



PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 11 MARCH 2024

10.30 am COUNCIL CHAMBER, COUNTY HALL, LEWES

MEMBERSHIP - Councillor Johanna Howell (Chair)
Councillors Sam Adeniji, Charles Clark, Anne Cross, Penny di Cara,
Kathryn Field, Nuala Geary, Stephen Shing, Colin Swansborough,
John Ungar (Vice Chair) and Trevor Webb

Miss Nicola Boulter, Parent Governor Representative
Trevor Cristin, Diocese of Chichester Representative
John Hayling, Parent Governor Representative
Maria Cowler, Roman Catholic Diocese representative

AGENDA

1. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 13 November 2023 *(Pages 3 - 8)*
2. Apologies for absence
3. Urgent items
Notification of items which the Chair considers to be urgent and proposes to take at the appropriate part of the agenda. Any members who wish to raise urgent items are asked, wherever possible, to notify the Chair before the start of the meeting. In so doing, they must state the special circumstances which they consider justify the matter being considered urgent.
4. Disclosures of interests
Disclosures by all members present of personal interests in matters on the agenda, the nature of any interest and whether the member regards the interest as prejudicial under the terms of the Code of Conduct.
5. Loneliness Stewardship Group *(Pages 9 - 16)*
6. Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR) *(Pages 17 - 22)*
7. Work programme *(Pages 23 - 44)*
8. Inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) report *(Pages 45 - 64)*
9. SEND pressures *(Pages 65 - 76)*
10. Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) Annual Report *(Pages 77 - 82)*
11. Any other items previously notified under agenda item 4

PHILIP BAKER
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1 March 2024

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PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the People Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, County Hall, Lewes on 13 November 2023.

PRESENT Councillors Sam Adeniji, Charles Clark, Penny di Cara, Kathryn Field, Nuala Geary, Johanna Howell (Chair), Wendy Maples, Stephen Shing and John Ungar (Vice Chair) and John Hayling (Parent Governor Representative). Trevor Cristin (Diocese of Chichester Representative) joined the meeting remotely.

LEAD MEMBERS Councillor Bob Bowdler, Lead Member for Children and Families
Councillor Bob Standley, Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability (ISEND)
Councillor Carl Maynard, Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Health joined the meeting remotely.

ALSO PRESENT Tom Alty, Deputy Chief Finance Officer
Chloe Cushing, Service Manager - Teaching and Learning Provision
Elizabeth Funge, Assistant Director - Education
Hamish Gale, Senior Manager Specialist Teaching Service
Alison Jeffery, Director of Children's Services
Rachel Jospeh, Strategic Lead: Inclusion and Alternative Provision
Mark Stainton, Director of Adult Social Care and Health
Rachel Sweeney, Senior Policy and Scrutiny Adviser

19. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 25 SEPTEMBER 2023

19.1 The Committee RESOLVED to agree the minutes of the meeting held on 25 September 2023 as a correct record.

20. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

20.1 The Chair confirmed the change to the Committee membership since the September meeting and thanked Councillor Dowling for his work on the Committee and welcomed Councillor Swansborough.

20.2 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Swansborough and Webb and Maria Cowler (Diocesan Representative).

21. DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS

21.1 There were no disclosures of interest.

22. URGENT ITEMS

22.1 There were no urgent items.

23. WORK PROGRAMME

23.1 The Chair introduced the report which outlined the Committee's latest work programme. The Chair asked the Committee for any further comments or proposed changes to the work programme and the following was discussed:

- **Cross cutting work between People and Place Scrutiny Committees:** There was a request for an update from the Scrutiny and Audit Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs Group on how any issues which cut across both Place and People Scrutiny Committees' remits would be scrutinised. The Chair confirmed that there was an upcoming meeting of the Scrutiny and Audit Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs and information from this would be shared with the Committee.
- **Loneliness and Isolation:** A question was asked about the membership of the Loneliness and Isolation Stewardship Group. The Director of Adult Social Care and Health (ASCH) noted that this membership was drawn from a range of voluntary organisations in East Sussex and this list could be circulated to the Committee.
- **Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) Pressures:** The Chair asked the Director of Children's Services to provide more information to the Committee in relation to current SEND pressures. The Director of Children's Services proposed that a briefing on this could be circulated to the Committee for their March meeting, to include the pressures from increased Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) applications and the Department's work with the Department for Education (DfE) and other local authorities on a funded programme to pilot elements of the Government's SEND and Alternative Provision Implementation Plan.

Forward plan

23.2 The Committee considered the Council's Forward Plan of executive decisions. There was a request for more information about the approval for the Local Visitor Economy Partnership application submission, the setting up of Experience Sussex and the Sussex Visitor Economy Strategic Plan Framework and the potential for this to cut across People and Place. It was agreed that this would be explored outside of the meeting.

23.3 There was a request for additional information on the decisions to award a main contractor for the Heathfield Youth Hub and award a main contractor for the Joff Youth Hub, Peacehaven, including on anticipated numbers of young people who would use the centres, and the proposed transport links to those locations. The Director of Children's Services informed the Committee that information on the proposals made to secure funding for the youth clubs could be provided to the Committee.

23.4 The Committee RESOLVED to:

- 1) Agree the updated work programme, subject to the addition of a briefing on SEND pressures and information on youth club funding proposals being circulated to the committee, and the addition of an item on SEND pressures to the March 2024 committee agenda.
- 2) Note the upcoming items on East Sussex County Council's (ESCC) Forward Plan in appendix 2 of the report; and
- 3) Note the updates on Scrutiny Reviews and Reference Groups contained in section 3 of the report.
- 4) Appoint Councillors di Cara, Geary, Howell and Ungar to the CQC Assessment Framework Reference Group.
- 5) Appoint Councillors di Cara, Field and Howell and Nicola Boulter (Parent Governor Representative) to the Scoping Board for the School Attendance Review, with John Hayling as a substitute if Nicola Boulter was unable to attend, and to circulate proposed Terms of Reference for agreement by the committee virtually.

24. RECONCILING POLICY, PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES (RPPR)

24.1 The Deputy Chief Finance Officer introduced the report, which incorporated the recent RPPR Cabinet report which provided an update on the policy context, the Medium Term Financial Plan and capital programme. The report presented a further opportunity for the

Committee to ask questions on the planning context and to request any additional information required for the RPPR Board in December.

