

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, County Hall, Lewes on 2 March 2018.

- PRESENT Councillors Roy Galley (Chairman), Bob Bowdler (substituting for Councillor Chris Dowling) Tom Liddiard, Laurie Loe, Stephen Shing, Alan Shuttleworth (Vice Chair), Francis Whetstone and Councillor Julian Peterson.
- Mandy Watson (substituting for Dr Anne Holt, Church of England Representative)
Councillor Julian Peterson (Borough and District Representative)
- LEAD MEMBERS Councillor Bob Standley (Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability - EISEND)
- OTHER MEMBERS Councillor David Elkin, Deputy Leader of the Council
- ALSO PRESENT Stuart Gallimore, Director of Children's Services; Louise Carter, Assistant Director (Communication, Planning and Performance), Fiona Wright, Assistant Director (Education & ISEND), Mark Whiffin (Head of Finance), Carrie Beech (Project Lead: Primary and Early Years), Dr Danielle Cassell (Senior Manager - System Leadership) and Jacky Cross (Teaching and Learning Consultant)
- Stuart McKeown, Senior Democratic Services Advisor.

25 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 27 NOVEMBER 2017

25.1 RESOLVED – to confirm as a correct record the minutes of the last Committee meeting held on 27 November 2017.

26 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

26.1 Apologies were received from Councillor Kathryn Field, Mrs Nicola Boulter (Parent Governor Representative) and Mr Simon Parr (Catholic Diocese Representative).

27 DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS

27.1 No disclosures were declared.

28 RECONCILING POLICY, PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES

28.1 The Committee discussed its input into the Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources process and possible future improvements. The Committee's comments include: that given the increasingly difficult decisions the Council needs to make, it is vital that Members are involved at an early stage with regard to proposals the Department are working on. So as to assist with this, the Committee agreed that ahead of its meeting in June, Members would be

invited to suggest specific areas of search which they believe the Committee should consider in more detail as part of the RPPR process next Autumn. Other comments included that 'without options' it is difficult for the Committee to make informed comments; that the Committee should clearly identify particular areas it is interested in and then 'drill down' into a level of detail that would help Members play a more effective role.

28.2 RESOLVED - the Committee agreed:

- 1) to request that its feedback on the RPPR process is put forward for consideration as part of the wider review of the RPPR process
- 2) that members of the Committee are invited to suggest specific areas of search which they believe the Committee should consider in more detail as part of the RPPR process next autumn; and that these suggested areas are provided to the Department ahead of the Committee's next meeting in June 2018.
- 3) to note the Department's response to the RPPR Board's comments on the budget.

29 UPDATE ON THE DEMAND ON ISEND SERVICES

29.1 At its meeting in June 2017, the Committee requested that a report which evaluates the impact of the measures set out in the Department's Action Plan be brought to its March 2018 meeting. A summary of the key points discussed by the Committee and the Department's responses are set out below:

- High Needs Funding Block. The Committee noted that for the 2017/18 financial year it had been necessary for the Department to make a transfer of approximately £4million to the High Needs Funding Block. With this in mind, the Department were asked to comment on how certain it is that it would not be necessary to move further monies between funding blocks during the course of the coming financial year. In response, the Department confirmed it is as confident as it can be that the budget is sufficient to meet the current levels of demand. However, relatively small increases in demand could still create significant budgetary pressures. Furthermore, and under the Government's 'Fairer Funding' formula, a local authority's ability to transfer between funding blocks is now capped (there are three funding blocks: the Schools Funding Block, the High Needs Block and the Early Years Block). As a result, the maximum that can now be transferred, with the agreement of the Schools Forum, is circa £1.2m. The Government do not provide additional funding if the budget is insufficient for the actual level of demand. Therefore any shortfall has to be met from elsewhere within the Department's budget, or ultimately the Council's wider budget.
- Building capacity and inclusive ethos in mainstream schools. Whilst supportive of the Department's goals in this work strand, the Committee requested more detail about the challenges schools are facing when building capacity for children with special educational needs. The Committee also wanted to understand the potential impact of this work strand on individual children. In response, the Committee were informed that the Department are working with schools to help them have both a better understanding of the resources already available to them and how to use those resources more cost-effectively. It should also be noted that when compared to its statistical neighbours, East Sussex has a higher than average proportion of its school age population with an Educational Health and Care Plan (EHCP). This is despite there being little evidence which justifies East Sussex having this higher rate. Furthermore, and even with the additional expenditure the higher rates of EHCPs generates, East Sussex cannot point to universally improved outcomes. Indeed other LAs have found different ways of supporting children to have good outcomes, with a significantly lower rate of EHCPs. As a result, the Department believes it can generate higher rates of good outcomes with a combination of building capacity within mainstream settings and more targeted use of EHCPs.

