

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held at County Hall, Lewes on 26 June 2017.

PRESENT Councillors Roy Galley (Chair) Tania Charman, Chris Dowling, Kathryn Field, Tom Liddiard, Stephen Shing, Alan Shuttleworth (Vice Chair), Francis Whetstone.

Dr Ann Holt (Church of England Representative)
Simon Parr (Roman Catholic Diocese Representative)
Nicola Boulter (Parent Governor 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)

ALSO PRESENT Stuart Gallimore, Director of Children's Services;
Fiona Wright, Assistant Director (Education & ISEND);
Liz Rugg, Assistant Director, Early Help and Social Care;
Louise Carter, Assistant Director (Communication, Planning and Performance);
Reg Hooke, Independent Chair of East Sussex Local Safeguarding Children Board;
Douglas Sinclair, Head of Children's Safeguards & Quality Assurance;
Caroline McKiddie, Partnership Manager: Education, Employment & Training; and
Stuart McKeown, Senior Democratic Services Officer.

1 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 20 MARCH 2017

1.1 RESOLVED – to confirm as a correct record the minutes of the last Committee meeting held on 20 March 2017.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2.1 Apologies were received from Councillor Laurie Loe.

3 DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS

3.1 No disclosures were declared.

4 URGENT ITEMS

4.1 No urgent items were notified.

5 LOCAL SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD (LSCB) SERIOUS CASE REVIEWS

5.1 Reg Hooke, Chair of the East Sussex Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB), introduced the item by providing the Committee with an overview of the role of the LSCB.

5.2 The Committee then discussed the findings set out in the Serious Case Review report relating to 'Child M'. The key issues discussed are set out below:

- **Sharing information and recording risk assessments.**

A broad area of learning identified in the report relates to how agencies share information and how risk assessments are recorded. Members noted that issues relating to these two tasks have been cited in a number of other Serious Case Reviews (SCRs). As result, the Committee asked for clarification as to what steps are being taken to ensure agencies embed these lessons so that key facts relating to vulnerable young people are clearly communicated, understood and acted on.

In response, Douglas Sinclair (Head of Children's Safeguards & Quality Assurance) informed the Committee that the Department has reconfigured its services so as to improve how information is recorded and appropriately shared. This has resulted in the deployment of a 'Single Point of Advice' (SPOA) system which deals with all referrals into either Children's Social Care or Early Help. The Department has also developed a multi-agency services approach. This means staff within the Department work closely with colleagues from the Police and specialist health visitors in two Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASHs).

The Committee were also informed that the LSCB have requested that the Department conducts a review into the impact of SCRs undertaken over the last five years. The review will focus on establishing whether the recommendations set out in SCRs have led to the improvements in performance they were intended to bring about. The LSCB hopes to produce its report by the end of 2017. Following a request from Members, an undertaking was given to incorporate the findings of the review into next year's annual Serious Case Review report to the Committee.

- **Time taken to complete the Coroner's Inquest.**

The Committee were concerned at the length of time it took for the Inquest into the death of Child M to be completed. In response the Committee were informed that the inquest was performed by a Coroner from a different local authority. The LSCB share the concerns of the Committee at this delay and consequently this matter is being discussed with the relevant local authority.

- **Role of Acute Hospitals and contact with young People who overdose.**

In response to a query raised by the Committee, Reg Hooke informed Members that the LSCB is aware that the number of young people admitted to acute hospitals as the result of a drug overdose is higher than expected. As a result, this issue has been identified as a specific topic which the Board is looking to investigate further with relevant agencies. Members were also informed that a national scheme called the 'Child Protection Information System' will be rolled out locally soon. The system is designed to ensure that relevant health and care professionals are notified when a child, or unborn baby subject to a child protection plan (CPP) or a child with Looked After Child status (LAC) is treated at any health setting in an unscheduled way.

5.3 RESOLVED – to:

- (1) note the findings and lessons from the Serious Case Review; and

(2) request that the Scrutiny Work Programme is updated to include reference to the LSCB's undertaking to incorporate the findings of its review of the impact of Serious Case Reviews into its annual SCR report to the Committee in June 2018.

6 RAISING THE AGE OF PARTICIPATION

6.1 The Committee established a 'Raising the Participation Age' (RPA) Review Board to examine if East Sussex County Council was meeting relevant statutory duties and whether improvements could be made to increase the levels of participation of young people in education, employment and training.

6.2 The report provided the Committee with an opportunity to review the Department's progress with its implementation of the measures described in the Action Plan (as set out in Appendix 1 to the report). Fiona Wright (Assistant Director) and Caroline McKiddie (Participation Manager: Education, Employment & Training) provided Members with an overview of the key developments since the last meeting of the Committee.