24.2 The Committee discussed and asked questions on the following areas:

- **RPPR process** – The Committee welcomed the information provided as part of the RPPR process. Opportunities for Members from all political groups to contribute to the budget-setting process were queried. The Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability (ISEND) and the Lead Member for ASCH responded that there was a current transparent process which sought to engage all Members through scrutiny, Whole Council Forums, Cabinet and Council and that councillors could ask questions at any time.
- **Medium Term Financial Plan** – The Committee raised concerns about the financial outlook and the impact this may have on the Council's ability to provide services, including those which were seeing increased demand. The Lead Member for Education and ISEND acknowledged the challenges and noted the lobbying work underway, including on the need for longer term sustainable funding. The Committee also sought clarification on ESCC's position compared with other authorities, noting the increasing need in the county and the lack of funding for preventive work. The Lead Member for Education and ISEND clarified that the report's reference to ESCC's more positive position related to the budget deficit and did not take into account wider factors. The Committee agreed that prioritising preventative approaches was difficult when previous service reductions had been required in response to financial constraints.
- **Lobbying** – The Committee noted the problems with short term specific grants from Government, and the limits these placed on departments in addressing local priorities, and asked for further information about current lobbying work, including service-specific lobbying to Secretaries of State. The Lead Member for Education and ISEND highlighted his recent engagement with the Secretary of State for Education and local MPs, as well as wider lobbying work through the County Councils Network and South East7 partnership. The Directors of ASCH and Children's Services also outlined the specific engagement by their departments at local, regional and national levels, including lobbying for an end to one off settlements and annual funding.
- **ASCH funding** – The Committee raised concerns about ongoing costs and pressures on ASCH and noted the difficulty in implementing recent Government reforms to social care with short term funding commitments. In response to a query about how funding from Government allocated for 2024/25 would be used within ASCH, the Director of ASCH told the Committee that the majority of this funding would support fee uplifts for the independent sector, where most people received their care, to ensure a sustainable care market. The Director noted that last year this included a 10% uplift in fees in the independent sector to reflect the national living wage and inflation. Although inflation had since reduced, the living wage was increasing so a fee increase for next year would support the care home and home care providers in meeting this.

24.3 The Committee RESOLVED to note the report.

25. ELECTIVE HOME EDUCATION

25.1 The Assistant Director - Education introduced a report updating the Committee on the number of children who are electively home educated (EHE). The report also provided an update on the priority actions the Department had completed following a report to the Committee in 2022.

25.2 The Assistant Director informed the Committee that the service was seeing a continued rise in the number of children who are EHE, although there had been a slight slowing of these numbers, which was in line with national figures. The largest increase was amongst pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4 and areas of current concern related to the number of vulnerable children, including children with a Child in Need Plan, Child Protection Plan or an EHCP or an identified SEND need. The report highlighted priority actions for 2023/24, including working with other agencies to support families. The Assistant Director also noted the concern that some children who are EHE had been permanently excluded.

25.3 The Senior Manager Specialist Teaching Service informed the Committee that since the report was produced, a DfE consultation had opened on revised home education guidance for local authorities. In the absence of legislation for a statutory register, the guidance proposed local authorities set up a voluntary registration scheme for parents who home educated. The Department was in the process of responding to this consultation.

25.4 The Committee welcomed the positive priority actions outlined in the report and asked questions and made comments on the following areas:

- **Potential of a voluntary registration scheme** – The Committee was very concerned that a voluntary registration scheme could result in the most vulnerable children not being known to the local authority and requested this concern be noted in the Council’s response to the Government consultation. The Senior Manager Specialist Teaching Service agreed that a voluntary register was a significant limitation in identifying families that may need additional support and the Assistant Director - Education confirmed that the response to the consultation would include these comments from the Committee. The Lead Member for Education and ISEND echoed these concerns and also highlighted correspondence with the Secretary of State for Education which had indicated that there would be something put in place to address this.
- **Vulnerable children** – The Committee enquired about the steps the Department was taking to address concerns about vulnerable children, including those with a Child Protection Plan, who were EHE. The Service Manager - Teaching and Learning Provision told the Committee that this was a priority, and the Department was addressing this in a number of ways, including joint working with social care leads and other professionals, including the new Early Help Level 2 Service, to ensure that EHE was everyone’s responsibility. The Service Manager also noted the effective systems and processes in place to identify any concerns early on, including a new Early Intervention Officer post which was responding to enquiries about potential EHE and working with schools to offer alternative support where appropriate.
- **SEND support** – In response to a comment about a local case where a parent with a child with autism was told to try home schooling and concern that this could be a wider issue for children with SEND, the Director of Children’s Services clarified that the guidance to schools was very clear that they should not be advising families to EHE and that the Department would follow up with schools on any reported cases of this happening. The Service Manager - Teaching and Learning Provision added that there was a local agreement in place with schools in East Sussex that if EHE was found not to be suitable for a child, they would return to their named school. She also noted that school data was used to identify any patterns. The Senior Manager Specialist Teaching Service added that, although EHE was a parental choice, there was a strong culture of challenge around this which all staff were aware of.
- **School admissions** – The Committee asked if some families were choosing to EHE their child due to not obtaining a place at their first choice of school. The Service Manager - Teaching and Learning Provision acknowledged that this was sometimes an issue for pupils transitioning to secondary schools and told the Committee that the Department was working with schools and the admissions team to address this, including working with families who chose not to take up the place offered to them. The Director of Children’s Services confirmed that this approach would not change or affect the admissions process or criteria.
- **Reasons for EHE** – The Committee asked about the reasons for families choosing EHE and whether bullying was a factor. Members asked whether the Department had detailed data on these reasons, including the reasons a family may state, for example, dissatisfaction with the school as an issue. The Service Manager - Teaching and Learning Provision clarified that the reasons for EHE were recorded in line with national DfE criteria, however more detailed data was captured through a survey sent to parents which was shared with area teams. The Service Manager noted that there was often a complex set of issues underpinning why a family chose to EHE, but the Department would talk to families to identify these issues and, where possible, would work with schools and families to resolve them. The Assistant Director - Education commented that the recent restructure in the Education Division allowed teams to more easily share information and data to get a better understanding of issues cutting across education.
- **Attendance** – The Committee enquired about the number of pupils who attended school part-time and were therefore potentially being EHE at other times. The Service Manager -

Teaching and Learning Provision clarified that EHE was a choice that parents made through an off-rolling process. The Director of Children's Services informed the Committee that part-time timetables should only be used on a temporary basis if it was in the interest of the child and guidance was clear with schools that these were not to be used to manage behaviour. She also noted that, under the recent restructure, there were termly meetings with schools to look at the roll and identify any issues with attendance, including pupils on part-time timetables. Feedback from these conversations had been positive so far and it was important to continue these as the number of pupils on part-time timetables was of ongoing concern.

- **Links between EHE and school exclusions** – The Committee commented on the recent School Exclusions Scrutiny Review and asked if the Department recorded children at risk of permanent exclusion electing to EHE. The Service Manager - Teaching and Learning Provision told the Committee that this was a priority and noted the data systems in place when there was a new application to EHE to identify any previous suspensions and to work with schools and colleagues to ensure EHE was suitable for that child and identify alternative appropriate support where possible.

- **HOPE Sussex Community** – The Committee discussed the HOPE Sussex Community and raised concerns that this was operating as an education setting outside any legal support mechanisms. The Director of Children's Services noted the Department's concern about this but stated that it was outside the remit of the local authority as it was not a registered school; any safeguarding concerns would need to be investigated by the police. The Service Manager - Teaching and Learning Provision added that, as there was no legal requirement for families to register to EHE, the department was not able to know what education children were accessing but that any evidence highlighting concerns would be investigated and shared with relevant organisations, including the DfE.

25.5 The Committee RESOLVED to keep this item on the Committee work programme, as an ongoing area of interest, with the potential to conduct a scrutiny review at an appropriate time in the future. The Director of Children's Services commented that previous scrutiny work on EHE could be circulated to the Committee for information.

