

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held at County Hall, Lewes on 20 March 2017.

- PRESENT Councillors Kathryn Field (Chair), Stephen Shing (Vice Chair), Kim Forward, Roy Galley, Alan Shuttleworth, Barry Taylor, Francis Whetstone.
- Dr Ann Holt (Church of England Representative)
Simon Parr (Roman Catholic Diocese Representative)
Councillor Julian Peterson (Borough and District Representative).
- Lead Members: Councillor Sylvia Tidy (Lead Member Children & Families / designated statutory Lead Member for Children's Services).
- Councillor Nick Bennett (Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability).
- Also present Stuart Gallimore, Director of Children's Services; Fiona Wright, Assistant Director (Education & ISEND), Elizabeth Funge (Head of Education Improvement) and Julie Dougill (Senior Manager: Leadership and Governor Services).
- Stuart McKeown, Senior Democratic Services Adviser.

25 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 28 NOVEMBER 2016

25.1 RESOLVED – to confirm as a correct record the minutes of the last Committee meeting held on 28 November 2016.

26 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

26.1 Apologies were received from Councillors Claire Dowling and Mike Pursglove and Nicola Boulter (Parent Governor Representative).

27 URGENT ITEMS

27.1 No urgent items were notified.

28 RECONCILING POLICY, PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES (RPPR)

28.1 The Committee discussed its input into the Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources process and possible future improvements. The Committee acknowledged the Department provide detailed information on both the impact of proposed savings and mitigations for each service. However, the Committee were generally of the view that for an individual service it would be helpful if they could be provided with greater clarity about the potential impact of proposed savings on children and young people themselves. The Committee also agreed that such information should be provided to them earlier in the process so as to enable Members to make an effective contribution to the RPPR process.

28.2 In response the Director of Children's Services confirmed that the Committee's comments will be taken into account when planning next year's RPPR process.

28.3 RESOLVED to:

- (1) To the note the report;
- (2) Forward on the Committee's feedback for consideration as part of the wider review of the RPPR process.

29 ISEND SERVICE DEMAND

29.1 At its meeting in November 2016, and as part of its engagement with the Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR) process, the Committee requested further detail from the Department about the reasons why there has been a significant increase in demand and associated costs for the ISEND service.

29.2 In response to this request the Committee were presented with a report summarising the pressures faced by the ISEND service and what steps the Department are taking to address these issues. A summary of the key points discussed by the Committee and the Department's responses are set out below:

- **Improving confidence as a way of reducing demand.** The Committee asked for more detail regarding the issue of improving parental confidence in local provision. This issue relates to the Department's finding that there is a direct correlation between parents' lack of confidence that mainstream provision can meet the needs of their child and an increased demand for statutory assessment, additional resources and specialist provision. It is important therefore that all staff who have contact with parents over SEND related matters have an informed understanding of what can be offered locally and the positive impact this can have on children with SEN. This understanding is important as without it, some staff may inappropriately be advising parents to seek additional resources via an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). Given this, the Department are seeking to provide guidance to all relevant staff who may influence parental expectations and with it their confidence levels regarding SEND provision.
- **Budget Capacity.** The Committee asked whether the Department are confident that the additional resources it has identified will be sufficient going forward. In response, the Director of Children's Services commented that the Department cannot guarantee that further resources will not be required. However, the Department believe it has developed an effective plan which it hopes will result in significant reductions in demand. The Director noted too that Ofsted are satisfied with the Department's approach to this issue. The Director also commented that there appears to be a long standing culture of less inclusiveness within the county, with some schools more willing than others to embrace teaching children with SEND. This less inclusive culture has also helped drive up the unusually high rates of referral within East Sussex. However, the Department are encouraged by recent feedback from groups of Head teachers who are now challenging this culture and it is believed that this will also help reduce demand, and with it the pressures on the ISEND budget.
- **Increase in the range and severity of needs.** The Committee asked for clarification as to whether the nature of demand has changed over time and whether in recent years there has been an increase in the number of children with more severe needs. In response, the Committee were informed that there is evidence that both the range of needs and their severity have indeed increased. With regard to severe needs, there are a range of factors influencing why there are now greater numbers of children within this group. One factor relates to advances in medicine which has resulted in more children surviving conditions which previously would have foreshortened their life expectancy. For example, there has been a significant increase in the numbers of

children who require assistance with their breathing who attend school. In terms of the range of needs, it is also clear the numbers of children with social, emotional, and mental health issues has increased too. However, whilst the Department accept that there has been an increase in these types of need, the rate of increase within East Sussex is significantly higher than the national average.

