

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

MINUTES of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee for Children's Services held at County Hall, Lewes, on 10 June 2013.

PRESENT: Councillors Kathryn Field (Chair), Stephen Shing (Vice Chairman), Peter Charlton, Michael Ensor, Kim Forward, Roy Galley, Jim Sheppard (substituting for Councillor Claire Dowling), Alan Shuttleworth and Francis Whetstone.

Ms Susan Thompson (Church of England Diocese representative)

Mr Simon Parr (Roman Catholic Diocese Representative)

Ms Nicola Boulter (Parent Governor Representative).

Lead Members: Councillors Sylvia Tidy (Lead Member Children & Families) and David Elkin (Lead Member for Resources and Deputy Leader).

Scrutiny Manager Paul Dean

Also present Ged Rowney, Interim Director of Children's Services; Liz Rugg, Assistant Director Children's Services (Safeguarding, Looked After Children and Special Educational Needs); Fiona Wright, Assistant Director (Schools, Youth and Inclusion Support); Louise Carter, Assistant Director (Communication, Planning and Performance); Alison Jeffery, Assistant Director (Early Help and Commissioning); and, Brian Hughes, Head of Youth Justice and Targeted Youth Support Service (for item 6 TYS).

1. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

1.1 RESOLVED – to confirm as a correct record the minutes of the last Committee meeting held on 11 March 2013.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2.1 Apologies for absence were received from: Councillors Claire Dowling and Gill Mattock; Ms Catherine Platten (Parent Governor Representative); and Councillor Nick Bennett (Lead Member Learning and School Effectiveness).

3. DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS

3.1 Cllr Ensor declared a non prejudicial interest as the leaseholder of a property used to provide youth services, and engages and full time youth worker (in respect of item 6 – Targeted Youth Support)

3.2 Cllr Forward declared a non prejudicial interest as a trustee of the Education Futures Trust (in respect of item 7 – 'THRIVE').

4 INTRODUCTION TO CHILDREN'S SERVICES – PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

4.1 The Lead Member for Children and Families introduced a comprehensive presentation about the work and management structure of Children's Services. The Interim Director and senior management team members outlined their areas of responsibility.

4.2 Key transformation projects currently underway include:

- 'THRIVE' (see item 7)
- Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) reforms
- New relationships with schools and the 'Proposition for Partnership'

4.3 The following points emerged from the discussion:

- Growing child population: current figures indicate a child population in East Sussex of 116,474, and rising, highlighting the question about how services in future are to be targeted to those who need them most. The 'THRIVE' strategy, as described above, is one key example.
- Home to school transport is commissioned by Children's Services and it provided by Economy, Transport and Environment. Eligibility is assessed by Children's Services.
- Local Children Safeguarding Board (LCSB) provides helpful assistance and data to the scrutiny committee. The LCSB Annual Report is of particular value in helping scrutiny Members understand and question the scale of the child safeguarding challenge, and how well our strategies are working.
- Education Standards Board: is an important complementary body to the scrutiny committee. On the face of it both bodies are concerned about educational attainment. The Standards Board focuses primarily on performance in individual schools, especially by examining Ofsted school inspection reports. The scrutiny committee takes a broad perspective across all aspects of education and safeguarding, and identifies issues for investigation and 'critical friend' challenge. For example: school exclusions and Key Stage 2 mathematics have previously been important scrutiny topics.
- Young carers: many children have considerable caring responsibilities; the department is working closely with Care for the Carers (www.cftc.org.uk) in commissioning supportive programmes.
- Children's Centres: there are 31 children's centres operated by the County Council; 65% of those attending are from the Council's 'target groups' ie. those who stand to benefit the most from the service. Statutory guidance requires an element of 'open access' service at centres but families do have other alternatives. There is no expectation that centres will have contact with all the children in their area. Scrutiny has previously explored how the performance of children's centres is measured.
- The 'Proposition for partnership' describes the new relationship between the local authority and schools, and sets out the Council's commitment to good outcomes for all children regardless of the status of the 'setting' or school. The Committee has shown interest as this work has developed over the last year as the authority has sought to clarify the role of the local authority against a landscape of

increasing school autonomy. Of particular interest has been the academies programme and the challenge of attracting academy sponsors to East Sussex.

- Foster carers: The Committee questioned the cost effectiveness of the campaign to recruit more foster carers and what the next steps would be.
- Raising the participation age (RPA): East Sussex is preparing for the raising of the participation age of young people in education and training to 17 in summer 2013 and 18 in 2015. Further opportunities will need to be created given that, currently, 93% of 16 year olds and 82% of 17 year olds are in education and training in East Sussex. Targeted youth support and work with schools is underway.

4.4 RESOLVED: to welcome the presentation and the opportunity to begin to develop the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee work programme.

5 TARGETED YOUTH SUPPORT (TYS) – PROGRESS UPDATE

5.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services which provided an update on the progress of Targeted Youth Support since its last appearance at the scrutiny committee in March 2012.

5.2 The issues addressed by the report and discussion were:

- How improvements to young people's wellbeing are measured through a variety of indicators (appendix 2 of the report refers)
- How the service reaches those who are most vulnerable by, amongst other things, aligning its operation to social care structures and THRIVE
- How well the service operates having divided its activity geographically (roughly 60% in coastal towns and 40% in the inland market towns) and the balance between group work and individual support
- How the service is responding to NEETs (young people Not in Education, Employment or Training) and the impact of the raising the participation age (RPA).