25.6 The Committee RESOLVED to note the report and to request that the concerns of the Committee about the proposal for a voluntary register were included in the Department's response to the DfE Elective Home Education Consultation.

26. SCHOOL EXCLUSIONS SCRUTINY REVIEW

26.1 Councillor Adeniji, Chair of the Review Board, introduced the report. He outlined the remit of the Review, the evidence considered by the Board, including talking to young people and visits to local schools, the key findings contained in the report, and the Board's recommendations. The Chair of the Review Board thanked the members of the Board for their engagement in the Review, the supporting officers for their work, and witnesses for their time.

26.2 Councillors Howell and Maples and John Hayling (Parent Governor Representative), members of the Review Board, also thanked the Chair of the Review Board, schools, officers, and witnesses, including the young people involved, and commented that the Review had been far reaching and complex and that they had found the Review worthwhile. They recognised the impact schools were facing from the pandemic and welcomed the approaches local schools had adopted to support pupils' needs.

26.3 The Committee welcomed the report and asked about the data in the report showing the number of permanent exclusions in primary and secondary schools in East Sussex and asked if the Department was expecting to see the situation in primary schools improve. The Assistant Director - Education clarified that the data showed that although the rates were lower in primary schools than secondary schools, East Sussex was excluding at a higher rate in primary schools than in other local authorities. The Strategic Lead: Inclusion and Alternative Provision informed the Committee that although full data from the last academic year was not yet available, recent data (over the previous three years) showed a reduction in the number of secondary permanent exclusions due to the implementation of a new strategy aimed at reducing exclusions and increasing schools' awareness of the causes of behaviour and appropriate support needed. Work was now underway to expand this to primary schools. The Strategic Lead told the Board

that, in line with a national trend, the number of permanent exclusions over the last academic year had increased due to the effects of the pandemic, however, the Department was working with schools to address this and identify any gaps in support and had also prevented a high number of permanent exclusions.

26.4 The Committee heard that the restructure of the Education Department was bringing together expertise across the local authority to share with schools and develop understanding on the reasons for higher rates of permanent exclusion but that it would take time to embed the strategies recently put in place. The Strategic Lead noted the challenges in implementing some of these, including the need to increase the sense of belonging for pupils in schools which was difficult with a high staff turnover, however these strategies were based on a wide range of evidence and data, including the use of youth voice, and there was an opportunity for schools to reduce permanent exclusion.

26.5 Councillor Maples, member of the Review Board, requested that some of the findings from the Review be further explored by the Committee, including better use of inclusive, affordable after school programmes and making schools more community friendly. The Assistant Director - Education noted that these linked with the current Early Years Reforms and proposals for wrap around care and a short briefing note on this could be provided to the Committee.

26.7 The Committee RESOLVED to endorse the report of the Review Board, subject to an amendment to the introduction to include more recent East Sussex data and make recommendations to Cabinet for comment and County Council for approval.

The meeting concluded at 2.58 pm.

Councillor Johanna Howell (Chair)

Report to:	People Scrutiny Committee
Date of meeting:	11 March 2024
By:	Director of Adult Social Care and Health
Title:	Tackling loneliness and isolation in East Sussex
Purpose:	To inform the People Scrutiny Committee of the stewardship approach to tackling loneliness and isolation in the County and provide an update on the appointment to the stewardship facilitation role and plans for implementation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The People Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:

- 1. note and comment on the plans for implementation of the stewardship approach to tackling loneliness and isolation.**
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1. Background

1.1 In April 2021, a public health funded COVID-19 recovery project was initiated in East Sussex, supported by Collaborate CIC. The overall aim of this 'Connected People and Places' project was to gain a better understanding of the nature and impact of loneliness on East Sussex residents, and identify future opportunities and approaches to mitigate the worst effects of loneliness. Loneliness had previously been identified as a topic area of interest for scoping and exploration by the People Scrutiny Committee. Therefore, rather than a full scrutiny review, a Loneliness and Resilience Reference Group was formed to provide valuable input to the project and its recommendations.

1.2 The resulting project activities and recommendations formed the basis of the 2022/23 annual Director of Public Health (DPH) report, '[Connecting People and Places - Bringing communities together in East Sussex](#)', which focused on social connections and multi-agency work to tackle loneliness.

1.3 The Partnership Plus Executive Board¹ holds the responsibility for ensuring that progress is made with the recommendations to tackle loneliness as a system across East Sussex. The headline recommendations are to:

- establish a System Stewardship Group to build and maintain the required collaborative leadership across the system;
- create a 'connection test' to apply a loneliness perspective to the policy making process;
- develop an action plan for developing social infrastructure rooted in the principles of ABCD (asset-based community development) and harnessing the potential of community ownership and community businesses;
- 'connect the connectors' by creating learning communities that learn and test ideas together and model and incentivise ongoing learning; and
- mobilise and equip a movement of connectors stretching across all public facing roles, businesses and communities.

2. Community engagement

2.1 Extensive, broad and targeted community engagement took place to underpin this programme as part of the Connected People and Places project. Further details are available in the DPH report (referenced above) which is available via the [East Sussex Joint Strategic Needs Assessment website](#). Community engagement and the lived experience of individuals and

¹ Partnership Plus is partnership of senior leaders from local authorities, the NHS, the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VSCE) sector and others in East Sussex.

communities is also expected to form a crucial part of future implementation of the stewardship approach to tackling loneliness.

3. System stewardship

3.1 System stewardship is a concept that draws from Human Learning Systems (HLS) theory. HLS is an alternative way of organising public service that acknowledges that people's lives are incredibly complex.² To be effective, our responses to social challenges need to work with these complex realities rather than seeking to control them. The approach recognises that *systems* as a whole create outcomes, not single organisations, services or projects. Key features of HLS include:

- making the process of creating change more 'human', putting decision-making into the hands of the people who know best — people and communities, and those who directly support them;
- changing the role of management to creating a learning culture, rather than exercising control; and
- supporting collaborative approaches across organisations and professions by nurturing a 'healthy system' based on trusting relationships, shared purpose and deep listening.

3.2 A systems steward can therefore be described as a person, organisation or group that takes responsibility for helping to create a 'healthy system' - a system that functions effectively and is more likely to produce positive outcomes. It involves building trust, relationships, and learning, whilst helping people work better together towards common goals.

Key features of the stewardship approach

- The system makes best use of available resources and decisions are made collectively, leading to responsibility for outcomes being jointly held.
- It is the job of all the partners to attend to the quality of relationships in the system and hold each other to account (this makes the partners joint stewards of the system).
- It requires partners to take on system leadership behaviours i.e. working beyond the boundaries of their organisation and formal role, moving away from authority and control to embrace an adaptive and collaborative leadership style and an explorative, learning mindset.

3.3 Some practical ways that the stewardship approach could manifest are included at Appendix 1. We will know how well the stewardship approach is working through an evaluation process that comprises 'learning cycles' and which seeks to find out:

- how well we understand the system (and its influence on connectedness/loneliness)
- the effectiveness of codesign activities (has meaningful involvement of all 'layers of the system' been achieved?)
- ways we have championed experimentation and exploration (have we tested different approaches and adapted as we learn?)
- how we embed the stewardship principles/behaviours and use our influence to achieve change

3.4 It will be the collective responsibility of the Stewardship Group - and ultimately Partnership Plus – to build and maintain the required leadership to ensure that the project recommendations are implemented effectively across the system. It will require combined and sustained efforts from all parts of the system to make progress.