- **Sharing best practice and outreach.** In response to a question regarding sharing best practice, the Committee were informed that many schools are keen to share knowledge and experience where possible. The Department is also investigating whether some providers within the county have capacity to expand their offer so as to help ensure there is sufficient, quality provision available across the county.

- **Impact of legislation.** The Committee sought clarity as to whether, in the Department's view, the Children and Families Act 2014 has led to improvements in SEND provision in East Sussex. In response, the Department confirmed that implementing the requirements of the Act has indeed led to improvements for families.

- **Increase in costs.** The Committee asked for confirmation as to what specific types of demand have been the primary cause of increased costs. In response, it was confirmed that most significant increase in costs relate to:

- Independent school placements:
- placements 16-19 and 19-25; and
- the top-up for children in mainstream provision.

29.3 The Committee thanked the Department for the detailed report and requested that given the importance of this area and the continued pressures the service is experiencing, that the Work Programme be updated to include ISEND service demand as an area which the Committee might want to investigate further in due course.

29.4 RESOLVED to:

- 1) Note the increasing demand for SEND provision across the county and the proposed priority areas for action in order to address these demands.
- 2) To request that the work programme be amended to include reference to ISEND service demand as a subject for possible future scrutiny work.

30 SCRUTINY REVIEW OF EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AT KEY STAGE 4

30.1 At its meeting on 27 June 2016, the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee appointed a Scrutiny Review Board to conduct a review of educational attainment at Key Stage 4. The Board focused their investigation on the challenges schools and academies face in relation to the recruitment and retention of teachers and any impact this might have on educational attainment. The Board consisted of Nicola Boulter (Parent Governor Representative and Chair of the Review Board) and Councillors Claire Dowling, Kim Forward, Roy Galley and Alan Shuttleworth.

30.2 Councillor Galley introduced the report and highlighted some of the Board's key findings. The Board also asked that their gratitude to a range of professionals who assisted its investigations be acknowledged. This included senior members of staff at local schools and academies, two consultant head teachers who attended the Board's November meeting and relevant officers within the Children's Services Department.

30.3 Fiona Wright (Assistant Director) and Elizabeth Funge (Head of School Improvement) welcomed the Board's report on behalf of the Department. The report is regarded as being timely as the current East Sussex Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy is due for renewal this year. As a result, the Department will be able to use the Board's recommendations to help inform the development of the next version of the strategy. In particular, the

Department welcomed the Board's focus on the issue of teacher retention as an area requiring further development within the strategy.

30.4 The Committee then discussed the Board's report and recommendations. A summary of these discussion points are set out below:

Progress 8 and Attainment 8. The Committee welcomed the inclusion in the report of a table which provided a summary of Progress 8 and Attainment 8 scores. However, more detail on how these measures operate was requested.

In response to this request and with regard to Progress 8, the Committee were informed that a zero score within this measure represents the national average and is considered by Ofsted as acceptable. With this context in mind therefore, a Progress 8 score of, for example, +0.14 would be considered as significant progress. It was also highlighted that this is the first year these measures have been in operation. As a result, relevant stakeholders are still developing their understanding of this measure. The Committee were also informed that when compared more widely, the figures for East Sussex indicate local secondary school pupils have progressed significantly above the national average.

The Department acknowledge the significant difference in Progress 8 scores between the top and bottom performing schools. However, it is believed that this gap is likely to narrow as schools are still developing their appreciation of the relationship between the curriculum choices they offer and the potential impact this may have on Progress 8 scores. As local schools develop their understanding of this relationship, it is likely this will result in a positive impact on those schools' scores. This in turn will help close the gap between the top and bottom performing institutions.

The Committee were also informed that further information about the operation of the new performance measures will be circulated.

