

## CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held at County Hall, Lewes on 23 November 2015.

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PRESENT	Councillors Kathryn Field (Chair), Peter Charlton, Angharad Davies, Claire Dowling, Michael Ensor, Kim Forward, Roy Galley, Stephen Shing and Alan Shuttleworth.  Dr Ann Holt, Church of England Representative Simon Parr, Roman Catholic Diocese Representative Nicola Boulter, Parent Governor Representative
LEAD MEMBERS	Councillor Sylvia Tidy (Lead Member Children & Families / designated statutory Lead Member for Children's Services), Councillor Nick Bennett (Lead Member for Learning & School Effectiveness).
OTHER MEMBERS	Councillor David Elkin (Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Resources)
ALSO PRESENT	Stuart Gallimore, Director of Children's Services; Liz Rugg, Assistant Director (Early Help and Social Care); Fiona Wright, Assistant Director (Education & ISEND); Ruth Szulecki (Early Years Development Manager); Anna Brookes (Head of School and Education, Employment and Training Coordinator); Caroline McKiddie (Partnership Manager: Education, Employment & Training) and Stuart McKeown Senior Democratic Services Advisor

### 21 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 21 SEPTEMBER 2015

21.1 RESOLVED - to confirm as a correct record the minutes of the last Committee meeting held on 21 September 2015.

### 22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

22.1 Councillor Johanna Howell (District and Borough Council Representative).

### 23 DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS

23.1 Councillor Field declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in relation to agenda item 6 (see minute 26) as she is Chair of Battle Pre-School.

23.2 Nicola Boulter declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in relation to agenda item 7 (see minute 27) as she is an assessor for apprenticeships.

23.3 Councillor Shuttleworth declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in relation to agenda item 7 (minute 27) in that his son has an apprenticeship at a Further Education College who is involved in work relating to employers and education providers.

## 24 URGENT ITEMS

24.1 No urgent items were notified.

## 25 SERVICES TO CARE LEAVERS - ACTION PLAN UPDATE

25.1 The report provided the Committee with an update on progress in relation to an Action Plan developed by the Department following an Ofsted inspection of Children in Need of Help and Protection, Children Looked After and Care Leavers (the outcome of the inspection was published in March 2014). Ofsted judged the services in this area as 'Good', with the Adoption Service being judged as 'Outstanding'. However, one sub-judgement of 'Requires Improvement' was issued in relation to the Care Leavers service. As a result the Department developed an Action Plan to address Ofsted's findings for this service.

25.2 Following introductory remarks from Stuart Gallimore, Director of Children's Services, Liz Rugg, Assistant Director (Early Help and Social Care), provided a summary of progress on the Action Plan. This included confirmation that the Care Leavers Service is now one team, based in a single office location and that the Department have strengthened the proportion of qualified social work staff to non-qualified social work staff. This strengthening has helped with planning and risk assessment. Feedback from care leavers has also been sought to assist with developing effective pathway plans which are audited to ensure they are in a suitable format for young people. Progress has also been made with regard to the Virtual School and the assistance it has provided in helping improve outcomes for Care Leavers.

25.3 The area that continues to be a challenge for the Department relates to accommodation. Whilst there continues to be some supported accommodation available, such as the YMCA, there is insufficient provision to meet demand – particularly in the east of the county. Given the savings required in the next 3 years, it is the Department's view that this situation is likely to deteriorate further. This may mean further use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation where no other provision is possible and the alternative would be street homelessness.

## Comments and Questions

25.4 The Committee thanked the Department for the update on the Action Plan and debated a number of issues which are summarized below.

- **Apprenticeships.** The Committee felt the current performance regarding take-up of apprenticeships by care leavers was disappointing. A query was also raised about whether more could be done to look at alternative sources of

