (Chairman)

Cllr Baldwin	Cllr Hall	Cllr Wickremaratchi
Cllr Cherry	Cllr McGregor	Mrs Oldroyd
Cllr Cornell	Cllr Mercer	Mrs Spear
Cllr Evans	Cllr Smith	Cllr Nagel

Apologies were received from Cllr Burgess, Cllr Duncton and Mrs Coles

Also in attendance: Cllr Russell and Baxter from the Youth Cabinet

### **35. Election of Chairman**

35.1 Cllr Dabell was proposed for the position of Chairman for the remainder of the 2024-25 term by Cllr McGregor and seconded by Cllr Wickremaratchi.

35.2 Cllr Mercer was proposed for the position of Chairman for the remainder of the 2024-25 term by Cllr Cherry and seconded by Cllr Smith.

35.3 A secret ballot was held which was won by Cllr Dabell by 6 votes to 4.

35.4 Resolved – That Cllr Dabell is duly elected as Chairman of the Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee for the remainder of the 2024-25 term.

### **36. Election of Vice-Chairman**

36.1 Cllr Cornell was proposed for the position of Vice-Chairman for the remainder of the 2024-25 term by Cllr Mercer and seconded by Cllr Smith.

36.2 Cllr Duncton was proposed for the position of Vice-Chairman for the remainder of the 2024-25 term by Cllr Baldwin and seconded by Cllr Wickremaratchi.

36.3 A secret ballot was held which was won by Cllr Duncton by 6 votes to 4.

36.4 Resolved – That Cllr Duncton is duly elected as Vice-Chairman of the Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee for the remainder of the 2024-25 term.

### **37. Business Planning Group Membership**

37.1 Resolved – That the Committee appoints the following members to its Business Planning Group: Cllr Dabell, Cllr Duncton, Cllr Burgess, Cllr Cherry and Cllr Cornell.

### **38. Declarations of Interests**

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

38.2 Cllr Smith declared a personal interest as the parent of a child with identified SEND and who has an EHCP, under agenda item 8.

38.3 Cllr Cornell declared a personal interest as a governor at Manor Green College in Crawley, under agenda item 8.

38.4 Mrs Spear declared a personal interest as a parent governor at Palatine School, having a child with EHCP and being a member of the Schools Forum for West Sussex, under agenda item 8.

38.5 Cllr Mercer declared a personal interest as a governor of St Andrew's School, Nuthurst, and a member of the Orchard Hill College Academy Trust which has a school in West Sussex, under agenda item 8.

38.6 Cllr Dabell declared a personal interest as his daughter is the headteacher of a Primary School in East Grinstead, under agenda item 8.

38.7 Cllr Cherry declared a personal interest as a member of a group of schools in Burgess Hill which represents 11 schools in Burgess Hill, under agenda item 10.

### **39. Urgent Matters**

39.1 No urgent matters were raised.

### **40. Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee**

40.1 In relation to paragraph 28.3, a member commented that it was important to add context that the current Government had been campaigning that the SEND System had been in this position for a long time, and prior to July 2024.

40.2 Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2024 be approved as a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

### **41. Responses to Recommendations**

41.1 Resolved – That the Committee notes the responses to the recommendations provided from recent meetings.

### **42. SEND Improvement Plan - Early Identification in the Early Years (Under 5s)**

42.1 The Cabinet member for Children and Young People, Learning and Skills, Cllr Russell, introduced the report which outlined the challenge and the work being undertaken to provide Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) for under 5s. Data showed there had been an increase of 124% in early years SEND referrals compared to 2021, and numbers were still increasing.

42.2 Members of the Committee welcomed the report and asked questions and a summary of those questions and answers follows.

42.3 The 124% increase in demand had been due to a wide range of factors but the Covid pandemic had caused some impact, such as children missing out on access to early years settings during lockdowns, leading to social relationship, and speech and language problems for children starting school, but it was not the only factor.

42.4 The service were not expecting huge early years provider place sufficiency issues with the expansion in funded places for children from nine months old up to three years from September 2025.

42.5 It was acknowledged that provision of wraparound care was a national issue for mainstream and special schools, and the service had been liaising with the Local Government Association (LGA) and other local authorities to tackle the problem. Work in-house was taking place to increase SEND support to current wraparound providers to help increase the number of spaces available to children with SEND.

42.6 The Enhanced Transition Package pilot mentioned in paragraph 4.4 would run until February 2025 half-term when officers would meet with parents and schools to gather feedback on outcomes.

42.7 A member welcomed early intervention but was concerned that there was a need for an earliest intervention service, i.e. when a child first comes to the attention of the service e.g. when they are put on a waiting list. Officers responded that there was a process for children under 5 with SEND for referral at the earliest point with support being provided. Work was underway with the Special Educational Needs Assessment Team (SENAT) to look at how the process could be run more effectively and on providing support at the earliest point in a setting or with families.