- Transformation Grant. In response to a request, the Committee were informed that the £0.5m transformation grant has been targeted at increasing the capacity of the Educational Psychology Service. This additional capacity is being used to provide more staff who can identify at an earlier stage a given child's needs (and appropriate strategies that will help address those needs). Assessment and Planning Officers have also helped by reducing the backlog of cases the service has. This backlog feeds into parent's anxiety about the effectiveness of the support available. It is important therefore that this backlog is cleared so as to help build parental confidence. It was also confirmed that the transformation grant is time-limited and largely completes in March 2018. After that the Department will undertake a review of the scope of this service area and what it believes will be appropriate going forward.
- East Sussex Better Together (ESBT) and Connecting 4 You (C4Y). In response to a request for more detail, the Committee were informed of the work being undertaken by the Department in partnership with the local Clinical Commissioning Groups. This work includes an ongoing review as to how support is commissioned for children who have a range of disabilities and health needs. There are also ongoing discussions in relation to nursing contracts. Work is also being undertaken with other local authorities to try and achieve consistency of 'placement cost' across the region.

29.2 RESOLVED – the Committee thanked the Department for its detailed report and the work being undertaken across the priority areas identified last year and the proposals for utilising the High Needs review as the vehicle for delivering further developments.

30 KEY STAGE 4 REVIEW OF EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

30.1 The Children's Services Scrutiny Committee appointed a Scrutiny Review Board to review Educational Attainment at Key Stage 4. The Review Board focused on the issues and challenges that secondary schools and academies face in relation to the recruitment and retention of teachers and the potential impact this has on educational attainment. The report updated the Committee on the Action Plan adopted by the Children's Services Department following the presentation of its final report to Cabinet in June 2017.

30.2 The Committee welcomed the report and the progress being made. The Committee then discussed a number of questions in relation to the Action Plan (see Appendix 2 of the report) and noted that a revised East Sussex Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy will be available in the autumn. A summary of the key discussion points, together with responses from the Department is set out below:

- Availability of keyworker housing. The Committee discussed keyworker housing and its relevance to teacher recruitment and retention. The Department agree that affordable housing is an important factor. As a result, some initial work is being undertaken with local borough and district councils to investigate whether more can be done to provide keyworker housing options. However, whilst this is an important issue, such housing only usually provides a bridge into the housing market, with new teachers still needing to enter the housing market at some point. As a result, keyworker housing should only be seen as part of a mix of different responses to the recruitment and retention challenge.
- Provisional GCSE results table. The Committee discussed the data set out in the 'Provisional 2016 GCSE results for East Sussex Schools' table (page 28 of the agenda). In response to questions about the new assessment methods and different levels of progress and attainment set out in the table, the Department undertook to provide more detail to Members at the Committee's 'Educational Attainment and Performance' reference group meeting in April. The Committee were also assured that the Department's ambition is that all children, irrespective of their cognitive ability, achieve at least good levels of progress. So whilst the Department accepted that the variability of outcomes displayed in the table is disappointing, in terms of the review process, it was

included so as to provide a factual basis for the Review Board regarding the scope of the attainment challenge in East Sussex. This helped the Board focus on what might be causing the differences in performance at different schools and academies. This in turn, ultimately led to the Board's development of a number of recommendations relating to teacher recruitment and retention which it hoped would help lead to improved outcomes.

- Leadership in schools. The importance of leadership in schools was discussed. This included the importance of leaders not only at the level of Head teacher/Principal, but also at other levels. In response the Department agreed that quality leadership is vital. It is for this reason that the Department has put in place a package of support for school leaders, which includes encouragement for applications from women and minority groups. A balance has to be struck between promoting effective school leaders and ensuring that sufficient quality practitioners remain in class. With this in mind, one of area of work for the Department is the promotion of school to school support. This support helps schools both offer and receive expertise and as a result, it is hoped this will help build excellent classroom practice. The Department also agreed that whilst school leaders need to provide clear direction and be 'courageous', they also needed to be approachable.