6.3 In response, the Committee welcomed the report and raised a number of questions in relation to the Action Plan. A summary of the Committee's questions, together with responses from the Department are set out below:

- **Sustaining progress.**

The Committee recognised the achievements set out in the Action Plan. However, given the pressure on resources Members asked for the Department's view as to how the positive progress made to date can be sustained. In response, the Committee were informed that, for example, some schools are struggling to find resource time to undertake activities that support the 'Investors in Careers' (IiC) award. As a result the Department are helping to link Business Advisers to relevant schools so that they can provide additional support with some aspects of IiC work. The Department also believe that over time it has refined its understanding of what activities have the most impact and that it has developed excellent working relationships with local schools. These, and other factors, mean the Department are reasonably confident that the progress made to date is sustainable.

- **Work Placements for Year 10 pupils.**

The level of placements for Year 10 students has increased from 35% two years ago to 45% for the 2016/17 academic year. Whilst recognising this progress, the Committee asked whether the Department are content with this figure and for its views on the challenges it is facing in achieving an increase in the number of Year 10 students being offered work placements next year. In response, the Committee were informed that the Department believe the percentage rate in East Sussex compares favourably with national figures. However, the Department are not content with this figure and believe that every young person should have the opportunity to participate in a work experience placement. Given this the Department are exploring ways of expanding the service further so as to provide more work placement opportunities. In terms of barriers to further progress, the Department accept that funding may present a challenge going forward as, for example, Colleges are charged for the service. However, and with a view to encouraging maximum participation in the scheme, the Department are trying to ensure these charges are kept as low as possible. In relation to this, feedback indicates that Colleges perceive the service as good value for money.

- **Employability Passport (EP).**

The Committee asked if Members could see an example of an employability passport and for feedback on how the EP is performing from the perspectives of both students and employers. The Committee were informed that progress with the EP had been delayed whilst the Children's Services Department wait for the Department for Education to release a passport via the Careers Enterprise Company. In the meantime, progress has been made in partnership with Sussex Downs College and the 'Digital Badges' scheme they have developed. The Department are keen to focus on providing a digital solution as evidence

indicates that potential users have a strong preference for an electronic EP, as opposed to a paper based offer.

- **Statutory responsibility to deliver high quality careers education.**

In response to a question from Members, it was clarified that it is the responsibility of schools to provide high quality careers advice. However, the Department seek to support local schools via the liC award. For those schools that have chosen not to sign up for the liC award, the Department co-ordinate a network of careers advisers in schools, with meetings taking place on a termly basis.

- **Student knowledge of what careers advice is available.**

The Committee noted the comments in Appendix 2 relating to the Gatsby Foundation's report finding that 'so many young people are kept in the dark about the full range of options open to them'. The Department was therefore asked for clarification as to how students are made aware of the careers advice and support available to them. In response, the Committee were informed that a young person's awareness of this subject can come from a range of sources. For example, and apart from the statutory role schools and colleges play, young people may receive advice from their parents. Given this, work is being undertaken to ensure that parents receive information that will help them provide effective guidance. A young person's peer group can also play an important role in offering advice. With this in mind, some local schools are currently working with an organisation called Future First. This project uses an 'alumni' model which involves inviting former students to talk to their younger peers (this could be in person or via social media). The Department are still reviewing this area and are exploring other methods as to how careers advice is provided.

- **Ofsted 2013 report.**

The Committee noted the findings set out in Ofsted's 2013 report on careers advice that '[nationally] only one in five schools were effective in ensuring that all students were receiving the level of information they needed'. As a result Members asked for the Department's view on as to what proportion of schools in East Sussex are now currently providing effective careers advice. In response, the Committee were informed that Ofsted have not raised any concerns about the quality of careers advice in East Sussex. Furthermore that in terms of the percentage rate of schools who have signed up to the liC award, the figure of 73% in East Sussex is much higher than the national sign up rate of 30%. However, in the context of the pressure on funding, the Department accept that going forward this area will remain a challenge given the significant resources which schools have to dedicate to effectively managing the award scheme. The Department also noted that the DfE have delayed publishing its 'Careers, Education Information and Advice Strategy' guidance document. The Department hope that when this strategy is published, it will include a requirement that all schools must participate in a careers award scheme.

6.4 RESOLVED – to:

- 1) commend the progress made by the Department in implementing the recommendations set out in its Review; and
- 2) that the Committee's request to receive a further progress report for its meeting in June 2018 is added to the Scrutiny Work Programme.

7 SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

7.1 Councillor Galley introduced the work programme item by emphasising his goal of ensuring that where possible, future reviews and related recommendations have a focus on 'looking forward' and helping the Department develop effective policies that anticipate new challenges and opportunities.

7.2 The Committee then discussed potential topics for future scrutiny reviews. The key discussion points are set out below.

