

## SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

MINUTES of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee for Children's Services held at County Hall, Lewes on 11 November 2013.

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### PRESENT:

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

Ms Nicola Boulter (Parent Governor Representative).

Councillor Gill Mattock (District/Borough Representative)

Lead Members: Councillors Sylvia Tidy (Lead Member Children & Families / designated statutory Lead Member for Children's Services) and Nick Bennett (Lead Member Learning & School Effectiveness).

Scrutiny Manager  
Scrutiny Lead Officer

Paul Dean  
Martin Jenks

Also present

Becky Shaw, Chief Executive, Ged Rowney, Interim Director of Children's Services  
Liz Rugg, Assistant Director Children's Services (Safeguarding, Looked After Children and Special Educational Needs); Louise Carter, Assistant Director (Communication, Planning and Performance); Alison Jeffery, Assistant Director (Early Help and Commissioning); Nathan Caine, Head of Inclusion Support Services and, Douglas Sinclair, Head of Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance

### 16. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

16.1 RESOLVED – to confirm as a correct record the minutes of the last Committee meeting held on 9 September 2013.

### 17. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

17.1 Apologies for absence were received from: Councillor Roy Galley, Ms Catherine Platten (Parent Governor Representative), Mr Simon Parr (Roman Catholic Diocesan Representative) and Ms Sarah Phillips (Church of England Diocesan representative).

### 18. DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS

18.1 There were no disclosures of interests.

### 19. URGENT ITEMS

19.1 None notified.

## 20. SCRUTINY REVIEW OF SCHOOL EXCLUSIONS IN EAST SUSSEX

20.1 The Head of Inclusion Support introduced the progress report on school exclusions in East Sussex. A lot of work has been undertaken to reduce the number of exclusions, which is detailed in appendix 1 (page 17 – 14). Although the agreed actions have been achieved, there is disappointment that the number of exclusions remain where they are. Based on the 2011/12 figures (the last year for which comparative national data is available) there was a 17% increase in temporary exclusions and a 1% increase in permanent exclusions overall in 2012/13. The discussion of the report focussed on the following points:

### 20.2 Scale of Exclusions

- There are approximately 64,000 school age children in East Sussex.
- In order to achieve a rate of exclusion in line with the national average (based on the 2011/12 figures), East Sussex Schools would need to reduce fixed term exclusions by 22% at primary level and 21% at secondary level. For permanent exclusions there would need to be a 57.9% reduction at primary level and a 34.5% reduction at secondary level.
- To achieve the national average this equates to 318 fewer fixed term exclusions at primary level and 2104 fewer at secondary level. The reduction needed in permanent exclusions at primary level would be 8 children and at secondary level 38 children.
- The number of fixed term exclusions is measured by the number of incidents, with some children receiving more than one exclusion in any one year period. For primary aged children there is a 10% exclusion rate.
- The majority of primary aged children receive fixed term exclusions for persistent disruptive behaviour and defiance.

### 20.3 Progress Achieved

- A large number of activities have been undertaken to bring down the number of exclusions and there is a clear plan to deal with this issue.
- Work with individual schools has seen some significant improvements, but these improvements are not reflected across all schools in the County.
- A peer review is being conducted to share best practice and to identify measures used elsewhere, that could be adopted to make reductions in the number of exclusions.

### 20.4 Key Areas of Concern

- The performance plan target of a 5% reduction in exclusions has not been met. The leadership team at each school plays a key role in securing the desired reduction in exclusions. It would appear that where there is a culture of excluding children because this is perceived to be the most effective way of dealing with behavioural issues, there will be a high level of exclusions.
- The disproportionate number of children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) excluded continues to be a concern.

### 20.5 Further Areas for Action

- There is a need for a more detailed analysis of the actions being taken to reduce exclusions; further evaluation of the quality of the support being offered to schools; and a renewed review of best practice from elsewhere (including the

outcomes from the peer review) to see how it could be tailored to change the East Sussex level of exclusions.

- The committee considered there was a need to look at how schools support children with SEN to reduce exclusions.
- ESCC is not complacent about this issue and will offer the best support it can, but needs to understand what is different in schools in East Sussex that is causing the higher rates of exclusion.

#### 20.6 RESOLVED –

- (1) To note the progress on reducing exclusion in East Sussex.
- (2) To request a more detailed analysis of the impact of actions taken so far to reduce exclusions and a report back on the outcomes from the peer review.
- (3) To request a progress report be brought to the Scrutiny Committee in six months time.

### 21. RECONCILING POLICY, PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES (RPPR)

21.1 The Committee considered the report that was introduced by the Interim Director of Children's Services on behalf of the Chief Executive, which set out in appendix 1 (pages 9 - 28) the core service priorities for the Children's Services Department (CSD). Various points were raised about the contents of the appendix to the report.