funding and support for this area (so as to help boost the levels of apprenticeships taken-up by care leavers). In response, Anna Brookes (Head of Virtual School and Education, Employment and Training Coordinator) explained that whilst the apprenticeship figures are disappointing, the Department had tried hard to improve take-up levels. For example, a number of young people had started apprenticeships, but not all were successfully completed. The main impediment to successful completion appearing to be an affordability issue, as young people lose housing benefits if they accept the offer of an apprenticeship. In response to a suggestion that representations should be made to the Government about the complexity of the benefits system in relation to young people, the Committee were informed that this area is being looked at nationally. The Committee were also assured that the Department were exploring all possible sources of funding and support for care leavers. Other issues discussed included reference to the relatively low target the Department have for care leavers to take-up apprenticeships. In response the Committee were informed that the target is linked to Personal Education Plans, the number of Level 2 courses and the views of the young people themselves as to what they want to do. In the main 16-18 year olds enrol in Further Education if they are able to sustain this. Others enrol in re-engagement programmes such as the Prince's Trust Programme. One positive development is the growth in numbers of young people going on to university. The Committee were also informed about the Countywide Employability Strategy, which care leavers are considered a key part of. East Sussex County Council (ESCC) itself has also developed opportunities for care leavers. The main issue now is to match these opportunities with what young people want to do. Progress is also being made with regard to the services that ESCC commission and to see what can be done to require external providers to offer opportunities for care leavers. The Committee were also assured that this area of work is monitored via the Council's Care to Work strategy.

- **Accommodation.** Whilst the Committee recognised the complexity of this area, they expressed particular concern about the provision of suitable accommodation and the impact on young people of proposed savings to the Supporting People programme in Adult Services. The Committee also asked what dialogue was taking place with borough and district councils regarding accommodation. In response the Director of Children's Services agreed that the proposed savings will have an impact, but that it is the role of the Department to work with a range of partners to mitigate so far as is possible the scale of this impact. It was also confirmed that the Department is discussing with borough and districts councils the issue of accommodation. This involves, for example, discussions around the processes followed by borough and districts and whether, if slight changes were made by them, ESCC might then be in a position to recoup some monies which could then be fed back into this area. The Director assured the Committee that the Department will keep the matter of accommodation for this vulnerable group under close review.
- **Supported Lodging Providers.** The Committee also asked about the level of payments being made to supported lodging providers and whether savings could be made to help fund the establishment of more providers. In response the Committee were informed that given the competitive market within which ESCC

operates, there is limited scope for re-negotiating terms with providers of supported lodgings.

- **Independence.** The Committee noted the high percentage of children with special educational needs – 89% or 40 out of the 45 children who had been in continuous care for the 12 months ending 31 March 2015 (Indicator CP07 on page 21 of the agenda). The Committee were concerned therefore as to whether the Department was setting itself unrealistic targets regarding independent living for Care Leavers and identifying appropriate pathways. In response Liz Rugg informed the Committee that one of the strengths of the Virtual School is that the Department have developed a good track record of mapping future pathways. Ultimately each pathway must come down to the needs of the individual and the reality is that whilst some of these young people will be able live independently, others will continue to need some support indefinitely. A central task for the Department therefore is to try and reduce the numbers of those who need support in perpetuity. Anna Brookes also informed the Committee that an increasing number of young people are being identified with social, emotional and mental well-being needs. The Department therefore aims to help these young people achieve emotional and mental well-being and to be emotionally successful. This would hopefully then help them stabilize and avoid becoming NEET in the long term.
- **Key Documents** In response to a question from the Committee, it was confirmed that the relevant officers keep copies of key documents (such as passports and national insurance documents) in case they are misplaced by young people.

25.5 The Committee decided that they would like to give further consideration to the issue of accommodation for care leavers and therefore agreed that the original Recommendation 2 in the report be amended with wording set out in paragraph 25.6 (2) below.

25.6 RESOLVED:- It was resolved to:

- 1) **note the progress made in key areas within services to care leavers; and**
- 2) **ask for more information regarding the ongoing challenges in providing sufficient, suitable accommodation options for care leavers; to consider, as part of the RPPR process, whether the risks identified in the report to this group could be reduced; and to investigate whether further progress could be made with Borough and District councils to help address the accommodation challenges identified in the report.**

## 26 EARLY YEARS ATTAINMENT UPDATE

26.1 The Director of Children's Services introduced the report by noting the much improved position that the Department is now reporting regarding Early Years Attainment.

26.2 The Committee thanked the officers in the Department for their hard work in securing the progress identified in the report and then debated a number of issues which are summarized below.