4. Plans into action

² Plimmer, D (2021) HLS and place: transforming local systems, in Human Learning Systems: Public Service for the Real World. Centre for Public Impact. Available at: <https://www.centreforpublicimpact.org/assets/documents/hls-real-world.pdf>

4.1 The Connected People and Places recommendations have been accepted by Partnership Plus and funding has been identified by Adult Social Care and Health DMT to take forward the first recommendation to establish a Stewardship Group through a new two year programme. To support the development of the stewardship approach, it was identified that a host/convenor would be required to facilitate multi-agency progress. Partner workshops held in Spring 2023 informed the development of requirements for the stewardship host organisation.

4.2 In collaboration with the East Sussex Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Sector Alliance, the Council worked to ensure a fair and transparent process for the selection of the host organisation within the VCSE sector, in line with the Council's Corporate Funding Protocol and in the spirit of the stewardship approach.

4.3 The Council has subsequently entered into a grant agreement with the organisation selected to lead the stewardship facilitation function, Sussex Community Development Association (SCDA). As part of the arrangements, East Sussex Community Voice will be providing evaluation, data and monitoring capacity, and other VSCE organisations such as 3VA, Age UK East Sussex, Care for the Carers and Possability People, will help reach target communities and support identification of other East Sussex organisations to be involved as the project develops.

5. Latest update

5.1 A Programme Facilitator has been recruited by SCDA and started in post in December 2023. The initial tasks during the first months of the programme will be to establish the membership of the Stewardship Group, agree with partners how to describe and communicate the work to partners and the public in language that resonates (i.e. the term 'stewardship' may not be easily understood), define what success looks like (determine the evaluation approach), and agree the vision. The Stewardship Group will consider how to build action on each of the 'Connected People and Places' project recommendations into the work programme.

5.2 A Reference Group, made up of the Chief Executive SCDA; Community Advice and Wellbeing Programme Manager SCDA; Programme Facilitator – Tackling Loneliness (Connecting People & Places); Chief Executive AgeUK East Sussex and Deputy Chair of VSCE Alliance; Chief Executive Sussex Community Voice; Public Health; and Collaborate CIC, has been established to guide the early development of the programme and establish the priorities for initiation of the Stewardship Group; its inception meeting is planned for April 2024. The Reference Group will ensure that the programme remains on track and adheres to the values and principles of the intended approach.

5.3 The ongoing participation of Collaborate CIC has been secured through limited involvement in the Stewardship Group/Reference Group. They will provide an independent 'critical friend' role with their detailed knowledge of the recommendations of the 'systems approach to loneliness' work, and as pioneers and advocates of the stewardship approach.

5.4 A five-step process for delivery of the programme is expected, as follows:

Step 1

- Establishing the Stewardship Group and agreeing the vision
- Identifying organisations/groups working with those most affected by loneliness and social isolation
- Reaching and engaging those with lived experience of loneliness and isolation; understanding their experiences and what community and connection looks like to them

Step 2

- Gaining knowledge and understanding through engagement with key groups (to include needs assessment, mapping, identification of gaps)
- Identifying key stakeholders that interact with identified community members across different levels of the system (champions)

- Generating interest and investment from key stakeholders through information and evidence on benefits to participation
- Co-designing a framework/toolkit for the approach

Step 3

- Piloting the framework/toolkit
- Learning, reflection, re-design, re-test
- Development of a learning programme

Step 4

- Monitoring and evaluation

Step 5

- Further roll-out of the framework/toolkit.

5.5 In the spirit of the stewardship approach, it is expected that all Partnership Plus member organisations, and other key partners, will further contribute to the programme through non-financial means, such as senior officer time, implementation support and brokering research and development opportunities. The membership of the Stewardship Group is likely to be drawn from organisations that have participated in the work to date (see Appendix 2), plus other interested parties who could helpfully be involved. In due course it is expected that the private sector could also contribute to the programme.

5.6 The Stewardship Group may start with a smaller group of committed people and demonstrate what is possible before attracting others. Early 'wins' and examples of the work achieved/are possible will be communicated. Everyone in the group should be committed to tackling loneliness and willing to do the work necessary to progress shared priorities over the two-year initial period. Examples of the implementation of these approaches in other areas have included representation of those with significant seniority (e.g. Chief Executives), anyone committed who has been empowered by their organisation to take part, as well as people with lived experience of the issues being tackled.

5.7 Quarterly highlight reports will be provided to Partnership Plus on each priority/workstream established by the Stewardship Group, along with details of stewardship facilitation activities, which may include: ways of working together; learning opportunities provided; communications activity delivered; 'check and challenge' or 'systems check' processes; and funding bid coordination and development.

5.8 The work to develop a systems approach to tackling loneliness is included in a number of East Sussex strategies and actions plans including: 'What Matters To You', the Adult Social Care Strategy and action plan. In addition, there are strong links with a range of other programmes, which will be developed further such as Making it Happen, Community Networks Support Programme, Family Hubs, the Creative Health programme, and the Sussex Social Prescribing Plan.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

6.1 Following a collaborative process, the host organisation to support development of the stewardship approach has been appointed and a Programme Facilitator is in post who will coordinate the rapid development of the work. Cross Council support will be important in ensuring the appropriate membership of the Stewardship Group, along with the eventual implementation support that may be required by council departments and a wide range of multi-agency partnerships.

MARK STANTON

Director of Adult Social Care and Health

Contact Officer: Ben Brown, Consultant in Public Health

Tel. No: 07923 240933 Email: ben.brown@eastsussex.gov.uk

Examples of specific actions system partners could take to develop a Stewardship Group

The stewardship approach is in marked contrast to a traditional steering group or programme management framework, with performance indicators to be measured and monitored. The focus is on helping connect the system, testing and learning together, and helping to address barriers to change as they are identified. Some practical ways that the stewardship approach could manifest include:

- Allowing time as part of meetings for people to get to know each other and build trust. For example, getting to know each other's motivations, drivers, constraints they are working within.
- Identifying principles and behaviours for how the group will work together - these should be explicit about what's different to the norm, and how group members will hold each other to account for these 'shifts'.
- Starting with a small group of committed people - with systems change, it often works best to start small, demonstrate what's possible, then attract others in. Everyone in the group should be committed to tackling loneliness and willing to do the work necessary to progress shared priorities (not just read papers/attend meetings).
- Rather than lots of formal agenda items, giving space for meaningful learning conversations - how is the system working at the moment, what needs to change, what are our roles (individually and collectively) in doing this?
- Ensuring insights are fed up from other layers of the system - what role can the group (and each individual) play in helping 'unblock' challenges that people are facing in trying to foster more connected communities? How can the group help share and embed learning from what is working?
- Rather than just focusing on launching new initiatives, examining more fundamental shifts needed in how things are done e.g. underlying relationships, power dynamics and structures.
- Identifying opportunities to reimagine existing initiatives/ways of working e.g. how could we give commissioned services more flexibility to invest in building relationships and promoting connection? How might we reduce monitoring requirements so that organisations can instead spend time on shared learning?
- Identifying practical experiments we can do to help create change. When we don't have a clear solution, experimentation is key.
- Allocating leads for priority areas and experiments, but ensure these are jointly owned and that any working groups formed to progress priorities include colleagues across the system (including practitioners / those working more closely with communities).
- Modelling behaviours you want to see across the system e.g. willingness to accept we don't know all the answers, encouraging creativity and experimentation, valuing stories of what change means for individuals and communities as well as quantitative data.