7.3 How schools are coping with change. The Committee discussed a range of significant developments/issues which schools are currently dealing with. The Committee want to assess the potential impact of these developments on pupil attainment and school performance. As a result, the Department were requested to provide further information to the Committee on these issues. The key changes the Committee discussed included:

- school funding issues, including data on school funding bids to the Strategic School Improvement Fund (SSIF) and the impact this is having on under-performing schools;
- the impact of the 'Federate First' programme (Federation First is a national campaign developed in 2016 by the National Governors Association to raise awareness of the advantages of federations to school improvement);
- issues relating to pupil attainment and school performance within different Key Stages and the implementation of the Assessment Without Levels assessment framework;
- whilst the Committee is interested in developing a clearer understanding of the impact of the key changes it has identified on all types of school within East Sussex, Members also have a specific interest in the sustainability of small schools; and
- how schools are now increasingly making decisions regarding which services they purchase and the impact this may have on performance and attainment.

7.4 In response, the Committee were informed that for a variety of reasons, it is currently difficult for the Department to provide a clear overview of the latest developments relating to the above factors. For example, with regard to the National Funding Formula (NFF) the Department are waiting for the Government to issue guidance on how resources will be distributed at an individual school level. Given the highly significant impact this may have on how schools operate, Members were advised to postpone undertaking a review of this area until the detail of the NFF is known.

7.5 With regard conducting a further review within Key Stage 4, the Committee were also advised that the current year is the first year where a new assessment methodology is being applied. As a result it will be very difficult for the Department to compare this year's outcomes with previous years.

7.6 Given the above advice, the Committee agreed to keep the above areas under review and would seek to identify at its next meeting in September 2017 what specific subjects might form the basis of a scrutiny review.

7.7 Children Centres. The Committee also focused on the changing nature of Children's Centres and related matters such as proposals to de-designate centres. The Committee want to develop their understanding of these changes and to investigate their impact on both local communities and on children within the Early Years phase. The Committee therefore requested that a report is provided for the November meeting which clarifies:

- the current status of Children's Centres in the county; and
- what the Department's plans are for Children's Centres

7.8 State of School Buildings and Plant. The Committee want an overview of the current status of school buildings and plant in East Sussex. This includes reference to the school maintenance programme and school commissioning plan. Such a review would also include consideration of health and safety issues following the Grenfell Tower fire.

In response, Fiona Wright, Assistant Director, informed the Committee that responsibility for school buildings is shared between the Children's Services Department and the Business Services Department (where the estates and capital and maintenance teams are based). Also, academies are separate institutions which are not funded via the local authority. These two factors make delivering an accurate picture of the current state of school buildings challenging and time will therefore be needed to co-ordinate relevant information for the Committee. With this in mind, it was requested that a report is provided to the Committee's November meeting.

7.9 **ISEND service pressures.** The Committee have an ongoing concern regarding the high levels of demand the ISEND service is experiencing. An update on the steps being taken by the Department to address these pressures was therefore requested. In response, the Committee were informed that the measures set out in the Department's Action Plan are still being implemented. As a result, it was suggested that a report be brought to the Committee in the spring, as this will give the Department sufficient time to review the impact of the measures it is taking.

7.10 Representation on the East Sussex Better Together Board (ESBT)

As part of its consideration of the Scrutiny Work Programme item, an election was conducted to determine the Committee's two representatives on the East Sussex Better Together Board (ESBT). It was agreed that Councillors Roy Galley and Alan Shuttleworth will act as the Committee's representatives on ESBT.

7.11 **RESOLVED** - to update the scrutiny work programme so that it refers to:

- 1) in relation to minute 5.3 (2), the Committee's request that the LSCB incorporate the findings of its review of the impact of Serious Case Reviews into its annual SCR report to the Committee in June 2018.
- 2) in relation to minute 6.4 (2), the Committee's request that it receive a further progress report at its meeting in June 2018 is recorded (Raising the Age of Participation).
- 3) in relation to minute 7.3, the 'Potential future scrutiny work' section of the Scrutiny Work Programme is updated to reflect the Committee's interest in keeping under review the range of major developments schools are currently dealing with. It was further agreed that the Committee would discuss the overlapping topics within this subject area at its next meeting in September. An assessment will then be made at that time as to what specific topic the Committee decide will be the subject of its next scrutiny review.
- 4) in relation to minute 7.7, wording is added to confirm that a report on Children's Centres is provided to the November 2017 meeting which provides an overview of:
 - o the current status of Children's Centres in the county; and
 - o the Department's future plans for Children's Centres
- 5) in relation to minute 7.8, wording is added to confirm that a report which updates the Committee on the state of school buildings in the county and wider issues relating to school expansions and closures is provided to the November 2017 meeting.
- 6) in relation to minute 7.9, wording is added to confirm that a report which evaluates the impact of the measures set out in the Department's Action Plan is provided to the March 2018 meeting (ISEND service pressures).
- 7) in relation to minute 7.10, the appointments of Councillor Roy Galley and Councillor Alan Shuttleworth as representatives of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee on ESBT is recorded.

8 FORWARD PLAN

8.1 The Committee noted the Forward plan for the period to 30 September 2017.

The meeting ended at 12.20 pm.

Councillor Roy Galley (Chair)
Chair