### Comments and Questions

- **Integrated Progress Review Pilot.** With regard to Recommendation 2 in Appendix 1 of the report (page 32), the Committee asked to be kept informed of progress on the roll out of the pilot and indicated that they wanted to be kept informed of any developments relating to the changing nature of Children's Centres. In response Ruth Szulecki (Early Years Development Manager) informed the Committee that the Pilot looked at 4 different areas with early years settings and health visitors. The goal being to see if strategies could be developed for bringing together the assessment that takes place by Health for a child aged 2 and the progress check that takes place in an early education setting. Parents often don't understand why two separate assessments are undertaken and feedback from them on the proposed changes was very positive. Parents were also involved in looking at communication and helped co-produce a leaflet which has been used during the pilot. The Department are now at the point of going forward with the proposal for an integrated review that will take place with health and early education providers at aged 27 months. The key tool to help with this process will be what is commonly known as the Red Book (more formally, the Personal Child Health Record). The Red Book will act as the means via which communication will take place between parents and health and other agencies that are involved with the child. This means there will be a shared, integrated progress review record which will help facilitate open conversations between a health visitor and a parent in an early years setting. The Department feel this has been a very positive project and are very encouraged by how communication has improved between health and early years.
- **Good Level of Development.** The Committee noted the difference in levels of achievement between boys and girls (Recommendation 5 – Summary of Progress Update October 2015) and asked what steps were being taken to address this. In response, Ruth Szulecki explained that over the last year in particular the learning environment for boys in the early foundation stage has been looked at more closely. Often boy's learning at this stage is more physical and some of the environments have not been especially supportive of this. However, the pace of improvement for boys has kept up with the overall pace of improvement, which is significant. More progress is still needed though. So, for example, there has been a programme of training for teachers which focuses on challenges around boys learning. This too is having an impact.
- **2 Year Old Capacity.** In response to a question about whether there is sufficient capacity for 2 year olds, Ruth Szulecki informed the Committee that the Department have made significant improvements in the number of places available. East Sussex now has a take-up rate of 82% for eligible two old years, which is very high and above the national average (and better than the other authorities in East Sussex's group). The Department have taken steps with those families who are known to it to actively promote these places. Ultimately though there is an element of choice which parents can exercise as to whether

they take up a place for their two year old child. The capital programme of development focuses on increasing places in areas where there are high concentrations of eligible families and this seems to have had a positive impact. There are some places about to be opened over the next 3 to 4 months and this too may have an impact. It is the case that there will be occasions where parents may not be able secure a place they want for their child because there is no capacity when required. So there are a small number of parents not taking up their entitlement to a place because the specific provider they want is not available (even though other places maybe available in the area). The challenge for the Department will be to make sure that there is sufficient capacity, in the required areas, of places that are good or better. Overall, however, the Department believe there are sufficient places, but the situation will be kept under review.

- **Communication with parents not taking up places for 2 year olds.** Whilst the high take-up rate for 2 Year old places was welcomed, the Committee asked what more could be done to reach those other families not taking up the offer of a place, particularly those with children who have very significant developmental needs. In response, the Committee were informed that the Department is actively considering how it communicates with relevant groups of parents to see whether the take-up rate could be increased. However, it should also be recognised that for some children with multiple difficulties finding a suitable place continues to be a challenge, especially for children with life limiting conditions.
- **Staff Qualification Levels.** The Committee asked for more information regarding progress on the Action outlined in Recommendation 7 (on page 44 of the agenda) on facilitating training for early years practitioners to acquire higher qualifications. In response Ruth Szulecki informed the Committee that the Department do monitor this area. For example, early years settings and schools that provide for children under school age are asked what the highest level of qualification is for those that lead their Foundation Stage. This data has enabled the Department to identify that there is a correlation between those schools and settings that have highly qualified staff and those that had good and outstanding outcomes from Ofsted.

26.3 RESOLVED:- It was resolved to:

- 1) **note the summary of progress in the updated Action Plan of the Children's Services Scrutiny Review of Early Years Attainment; and**
- 2) **to ask for an exception report to provide a progress update relating to Recommendation 2 in Appendix 1 (re the Summary of Progress Update October 2015).**

## 27 SCRUTINY REVIEW OF RAISING THE PARTICIPATION AGE (RPA)

27.1 Nicola Boulter, Chair of the Review Board, introduced the report by explaining that the aim of raising the age of participation is to ensure young people remain

positively engaged with education, employment or training until at least the age of 18. The Review Board was therefore established to investigate:

- whether East Sussex County Council (ESCC) is meeting its statutory duties in this area; and
- to identify whether any improvements can be made to increase participation in education, employment or training.