30.3 RESOLVED - the Committee agreed to:

To note the report and asked that the revised 'East Sussex Teacher and Recruitment Strategy' is circulated to the Committee and that this request is added to the Scrutiny Work Programme.

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 issues for the attention of the Committee. The key discussion points are summarised below:

- **Timing of the East Sussex SACRE Annual Report.** Councillor Galley informed the Committee of SACRE's view that the findings of the annual report to NASACRE (National Association of SACREs) could be more effectively actioned if the deadline for its production was brought forward (the annual report was attached as Appendix 1 to the report to the Committee). As a result, SACRE is raising this issue at the national level to see if an earlier deadline would be beneficial to other local SACREs.
- **Religious Education (RE) Agreed Syllabus.** SACRE has now completed the major process of reviewing and revising the RE syllabus and the resultant agreed syllabus is now in place in East Sussex Schools.
- **Training Programme.** SACRE has an ongoing training programme. This year's training conference will include a focus on celebrating the similarities across the Abrahamic religions and will be led by the Muslim tutor of Eton College.
- **School Visits.** SACRE has an ongoing programme of visiting all secondary schools in East Sussex. With this in mind, nearly all of the maintained secondary schools have been visited, as well as a number of secondary academies. SACRE also visits individual primary schools where it believes additional support maybe needed.
- **National Curriculum requirement to teach a broad-based curriculum which includes Religious Education.** Based in part on the school visits mentioned in the above point, Councillor Galley confirmed that SACRE is generally satisfied that schools in the primary sector are complying with national standards for the provision of religious education. At the secondary level, SACRE believes there is some evidence which indicates there a number of maintained schools which may need additional support if

they are to fulfil the requirements of the National Curriculum with regard to RE. In support of this view, Councillor Galley circulated a report from the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE). The report cited figures taken from 'National Workforce' data provided by the Department for Education. The Committee asked for more detail about the data contained in the report and clarification as to whether the relevant requirements for RE are being met in secondary schools in East Sussex.

In response the Committee were advised that the data contained in the circulated item required careful interpretation as, for example, different schools often use different descriptions for the teaching sessions via which RE is taught. As a result, the data may not provide a complete picture of the levels and status of RE teaching in East Sussex. Mandy Watson also sought to reassure the Committee that from the perspective of the Diocese of Chichester, the Agreed Syllabus for RE in East Sussex does meet relevant requirements and is of a good standard. Furthermore, that the Diocese is pleased that all schools in East Sussex will be using the Church of England's 'Understanding Christianity' module. Whilst Members accepted that the data provided by NATRE may need careful interpretation, it was requested that further clarification on the current levels of RE provision in East Sussex be provided to the Committee by its October meeting.

- **Further actions.** Councillor Galley confirmed that where further work may be required, SACRE is keen to work in partnership with these schools and to provide support where it can. Furthermore, whilst SACRE will work in partnership with those schools, there is an option for SACRE to consider making a formal complaint to the Department for Education. In addition, following a number of unsuccessful attempts to make contact with two secondary schools to arrange a visit, Councillor Galley will write to the relevant Governing Boards and ask for their assistance.

31.2 RESOLVED - the Committee agreed to:

- 1) note the work of SACRE in improving the quality of religious education, especially in maintained Secondary schools;
- 2) note the work of SACRE in supporting schools with collective worship and pupils' spiritual, moral, social, cultural development and British Values 2016-2017; and
- 3) note the three-year development plan for SACRE.
- 4) request that further clarification is provided to the Committee by its October meeting on how secondary schools in East Sussex are performing in relation to the requirements of the National Curriculum with regard to RE.

32 SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

32.1 The Committee reviewed its future work programme.

32.2 RESOLVED – to update the work programme so as to include the following items:

- 1) in relation to minute 28.2 (2) that Committee members are invited to consider what specific areas of search they want to discuss as part of the RPPR process for next autumn and that these specific areas are provided to the Department ahead of its next meeting in June 2018.
- 2) in relation to minute 30.3 that the updated East Sussex Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy is circulated to the Committee in the autumn.
- 3) in relation to minute 31.2 (4), that SACRE will provide an update to the Committee in the autumn on issues relating to the requirements of the National Curriculum with regard to religious education and secondary schools in East Sussex.

33 FORWARD PLAN

33.1 RESOLVED – to note the Forward Plan for the period to 31 May 2018.

(The meeting ended at 1.04 pm)

Councillor Roy Galley, CHAIRMAN