5.3 RESOLVED: to welcome the update and responses.

6 'THRIVE' TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME – UPDATE

The Committee considered a report and presentation by the Director of Children's Services (presentation attached to these minutes).

'THRIVE' is a programme introduced in 2012 that is designed to enable *earlier* and more *effective* intervention with families. The aims are:

- to help families make the changes necessary to secure the safety and wellbeing of children and young people, so reducing the number requiring social care intervention, and
- to intervene more swiftly and effectively to place children elsewhere when change is not possible.

Officers reported a positive picture of the THRIVE project after its first year. There has been a 45% reduction in referrals not just from the police to Children's Services (a benefit achieved early on), but also a sustainable reduction from other agencies. Particular attention is now being given to referrals from schools. The number of Child Protection Plans (CPPs) has also substantially reduced.

The main ongoing challenges include:

- assessments are taking longer because they are more complex;
- The number of CPPs may begin to rise as the number of looked after children (LAC) reduces;
- more children will be placed into extended family placements with an ongoing financial commitment to support the placements over the long term;
- recruiting and supporting sufficient adoptive families;
- the courts ultimately make many of the key decisions that affect the ability to deliver THRIVE targets, and often work to longer timescales than we would like; and
- the impact on safeguarding children of the recent government welfare reforms is, as yet, difficult to assess.

RESOLVED: to note the positive achievements of the 'THRIVE' transformation project in its first year and receive further progress reports in due course.

7. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

7.1 The Committee identified a number of issues as potential scrutiny topics:

7.1.1 Improving educational attainment in East Sussex

During 2012/13 the scrutiny committee noted that Key Stage 4 (GCSE) attainment in East Sussex was disappointing compared with many other authorities. Schools in some areas of the County appear to be improving whereas there is a lack of improvement in others. There are a number of possible lines of possible scrutiny inquiry:

- exploring the underlying reasons for differences in attainment might lead to better strategies to tackle underperforming schools or pupils; eg. reviewing numbers of 5+ A*-Cs including English and Mathematics may reveal correlations with, say, geography or capital expenditure in schools or changes in school funding.
- The proposition for partnership: how the Council works with the different types of schools to improve educational attainment and school performance; the effectiveness of support to underperforming maintained schools and the developing Council roles of influencer, partnership broker and service marketer to academies/free schools.
- Academies: during 2012/13 the Secretary of State for Education alleged that East Sussex was obstructing the progress with academies conversion: to consider the current position and actions being taken.

7.1.2 Raising the Participation Age (RPA)

The preparedness of East Sussex for the raising of the participation age (RPA) of young people in education and training) to 17 in summer 2013 and to 18 in 2015:

- The role the County Council, and others, in helping to overcome barriers to education and work and to align the aspirations of young people with employment and learning opportunities.
- Reducing the number of NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training) amongst young people has been of particular ongoing concern to the committee.

7.1.3 Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) reforms/ Transition from children's to adults' social care

An initial scrutiny investigation early in 2013 found that the Transition Service, after a year of operation, had demonstrably reduced the potential for a 'cliff edge' drop in

services experienced by young people with the most challenging needs as they change from children's to adults' social care services. Further scrutiny could be undertaken to investigate:

- the experience of young people with moderate or minor needs as they move from children's to adults' social care services.
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) – the impact of the reforms and the *Pathfinder* approach that has been trialled in East Sussex.

7.1.4 Early intervention

The Troubled Families Programme (known in East Sussex as Family Keywork) is a key Government initiative. Improving early help and prevention services is a key priority of the Council's Children's and Young People Plan. Possible lines of enquiry could include:

- How East Sussex is improving early help and developing effective prevention initiatives. This is a key part of THRIVE.
- The impact of the Family Keywork programme in East Sussex in relation to outcomes for both children and families as a whole.
- The role of children's centres in providing effective early help for children and the potential for making wider use of them to promote community wellbeing for example as community assets through a 'one-council' approach.

7.2 The Committee noted the following programmed scrutiny work:

7.2.1 THRIVE: This programme, as discussed above, is of such significance that regular reports will be considered by the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee.

- A future report can address the question of the effectiveness of foster carer recruitment.

7.2.2 Children's Safeguarding: The Committee considers the annual report of the Local Safeguarding Board in the autumn of each year. This provides an opportunity to question and understand the issues being tackled by the Board and to take an overview of the Board's future work programme.

7.2.3 School exclusions: a scrutiny review of school exclusions reported to Cabinet and Full Council in July 2012. The Scrutiny committee will review progress with its recommendations again in November 2013.

7.2.4 Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR): scrutiny plays an active role in the Council's planning and performance process which begins, for scrutiny, at the September committee each year.

7.3 RESOLVED – (1) to consider the logistics of the work programme proposals collected so far and work towards a detailed work plan for consideration in September 2013.

8. FORWARD PLAN

8.1. RESOLVED – to note the Forward Plan for the period 1 June 2013 to 30 September 2013.

The meeting ended at 1.10pm

COUNCILLOR KATHRYN FIELD
Chair