Different contexts within which local schools operate. The Committee accepted that the issue of teacher recruitment and retention is a national issue which may impact to varying degrees on local schools. However, the Committee asked that it is acknowledged that some schools may face greater challenges than others. For example, that the location of a school in terms of the quality of its transport links and whether it is situated within a deprived area may have a direct impact on its ability to recruit teaching staff.

Teaching Schools. The Committee asked for more clarity about the Department's interactions with local teaching schools and its future development plans. In response, the Department acknowledged the need to increase teaching school capacity within the county and that this is indeed a key element within the school improvement strategy. Julie Dougill (Senior Manager: Leadership and Governor Services) confirmed there are currently five teaching schools within the county. These schools meet regularly as a group and also participate in the Initial Teacher Training Network. This network involves local universities and all the schools within the county that offer 'School Direct'. The Department also confirmed they are waiting on the outcome of applications for a further four secondary schools to become teaching schools. If applications are approved, this would result in an increase in teacher training capacity within the county.

30.5 RESOLVED to:

1) agree the report of the Review Board and to submit the report to Cabinet on 18 April 2017 for comment and to full Council for approval on 23 May 2017.

2) circulate further information to the Committee regarding the Progress 8 measure.

31 STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (SACRE) ANNUAL REPORT

31.1 Councillor Roy Galley, as Chair of the Standing Advisory Committee on Religious Education (SACRE), introduced the report and highlighted a number of key issues for the Committee to consider, including:

- That the five year review of the Religious Education syllabus had been completed and would be presented to the national SACRE conference on 29 March 2017. The new syllabus takes into account requirements relating to the duty to promote 'British Values' and to support the moral, social, cultural and mental development of young people.
- As part of its development programme members of SACRE have visited 9 secondary schools and a number of primary schools. When compared to other SACREs across the country it appears such visits are not common place. However, East Sussex SACRE feel such visits are essential if Members are to develop an informed picture of the nature of the RE provision at individual schools within the county. So far SACRE members have only been able to visit maintained schools. Given the perceived value of such visits, it is also the ambition of SACRE to visit academies within the county.
- SACRE is keen to engage more with young people and as a result, meetings have been held with members of the Youth Cabinet. Feedback from this engagement included the view that whilst Youth Cabinet members felt they had a good understanding of Christianity and Judaism, there was a general view that more could be done to develop their understanding of other major world faiths. Consideration is therefore being given to arranging a student conference where these matters could be discussed.
- SACRE is keen to ensure that its membership draws from a wide as possible range of faiths. Work is this therefore being undertaken to see what can be done to further diversify membership.

31.2 In response to a question about its interactions with the National Commission for Religious Education, the Committee were informed that SACRE had made a submission to the Commission. The Committee also asked for detail about what plans are in place to ensure training will be provided to schools with respect to ongoing changes in RE. In response the Committee were informed that the Department have been actively working on supporting training in relation to the 'Understanding Christianity' project and that there is also a training plan in place for Continuing Professional Development for the coming year. It was also noted that due to financial pressures on school budgets, it appears that some schools are not accessing the training offered to them. As a result the Department are seeking to develop training events that are attractive to schools and fit for purpose. The Committee also noted that the RE 'take-up' figures for both the GCSE full and short courses in East Sussex was below the national average. In response the Committee were informed that the Department's expectation is that the gap between local and national figures will reduce as changes introduced by the National Curriculum take effect.

31.3 RESOLVED to note:

- 1) the work of SACRE in improving the quality of religious education, especially in maintained schools;
- 2) the work of SACRE in supporting schools with collective worship and pupils' spiritual, moral, social, cultural development and British Values 2016-2106;

- 3) the three year-year development plan for SACRE.

32 SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

32.1 The Committee reviewed its work programme, and asked that in relation to minute 29.4 (2) that the issue of ISEND service demand be added to the Scrutiny Work Programme as a potential scrutiny topic.

33 FORWARD PLAN

33.1 The Committee noted the Forward Plan for the period to 30 June 2017.

(The meeting ended at 12.10 pm)

The date of the next meeting is 26 June 2017.

COUNCILLOR ROY GALLEY
Chair