42.8 It was acknowledged that it was important to have a range of performance measures, including audits and family voice. A member asked if it could be considered if data would measure time between referral and intervention, late presentation where children have not attended nursery and how to improve that.

42.9 It was recognised that communication was important, and the service reported it was working with the West Sussex Parent Carer Forum to keep lines of communication open with parents, carers and young people, to simplifying contacts, to build direct contact with parents and carers, and improve communications. Feedback and views were always considered, and a parent/carers survey could also be undertaken.

42.10 The budget for this area of work had been increased but it was questioned whether it would meet the high increase in demand? It had been recognised by the Government's Public Accounts Committee that there was a national issue around funding arrangements for SEND and the Department for Education (DfE) and other funding departments had been asked to work more closely with local authorities. The service itself had brought in some additional funding from specific grants and lobbied central Governments whenever possible for increased funding. The service would also ask the West Sussex Schools Forum for some increased funding from the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). The resources available were used extremely well by dedicated and experienced staff. The Committee requested to see the see any lobbying letters that had been sent to the Government on this so that they could assist to raise the current challenges around funding.

42.11 It was acknowledged that the SEN Inclusion Funding (SENI) for early years providers had not increased in the last four years and the service would be looking into how that was impacting providers, e.g. wage increases, increased equipment costs, and officers committed to provide further detail on this to the Committee when that work was completed.

42.12 The service works closely with headteachers and SEN Co-ordinators (SENCOs), having recently held SEND focussed seminars with secondary and primary school headteachers with solution focussed problem solving sessions to work collaboratively on how to further improve services. There is an annual conference for headteachers and governors on SEND. There are also termly Leadership Forums open to all SENCOs to discuss continuing professional development, share good practice, and provide a support network. There is a year-long training programme available for SENCOs looking at different aspects of their role and the support available, as well a consultation line for all SENCOs providing access to SEND and inclusion advisers.

42.13 A member raised work on providing satellite help for mainstream schools, supporting the idea but looking for more information. Officers reported that this would be part of the SEND Improvement Plan paper coming to the next meeting and more information would be available then.

42.14 The Youth Cabinet representative, Baxter, asked what work was taking place to reduce waiting times for speech and language therapy. Officers reported that this was a service provided by the NHS and the County Council held them to account through the SEND and Alternative Provision (AP) Board. It is a priority for the NHS, but they were also experience funding pressures.

42.15 The Youth Cabinet representative, Baxter, raised that children with a SEND diagnosis were five times more likely to be excluded from school and asked what actions were being taken to prevent this. Officers recognised that exclusion numbers were higher for children with SEND and that a project in the Change Programme funded through the DfE was working with children at risk of exclusion. The project provided support from a range of services to help children in school and reduce permanent exclusions. It was hoped that benefits would be realised, and the project could be expanded.

42.16 Resolved – That the Committee:

1. Welcomes the actions planned and underway for Early Years and agrees that sustainable Early Years support is vital.
2. Requests an update to the Committee on the delivery and impact of the Early Years Strategy in the future and will add this to their Work Programme.
3. Recognises the challenge around wraparound care for children with SEND and welcomes the work on this.
4. Highlights the importance of intervention at the earliest opportunity and ask that this is explored as a priority. The Committee suggests that earlier support should be clearly monitored and tracked.
5. Agrees with the importance of having clear and simple communication with parents and carers on the information and support available in this area and to gain their feedback and welcomes that this is a priority.
6. Asks for further detail on the review of the Special Educational Needs Inclusion Funding (SENIF) when available.
7. Recognises the significant national funding issues for support of children with SEND. The Committee request to see the lobbying letters that have been sent to the Government on this.

### **43. Adult Learning Service**

43.1 The Cabinet member for Children and Young People, Learning and Skills, Cllr Russell, introduced the report which explained the actions taken following the ceasing of trading of the major provider in late 2022 and the progress of the service since. In June 2023 Ofsted inspected the service and rated it as 'Good'.

43.2 Members of the Committee welcomed the report and hoped that it would become an annual update, and asked questions and a summary of those questions and answers follows.

43.3 Funding from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) is very closely tracked, with all tracking being publicly available. The Adult Learning Scrutiny and Advisory Board looks at the Adult Learning Service in depth, tracking attendance, enrolments and monitoring learners. Ofsted advice was to grow the service slowly and steadily, and the service want to get the funding use correct against the vision for the service. A team of over 50 colleagues is now in place. Work also takes place with the County Council's Economic Development team to focus training in the right areas.