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Stewardship Group: proposed organisations/sectors from which membership will be invited

Local authorities:

- East Sussex County Council (Adult Social Care & Health, Children's Services, Governance Services and Communities Economy & Transport)
- Hastings Borough Council
- Lewes and Eastbourne Councils
- Rother District Council
- Wealden District Council

NHS / health:

- NHS Sussex
- East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust and other local NHS providers
- Primary Care Networks

Community safety:

- East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service
- Sussex Police
- Office of the Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner

VCSE organisations nominated by the East Sussex VCSE Alliance, and VCSE organisations more widely, including:

- 3VA
- Age UK East Sussex
- Care for the Carers
- East Sussex Community Voice (incl. Healthwatch)
- Hastings Voluntary Action
- Possability People
- Rother Voluntary Action
- Sussex Community Development Association

Private sector

- To be explored through appropriate mechanisms.

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Report to:	People Scrutiny Committee
Date of meeting:	11 March 2024
By:	Chief Executive
Title:	Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR)
Purpose:	To review scrutiny's input to the Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources process for the financial year 2024/25 and to consider related items for inclusion in the committee's work programme.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is recommended to:

- 1) Review the Committee's input to the RPPR process;**
 - 2) Identify any potential areas for inclusion in the Committee's future work programme on services or issues within the Committee's remit.**
-

1 Background

1.1 The Council's integrated business and financial planning process, Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR), matches available resources with our delivery plans for our priority outcomes so that we focus and protect our spending where it will deliver our priorities most effectively. It also ensures we have the demographic trends and performance information to monitor progress.

1.2 Scrutiny committees actively engage in the process, firstly to bring the insight they have gained through scrutiny work into the planning process and, secondly, to help influence their future work programmes, so that scrutiny work can continue to inform RPPR on an ongoing basis.

2 Scrutiny engagement in Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources

2.1 This time of the year provides a good opportunity for the Committee to take stock and reflect on its involvement in the RPPR process to date, and to consider any areas arising from the scrutiny discussions that took place.

2.2 By way of background, attached at Appendix 1 is a diagram setting out the RPPR cycle and below is a timeline of the Committee's involvement to date:

2.3 July 2023 - People Scrutiny Committee considered relevant parts of the quarter 4 2022/23 (end of year) monitoring report and the 2023 State of the County report. This enabled scrutiny to consider performance achievements and challenges over the preceding year, alongside the forward-looking demographic, policy and financial analysis in the State of the County report.

2.4 September 2023 - the Committee considered an update on the RPPR planning process, including scrutiny engagement. Members were asked to identify any additional information or scrutiny work required to support the Committee's ongoing contribution, for consideration at future meetings.

2.5 October 2023 - The Committee held a work planning awayday to enable further consideration of issues arising from State of the County for the services within the Committee's remit and to ensure that key issues were incorporated into the Committee's ongoing work programme.

2.6 November 2023 - the Committee considered an updated version of the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP), an update on the capital programme and significant updates to the policy context since State of the County, as set out in a report considered by Cabinet on 7 November 2023. The meeting provided a further opportunity to request any information required by scrutiny to inform its engagement with RPPR, for consideration at the RPPR Boards in December or as part of the wider work programme.

2.7 December 2023 - the RPPR Board that the Committee established to provide more detailed input into the RPPR planning process met to consider the draft 2024/25 Portfolio Plans and the latest financial position. The Board:

- considered the emerging financial outlook based on Government announcements during the autumn;
- considered any amendments to the draft Portfolio Plans and how priorities were reflected against the proposed key areas of budget spend for the coming year;
- considered the interim feedback from the public engagement survey; and
- agreed comments and recommendations to Cabinet.

2.8 Appendix 2 summarises the comments and recommendations made by the People Scrutiny Committee RPPR Board to Cabinet.

3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

3.1 The Committee is invited to:

- consider any areas arising from RPPR scrutiny discussions which should be included in the Committee's future work programme - careful selection of topics will enable the Committee to be well positioned to comment on the impact of service changes, future service delivery and budget proposals as part of the ongoing RPPR process; and
- review the Committee's input to the RPPR process and consider any improvements to the process from a scrutiny perspective.

3.2 Scrutiny's input to planning, through RPPR, for 2025/26 will begin at the July meeting with consideration of relevant parts of the quarter 4 2023/24 (end of year) monitoring report and the 2024 State of the County report.