27.2 The Review Board comprised: Nicola Boulter (Parent Governor Representative and Chair of the Board), Councillors Kim Forward, Roy Galley, Francis Whetstone and in the early stages of the review, Catherine Platten (Parent Governor Representative). Nicola thanked on behalf of the Review Board all those who had contributed to the review and the recommendations contained in the report. Mrs Boulter also requested the following amendments be made to the report:

- **Page 55 amendment to tables.** The published version of these tables only gives a percentage figure. The Board asked that these tables be amended to show the numbers of pupils, as well as the percentage figure.
- **List of schools Appendix** (page 72). The Chair asked that this table be amended so that the Red, Amber and Green colour coding system be reinstated. This will enable quick identification of the 'Investors in Careers' accreditation status.
- **Recommendation 3 – All schools should appoint a Governor as a careers advice champion.** So as to help ensure it is taken forward by school governing bodies, it was requested that this recommendation be taken to area governor meetings.
- **Recommendation 8 – Commend the idea of an employability passport and encourage its swift development. Work should be undertaken where possible to make the Employability Passport regionally and nationally accepted and recognised.** A request was made for an update on the pilot scheme.

27.3 The Committee, including members of the Review Board, then discussed the report and recommendations. These comments are summarized below:

- the Review has highlighted an overall positive position in East Sussex and that the Board's twelve recommendations will help improve matters further without significant additional resources being needed to implement them. Although the Children's Services Department will need to help with facilitating implementation of some of the recommendations. For example, the Board felt that the standard of careers training across schools varies and that whilst this is a matter for schools themselves, the Committee asked whether more could be done to help encourage governing bodies and school leaders to improve careers advice and guidance.
- That whilst it is clear those with the highest of level of need will receive support, the Board felt that those young people on the next level down (on the Continuum of Need) might not receive the support they need and this therefore would remain a challenge.

- There is a need to actively engage with local businesses and help improve the relationship between them and schools.
- That steps need to be taken to ensure proper training and support is provided to governing bodies, if the recommendation of Governing Bodies having a careers advice champion is to be effectively adopted.

27.4 In response, Fiona Wright, Assistant Director Education and ISEND confirmed that the information requested by the Chair in paragraph 27.2 would be provided. Fiona also noted the comments about the positive performance in East Sussex and referred back to the position in the County five years earlier when figures were well below the national average. Significant improvements have therefore been made. Going forward, and in the context of the savings required, the Department believe it has done the best it can to develop effective strategies to help it at least sustain the improvements in this area. With regard to governor involvement, Fiona informed the Committee that the Department and Councillor Bennett as Lead Member for Learning and School Effectiveness, recognise the importance of governor involvement in this area. So, for example, the recommendation relating to a Governor Champion was raised by Councillor Bennett at an area Governor's Forum meeting in the previous week (the forum is comprised of representatives from all the Education Improvement Partnerships in the County). The Committee were therefore assured that the Department and the Lead Member intend to ensure the benefits and role of a governor champion are clearly understood by Governing Bodies.

27.5 Caroline McKiddie (Partnership Manager: Education, Employment & Training) also provided an update to the Committee on a range of issues, including that the Department have been working with the Careers Enterprise Company (which is a government organisation) about the possibility of a digital passport which would enable young people to download and look at their passport on, for example, their mobile device. The Committee were also informed that a bid for careers adviser funding was successful and 1.5 posts will be appointed. Once in place, the post holders will facilitate the building of relationships between school and local businesses.

RESOLVED:- It was resolved to agree the report of the Review Board and to submit it to Cabinet on 26 January 2016 and full Council on 9 February 2016.

## 28 CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

28.1 The Committee discussed the work programme and the potential areas for future reports and scrutiny reviews. It was confirmed that the following Review Board meetings had been scheduled:

- A scoping meeting for the Educational Attainment in Key Stage 1 Review Board – 2.00pm on Tuesday 8 December 2015; and
- Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR) Review Board meeting -1.45pm on Monday 14 December 2015

28.2 The Committee were also informed that Sussex Police have been invited to attend the March meeting to provide an update and to answer any questions the Committee may have in relation to the proposed changes to the policing model and its impact on young people.



28.3 RESOLVED:- It was resolved that the work programme be amended in line with paragraphs: 25.6 (2) and 26.3 (2)

29 FORWARD PLAN

29.1 The Committee noted the Forward Plan for the period 1 November 2015 to 29 February 2016.

The meeting ended at 11.46 am

The date of the next meeting is 21 March 2016.

COUNCILLOR KATHRYN FIELD  
CHAIR