21.2 It was clarified that where a requirement for investment was identified, this related to the allocation of resources within the existing departmental budget, and not the requirement for additional funding. The requirement to have a Local Children's Safeguarding Board (LCSB) is a statutory requirement (page 9 item 1(i)) and the requirement to provide early years education places to some 2 year olds (page 9 item 1(ii)) applies only to those from the most deprived backgrounds.

21.3 It was confirmed that the medium term financial plan required the department to save £16 million over 3 years (2013/14, 2014/15 & 2015/16) but there was still a significant budget. The department is on track to make the required savings for 2013/14, but there will be a need to look at some new savings proposals for 2014/15 and 2015/16 in order for the department to achieve its savings targets..

21.4 Members of the Committee were reminded to attend the RPPR Board on the 7 January 2014 at 2.00pm. The following Committee members indicated that they would be able to attend: Councillor Field, Councillor Shing, Councillor Charlton, Councillor Dowling, Councillor Ensor, Councillor Forward, Councillor Shuttleworth, Councillor Whetstone and Councillor Gill Mattock. Councillor Barnes undertook to inform Councillor Galley.

#### 21.5 RESOLVED – It was resolved:

- (1) To note the process for scrutiny's involvement in the Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources process.
- (2) That all members of the Committee were invited to sit on the RPPR Board on the 7 January 2014, including those members that had indicated their intention to attend (paragraph 21.4 above).

## 22. QUALITY ASSURANCE IN CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE AND EARLY HELP SERVICES ANNUAL REVIEW 2012/13

22.1 The report was introduced by the Head of Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance on behalf of the Interim Director of Children's Services.

22.2 Quality assurance is not a new activity and the Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) came out of a review of this activity in 2012/13. Quality assurance is discussed at quarterly manager's meetings and there has been some good progress against the seven key findings from the review (appendix 2, page 55). It has also been a focus for what we are doing well (e.g. the Celebrating Success presentation) and being able to demonstrate good practice when inspected. The discussion of the Quality Assurance Framework contained in appendix 1 (page 34 – 53) of the report, and the Key findings in appendix 2, looked at the following issues:

### 22.3 The Quality Assurance Framework

- The children's social care quality assurance framework is thorough and has links to the Thrive programme and Early Help.
- The framework is operational and quality assurance activity is taking place e.g. management inspections, staff training and learning activity.
- Service users and user groups' views were taken into account in drawing up the framework and are reflected in the findings.

### 22.4 Key Findings and Management Action Plan

- The key findings came out of the review of quality assurance at the end of 2012/13.
- There needs to be more information about how these issues are being taken forward with SMART (specific, measureable, agreed, realistic & timed) targets and a review of how interventions have worked over time.
- A management action plan is being produced and will be available in January 2014. This will be circulated to the Committee when it is available.

### 22.5 Overall Quality Assurance

- East Sussex is a learning authority and there are lots of good signs of improvement. An independent social care expert has been commissioned to look at social care practice as part of this continual improvement process.
- The last unannounced Ofsted inspection of Contact, Referral and Assessment gave an assessment of good. Ofsted will be announcing shortly which authorities will be inspected under the new inspection regime. Officers will be watching closely to see what issues arise for the assessment of the quality of services.

22.5 RESOLVED:- It was resolved:

(1) To request that the management action plan for the Quality Assurance Framework be brought to the Committee as an update item in March 2014 and that the action plan be circulated to the Committee prior to that date when it is available.

(2) That the Committee would like see the "Celebrating Success" presentation (paragraph 22.2 above).

## 23. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

23.1 The Scrutiny review of School Attainment will commence soon, with an initial scoping meeting of the review board planned for early December.

23.2 The Committee discussed and agreed to conduct a review of Raising the Participation Age (RPA) to cover the following areas:

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 (people Not in Education, Employment or Training) amongst young people has been of particular ongoing interest for the committee.

23.3 A potential review of the Clerking Service to school governors to look at how the revised service is working was discussed. It was agreed to add this to the work programme.

23.4 A progress report on school exclusions will be brought to the committee in six months time at the Scrutiny Committee meeting to be held on 16 June 2014.

23.5 A management action plan for the findings from the Quality Assurance Framework will be reported to the Committee at the meeting to be held on 10 March 2014.

23.6 RESOLVED:- That the work programme additions from this meeting be agreed:

- School Exclusions update report (paragraph 20.6 above).
- Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) - report findings management action plan (paragraph 22.5 above).
- A review of Raising the Participation Age (RPA) (paragraph 23.2 above).
- A possible review of the Clerking service to school governors (paragraph 23.3 above).

## 24. FORWARD PLAN

24.1 There was a discussion of the items on the forward plan that related to the removal of community areas for the Home to School Transport Policy and the provision for children living in shared community areas. The interim Director for Children's Services undertook to clarify the process where the Lead member was considering the community areas for school transport and access to transport within community areas.

24.2 RESOLVED – to note the Forward Plan for the period 1 November 2013 to 28 February 2014.

The meeting ended at 11.54 am

COUNCILLOR KATHRYN FIELD  
Chair