BECKY SHAW Chief Executive

Contact Officer: Rachel Sweeney, Senior Policy and Scrutiny Adviser

Telephone: 07561 267461

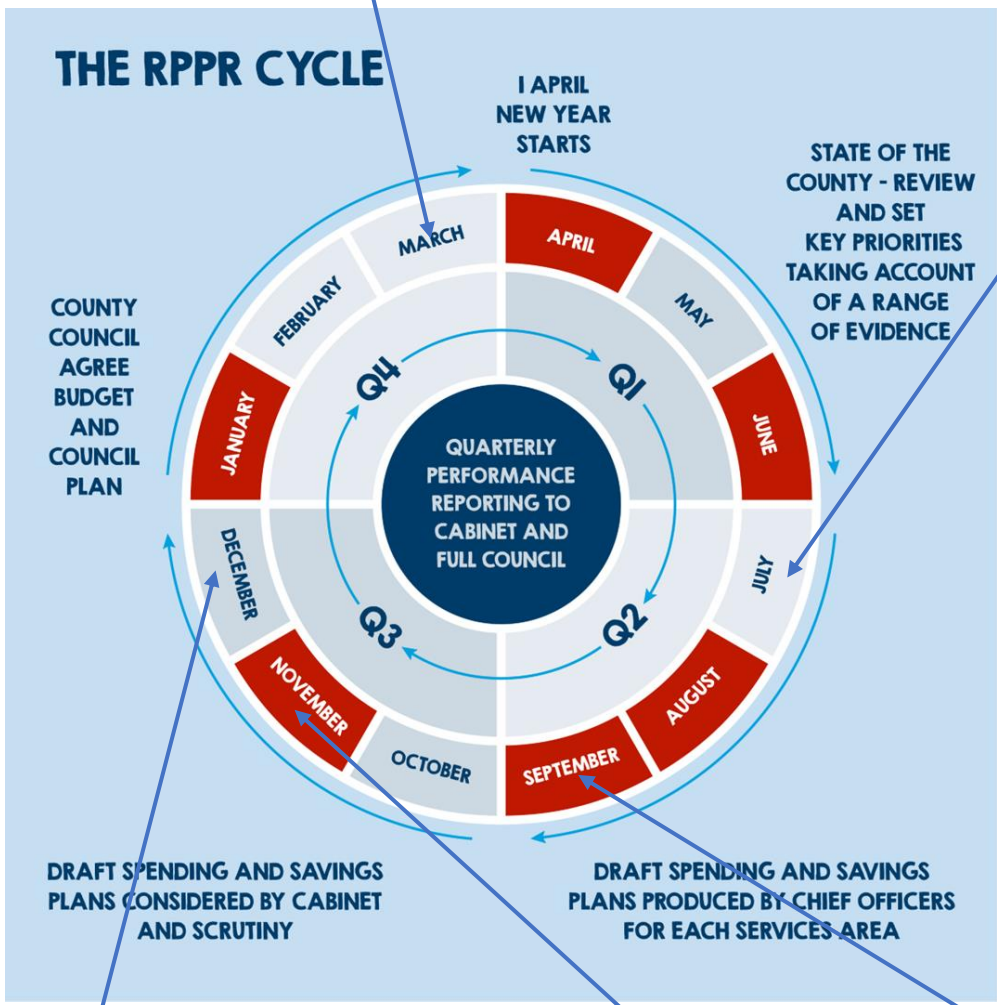
Email: rachel.sweeney@eastsussex.gov.uk

5. March scrutiny committee meetings

Scrutiny committees review their input into the budget setting and business planning process, receive feedback on any specific recommendations and consider any potential improvement to the way they are involved in the process for the coming year, including the information they receive and the way they scrutinise the planning process.

1. July scrutiny committee meetings

Scrutiny committees review the Q4 Council Monitoring report (backward look) and the State of the County report (forward look) with a focus on services within their remit. The Q4 report enables committees to scrutinise performance in relation to the Council’s targets, financial performance and risk issues over the previous year. The State of the County report enables scrutiny to consider the key issues in the policy, financial and operating environment for the relevant service areas in the coming planning period. The committees identify any aspects of performance, policy, budget or service issues that they would like to explore in more detail through their autumn business planning (RPPR) agenda items or via their broader work programme.



Scrutiny input is embedded throughout the annual budget setting and business planning (RPPR) cycle

4. December RPPR Boards

The committees’ RPPR Boards scrutinise the latest information on the overall financial position, including the provisional settlement if available, relevant draft updated Portfolio Plans and savings plans. Scrutiny comments and recommendations on financial and service plans for the coming year are agreed and submitted for consideration by Cabinet in January.

3. November scrutiny meetings

The committees continue to consider the latest available information on the policy and financial context, review any additional information requested in September and agree any further information required for committees’ RPPR Boards.

2. September scrutiny meetings

The committees consider the latest available information on the policy and financial context for the coming year and review any additional budget or service information requested in July. Further information or scrutiny work is agreed as required.

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Summary comments for Cabinet – People Scrutiny RPPR Board (15.12.23)

1.1. The People Scrutiny RPPR Board met on the 15 December 2023 and agreed comments to be put to Cabinet, on behalf of the parent Committee, for its consideration in January 2024. The information supplied to the Board to support its discussions comprised of:

- an RPPR Board overview report
- a Local Government Association (LGA) briefing on the Autumn Statement 2023;
- an interim report on the responses to the public survey; and
- the draft portfolio plans for the Adult Social Care and Health (ASCH) and the Children’s Services Departments (CSD).

1.2. The Board met before the provisional local government finance settlement 2024 to 2025 was published and therefore the Board was not able to comment in detail on the Council’s budgetary position. The Board received an update from the Chief Finance Officer on the finance briefings circulated and the Government’s local government finance policy statement published on 5 December.

1.3. The comments of the People Scrutiny RPPR Board are set out below:

Financial outlook

1.4 The Board expressed its concern about the financial challenges facing the Council, particularly ASCH and CSD, following the Autumn Statement and subsequent local government finance policy statement. Whilst the Board welcomed the increase to the national living wage and its benefit for local workers, there was also recognition that this would generate additional financial challenges, particularly for ASCH in relation to care fees.

Interim public survey report

1.5 The Board discussed the interim results of the public engagement survey and also noted that, as a snapshot of local views from those who responded, the survey needed to be viewed as part of wider stakeholder engagement. The Board discussed approaches to engagement which were noted by Officers. The Board noted that the results highlighted a preference to prioritise spending on roads, however Members commented that this did not necessarily show the full picture and conversations with residents about care services, for both adults and children, often led to an agreement that spending in this area was also a priority. The Board agreed that more work needed to be done to promote to communities the work and priorities of ASCH and CSD, to raise awareness of the range of services they offer as well as current pressures.

Adult Social Care and Health draft portfolio plan

1.6 The Board received an update from the Director of ASCH on the draft ASCH portfolio plan and the key developments and challenges facing the Department for 2024/2025.

1.7 The Board recognised the impact of the changing demography in East Sussex, most notably the projected ongoing increase in the number of older people, including those with long term illnesses, which was contributing to increased pressures on local services and the ASCH budget.

1.8 The Board wished to acknowledge the ongoing challenge of recruitment in adult social care services and the potential impact of this on service delivery. However, the Board was reassured that this remained a priority area and that targeted work on this had recently reduced the number of vacancies.

1.9 The Board recognised the increasing resources needed to support migrants, and the complexity of the various schemes in place for different migrant groups and welcomed the work the Department was doing to respond to this, working with local partners.

Children's Services draft portfolio plan

1.10 The Board received an update from the Director of CSD on the draft CSD portfolio plan and the key developments and challenges facing the Department for 2024/2025.

1.11 The Board noted the range of responses to social care challenges reflected in the Department's plans and specifically welcomed the recently agreed increase in foster carer payments and viewed this an investment which would result in savings elsewhere through supporting the availability of in-house foster care placements.

1.12 The Board recognised the need for strong mental health support for young people and were reassured that this remained a priority for the Department, as seen through their ongoing work with partners, including the NHS Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, and ongoing funding to support mental health and emotional wellbeing in schools.

1.13 The Board recognised the ongoing challenges in education around school attendance and welcomed the prioritisation of work in this area within the Department's Portfolio Plan, including work to reduce the number of pupils on part-time timetables and the number of families electing to home educate (EHE). The Board noted the progress in this area to date, including work from a pilot EHE early intervention programme which had seen a significant reduction in the number of new elective home education applications.

Report to: People Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: 11 March 2024

By: Assistant Chief Executive

Title: People Scrutiny Committee Work Programme

Purpose: To review and discuss the People Scrutiny Committee's future work programme

RECOMMENDATIONS: The Committee is recommended to:

- 1) review and agree the latest work programme set out at Appendix 1;
 - 2) agree the new membership of the Prevention in Children's Services Reference Group; and
 - 3) review upcoming items on East Sussex County Council's Forward Plan as set out at Appendix 2 to identify any issues that may require more detailed scrutiny.
-

1 Background

1.1 The work programme is an important tool in ensuring the correct focus and best use of the Committee's time in scrutinising topics that are of importance to the residents of East Sussex, and the efficient and effective working of the Council. It also provides clarity for those who may be requested to give evidence to the Committee on the issues under review, and the questions the Committee requires answers to.

1.2 Discussion of the work programme provides the Committee with the opportunity to consider topics that it may be of value to scrutinise, and to decide whether further scoping work is required. This provides a basis for deciding the best way of scrutinising a topic, the timescale, and who from the Committee will be involved in carrying out the review work. If there are a number of potential topics for review, Members can determine the priority of the work within the resources available to the Committee.