43.4 A member asked if, under report paragraph 7.4, there was any data on the 10% of vulnerable adults who had not been reached to continue their training? Officers reported that work with adult social care colleagues

had revealed that some vulnerable adults had not wanted to return to learning, some had passed away, and sometimes the tutor network had been insufficient to provide learning.

43.5 Officers would like to have a list of community spaces holding adult learning but work so far had been on building a cost-effective model of learning and not on venues. Work had started and adult learning was delivered in libraries but there was a lot more work to be done. There are many more adults to work with, but the model needed to be embedded and stable before being expanded to ensure it could work effectively and manage demand. Members also suggested the service could reach out to business with training facilities to see if they could help.

43.6 Members were concerned that the lack 16-19 programme tutors could lead to impacts in the future for those young people. Officers reported a 16-19 pilot is in place, which receives referrals from other County Council services, to help the most vulnerable and those Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEETs), which connects with the careers team in the Standards and Effectiveness service. Focus was on the hardest to reach and most vulnerable, with the intention of developing a fuller programme from the pilot project. There is confidence that the funding allocation for this year has been justified and funding will be secured going forward.

43.7 Resits for public examinations generally take place in colleges or sixth forms, but for some young people that is not suitable and alternative vocational options are provided.

43.8 The Multiply project had produced a real impact on maths results but funding had now ceased, and the project would soon end. Officers have been working with partners who have the maths skills needed to provide alternative pathways.

43.9 Officers acknowledged recruitment is a challenge however funding has provided an opportunity for people with education experience within small providers and charities receiving funding to consider roles.

43.10 Officers reported it was difficult to provide data on outcomes for adults with learning disabilities and that they had spoken with Ofsted on how to monitor pathways to success. The Adult Learning Newsletter was one of the most valuable ways of measuring the outcomes and successes of this cohort through qualitative feedback and comments from these learners about their courses.

43.11 Officers confirmed that the figure for the level of adult illiteracy in the south east of around 11% was from the National Census. No figure for West Sussex was available, but the service were trying to track post-16 young people, information from providers and communities, to give an indication of the level. The constant transition of people in and out of the county makes this a difficult task. The main priority is around English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and how adult literacy could have an impact on the economy of the county. Further consideration would be given to monitoring and potential Key Performance Indicators could be included in later updates.

43.12 Members asked if more narrative could be added to tables to understand them better, on table 6.1 could a column be added to explain which district or borough the charities operate in. Officers explained that in table 6.1 a learner is a person and enrolment refers to how many times a person participates. It was anticipated that the data for the next report would be more in-depth and more comparable as it would cover a period of two years.

43.13 Officers confirmed that the biggest challenge was ensuring the Adult Learning Service was robust enough to open the doors to the large number of residents who they knew they could be working with.

43.14 Resolved – That the Committee:

1. Thanks the service for an excellent report and the progress and breadth of the Adult Learning Service.
2. Highlights the importance of raising awareness of the Adult Learning services on offer to residents.
3. Welcomes the work on the rollout the 16-19 pilot project and sought assurance on the continuation of funding and the ongoing work to progress this.
4. Welcomes hearing of the work to develop and grow a venue base for adult learning courses and raises the importance of engaging with businesses with training facilities.
5. Recognises the challenges around recruitment, and the on-going work to address this.
6. Seeks assurance on how the work with vulnerable adults is tracked to measure the impact of these and following pathways, and glad to hear this will be progressed.
7. Welcomes that the service will look further at how it measures its success and suggests that a KPI around literacy is considered.
8. Will keep the item on its work programme and consider an annual update on the progress of the service.
9. Requests that the outcome of the recent review of Adult Learning is shared when available (March 2025).

#### **44. Work Programme Planning and Possible Items for Future Scrutiny**

44.1 The Committee agreed the draft Work Programme, including the following:

44.2 Members agreed that the **SEND Improvement Plan** update for the 26 February meeting should be an overview of the whole improvement plan to date.

44.3 **Children not accessing education at school** – The Committee requested that the following be included within the report to the 26 February meeting: information on the policies and processes to safeguard those children not in an education setting and the criteria to identify and address any concerns raised, the policies and procedures around Elective Home Education, reasons and how children are supported as well as the implications of the Children’s Wellbeing and Education Bill on this.

44.4 **Draft Youth Strategy** – A member requested that this was considered by the Committee as a priority to look at how the County Council was responding to the statutory duties in regards to Youth Service provision.

**45. Requests for Call-In**

45.1 There have been no requests for call in to the Scrutiny Committee within its constitutional remit since the date of the last meeting.

**46. Date of Next Meeting**

46.1 The date of the next meeting will be held on 26 February 2025 at 10.30am.

The meeting ended at 12.27 pm

Chairman