2 Supporting information

Work programme

2.1 The Committee's latest work programme is attached at Appendix 1, incorporating a number of updates including those outlined below. The Committee is asked to consider, discuss and agree the work programme, subject to any further changes required.

Scrutiny Reviews

School Attendance

2.2 The Committee heard in 2021 that overall school absence and persistent absence rates across East Sussex were high, when compared to national levels and statistical neighbours and agreed to conduct a scrutiny review. At the initial scoping board, it was agreed to postpone the review due to the ongoing impact of, and disruption from, the coronavirus pandemic.

2.3 A further scoping board meeting was held in December 2023 where the Board heard that several pieces of work to address attendance had launched in September 2023 and the impact of these was not yet clear. It was agreed that the Board would meet again in July 2024 to look at the latest data and establish what progress was being made, as well as any current areas of concern.

If any areas of concern were identified, it was agreed that these would be progressed with a scrutiny review which would commence in the autumn of 2024.

Reference Groups

Prevention in Children's Services

2.4 The Committee agreed to form a Reference Group to provide regular and timely input into key projects and programmes relating to prevention in Children's Services. The Group held its first meeting in June 2023 and heard from the Department about its work on Family Safeguarding and Family Hubs, both of which focus on whole family support and early intervention to prevent the need for more serious intervention later.

2.5 The Group last met on 23 February 2024 and received updates on the Family Safeguarding Model, Connected Families, and Family Hubs, including outcomes to date. The Group welcomed the updates and noted the positive impacts of the programmes. It was agreed that the Group would next meet in summer 2024 to explore the role of education in prevention.

2.6 Councillor Cross has expressed an interest in joining this Reference Group and Councillor Field is no longer able to participate. The Committee is asked to agree these changes to the membership of the group.

CQC Assessment Framework

2.7 The Committee agreed at its 2023 awayday to establish a Reference Group to support Adult Social Care and Health (ASCH) with the upcoming CQC inspection and LGA Peer Review.

2.8 The Reference Group met on 13 December 2023 and received a presentation from the Department detailing the CQC assessment process (including scrutiny involvement), as well as work underway to prepare for this, including participating in a Peer Review. The Group discussed and commented on the ASCH self-assessment framework.

2.9 The Peer Review took place in February 2024 and the Reference Group will next meet to discuss its findings when a report is available. Members of the Committee were invited to meet the Peer Review team during their visit.

Health and Social Care Integration Programme (HASCIP)

2.10 The Group last met on 8 February 2024 to consider a progress update on the Joint Sussex Integrated Care Strategy Shared Delivery Plan (SDP) and Integrated Community Teams (ICT). The update outlined the progress in delivering collective SDP milestones for 2023/45, including the development of ICT footprints and intelligence profiles, as well as next steps for the SDP.

2.11 The Group welcomed the update and agreed to further support the Department as the SDP progressed.

Briefings

ASCH briefing on Suicide Prevention

2.12 At its 2023 awayday, the Committee heard about the ongoing priority for ASCH on suicide prevention and requested further details on this programme of work through a briefing.

2.13 The Committee received a briefing on 4 January which outlined the national and local context around suicide, and the Department's work and planned work on suicide prevention in East Sussex.

Training

2.14 A 'bite size' training session has been arranged for 22 April to provide Members with a greater understanding of the role and remit of Healthwatch, in particular how it relates to the work of Adult Social Care.

2.15 As part of ongoing development, Members are invited to consider any other topics of interest for training to support their role on the Committee.

Forward Plan

2.16 A copy of the Council's Forward Plan of executive decisions for the period 1 March to 30 June 2024 is included at Appendix 2. The Committee is requested to review the forthcoming items on the Forward Plan to identify any issues within the remit of this Committee that may require more detailed scrutiny. The Forward Plan is revised and published on a monthly basis and Committee members should regularly review the Forward Plan.

3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

3.1 An important part of managing the work of the People Scrutiny Committee is regularly reviewing its future work programme. This involves the Committee assessing its priorities, ensuring its ongoing reviews are completed in a timely fashion and identifying new areas for scrutiny.

PHILIP BAKER
Assistant Chief Executive

Contact Officer: Rachel Sweeney, Senior Policy and Scrutiny Adviser

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Email: rachel.sweeney@eastsussex.gov.uk

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People Scrutiny Committee - Work Programme

Current Scrutiny Reviews		
Title of Review	Detail	Proposed Completion Date
School Attendance	<p>The Committee heard at their 2021 work planning awayday that overall school absence and persistent absence rates across East Sussex are high, when compared to national and statistical neighbours; and that East Sussex has a significant number of children and young people deemed too ill to attend school due to anxiety and poor mental health, and increasing levels of Emotionally-Based School Avoidance.</p> <p>A scoping board meeting was held on 10 March 2022 and the Board agreed that although the subject was appropriate for a Scrutiny Review, as so much of the current situation regarding school absence rates in East Sussex was related to the ongoing impact of, and disruption from, the coronavirus pandemic, it was too early for the Committee to undertake a scrutiny review of school attendance.</p> <p>A further scoping board meeting was held in December 2023 where the Board heard that several pieces of work to address attendance had launched in September 2023 and it was not yet clear what was having an impact. It was agreed that the Board would meet again in July 2024 to look at the latest data and see what progress was being made and any current areas of concern. This meeting will scope a focussed review to begin in September 2024 and report to the March 2025 Committee.</p> <p>Membership of the Scoping Board: Cllrs di Cara, Field and Howell and Nicola Boulter and John Hayling (Chair) Parent Governor Representatives.</p>	March 2025
Initial Scoping Reviews		
Subject area for initial scoping	Detail	Proposed Dates
Suggested Potential Future Scrutiny Review Topics		
Suggested Topic	Detail	
Elective Home Education	The Committee heard at their 2021 work planning awayday that issues relating to the increase in the numbers of children being electively home educated (EHE) remain a concern for the Children's Services Department and expressed an interest in scrutinising the work the Department is doing in response.	

	<p>The Committee received additional updates on the local situation, as well as national updates, at their November 2022 and November 2023 meetings, including information at the November 2023 meeting on a DfE Consultation that has opened on revised home education guidance for Local Authorities to provide more clarity about 'suitable education' and support to be provided for home educators. In the absence of legislation for a statutory register, the guidance proposes Local Authorities set up a voluntary registration scheme for parents who home educate.</p> <p>The Committee agreed at the November 2023 meeting to retain this as a potential area for review but will await further information from the DfE consultation.</p>	
Scrutiny Reference Groups		
Reference Group Title	Subject area	Meeting Dates
Prevention in Children's Services	<p>The Committee agreed in March 2023 to convert a planned scrutiny review on prevention in Children's Services into a Reference Group in order to provide regular and timely input into key projects and programmes which are under development and progressing at pace. The group is considering work to develop preventative approaches including Family Hubs and the Family Safeguarding model, providing ongoing scrutiny challenge.</p> <p>This Reference Group last met on 23 February 2024 and received an update on the work and progress of Connected Families and Family Hubs.</p> <p>The next meeting is planned for June/July 2024 and will explore the role of education in prevention.</p> <p>Membership of the Reference Group: Councillors Adeniji, Howell, and John Hayling, Parent Governor Representative (Chair).</p>	Next meeting: June/July 2024
CQC Assessment Framework	<p>The Committee agreed at its 2023 awayday to establish a Reference Group to support ASCH with the upcoming CQC inspection and LGA Peer Review.</p> <p>The Reference Group met on 13 December 2023 and received a presentation from the Department detailing the CQC assessment process (including scrutiny involvement), as well as work underway to prepare for this, including participating in an upcoming Peer Review. The Group discussed and commented on the ASCH self-assessment framework.</p> <p>The Group heard that the Peer Review will include discussions with the People Committee; a Committee briefing on this will be arranged for early February.</p> <p>The Reference Group will meet after the Peer Review to discuss its findings.</p>	TBC

	Membership of the Reference Group: Councillors di Cara, Geary, Howell, Ungar and Webb.	
Health and Social Care Integration Programme (HASCIP) Reference Group	<p>The Committee agreed to establish a Reference Group to monitor progress of the East Sussex Health and Social Care Integration Programme and identify areas for future scrutiny. It will review HASCIP progress reports provided to the Health and Wellbeing Board and meet on an ad hoc basis as required to consider issues arising in more detail.</p> <p>The Group last met on 8 February 2024 to consider a progress update on the Joint Sussex Integrated Care Strategy Shared Delivery Plan (SDP) and Integrated Community Teams (ICT). The update outlined the progress in delivering collective SDP milestones for 2023/45, including the development of ICT footprints and intelligence profiles, and next steps for the SDP.</p> <p>The Group welcomed the update and agreed to further support the Department as the SDP progressed.</p> <p>Membership of the group: Councillors Clark, di Cara, Geary (Chair), Ungar and Webb.</p>	Next meeting: TBC
Educational Attainment and Performance Scrutiny Reference Group	<p>The Committee agreed in June 2018 to establish a Reference Group to focus on reviewing data on educational attainment in East Sussex and related issues. The group meets on an annual basis.</p> <p>The Group met on the 7 March 2023 to review the attainment data is for the 2021/22 academic year.</p> <p>Membership of the group: Councillors Adeniji, Field (Chair) and Howell and Nicola Boulter, Parent Governor Representative.</p>	Next meeting: 27 March 2024
Adult Social Care reforms Reference Group	<p>The Committee agreed at its 2022 work planning awayday to establish a Reference Group to consider the impact and implementation of the national Adult Social Care reforms. Implementation of the reforms was subsequently delayed in the 2022 Autumn Statement from October 2023 to October 2025 and the first meeting of the Group will take place closer to implementation.</p> <p>Membership of the group: Councillors di Cara, Geary and Ungar.</p>	First meeting: closer to implementation of the reforms in Oct 2025
Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR) Board	RPPR Board meets annually to agree detailed comments and any recommendations on the emerging portfolio plans and spending and savings proposals to be put to Cabinet on behalf of the scrutiny committee.	Next meeting: December 2024
Reports for Information		
Subject Area	Detail	Proposed Date
Youth Employability Service Contract	A report on the new Youth Employability Service contract, which commenced in October 2023, and its impact on young people, including vulnerable groups.	June 2024

Training and Development		
Title of Training/Briefing	Detail	Proposed Date
Healthwatch	Bitesize training on the role and remit of Healthwatch, including with ASCH.	22 April 2024
Future Committee Agenda Items		Author
11 July 2024		
Equality and Inclusion in Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Review	6 month monitoring report on progress with the Review's recommendations.	Director of Adult Social Care and Health
Use of Digital and Technology in Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Review	12 month monitoring report on progress with the Review's recommendations.	Director of Adult Social Care and Health
Children's Services work with IMPOWER	The Committee agreed at its 2023 awayday to request an update on the Department's work with consultants IMPOWER to review and develop cost effective and outcome focused children's care arrangements, including the long term use of foster carers in the county. This update will also address current issues with private care provision and work underway to manage this.	Director of Children's Services
Committee Work Programme	To manage the Committee's programme of work including matters relating to ongoing reviews, initial scoping boards, future scrutiny topics, reference groups, training and development matters and reports for information.	Senior Policy and Scrutiny Adviser
Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR)	To commence the Committee's involvement with the RPPR process for 2024/25 financial year by reviewing the information in the Quarter 4 (end of year) (2023/24) Council Monitoring report and the State of the County report.	Chief Executive
24 September 2024		
Committee Work Programme	To manage the Committee's programme of work including matters relating to ongoing reviews, initial scoping boards, future scrutiny topics, reference groups, training and development matters and reports for information.	Senior Policy and Scrutiny Adviser
Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR)	To continue the Committee's work on the RPPR process for 2024/25 financial year.	Chief Executive
School Exclusions Scrutiny Review	6 month monitoring report on progress with the Review's recommendations.	Director of Children's Services
Safeguarding Adults Board - Annual Report	The Safeguarding Adults Board (SAB) Annual Report outlines the safeguarding activity and performance in East Sussex during the previous financial year, as well as some of the main developments in place to prevent abuse from occurring.	Chair, Safeguarding Adults Board

Annual Review of Safer Communities	To update the Committee on performance in relation to Safer Communities in 2023/24 and the priorities and issues for 2024/25 that will be highlighted in the Partnership Business Plan.	Assistant Director - Planning, Performance and Engagement
East Sussex Safeguarding Children Partnership (ESSCP) Annual Report	Presentation of the annual report of the East Sussex Safeguarding Children Partnership.	Independent Chair, East Sussex Safeguarding Children Partnership
19 November 2024		
Transition in services	To provide the Committee with clarification on the process of transitioning between Children's Services and ASCH.	Director of Children's Services and the Director of Adult Social Care and Health
Committee Work Programme	To manage the Committee's programme of work including matters relating to ongoing reviews, initial scoping boards, future scrutiny topics, reference groups, training and development matters and reports for information.	Senior Policy and Scrutiny Adviser
Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR)	To continue the Committee's work on the RPPR process for 2024/25 financial year.	Chief Executive
13 March 2025		
Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) Annual Report	To update the Committee on the work of SACRE.	Roy Galley, Chairman of SACRE / Director of Children's Services
School Exclusions Scrutiny Review	12 month monitoring report on progress with the Review's recommendations.	Director of Children's Services
Committee Work Programme	To manage the Committee's programme of work including matters relating to ongoing reviews, initial scoping boards, future scrutiny topics, reference groups, training and development matters and reports for information.	Senior Policy and Scrutiny Adviser
Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR)	To provide the Committee with an opportunity to review its input into the RPPR process for 2024/25 financial year.	Chief Executive

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EAST SUSSEX COUNTY COUNCIL'S FORWARD PLAN

The Leader of the County Council is required to publish a forward plan setting out matters which the Leader believes will be the subject of a key decision by the Cabinet, individual Cabinet member or officer in the period covered by the Plan (the subsequent four months). The Council's Constitution states that a key decision is one that involves

- (a) expenditure which is, or the making of savings which are, significant having regard to the expenditure of the County Council's budget, namely above £500,000 per annum; or
- (b) is significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more electoral divisions.

As a matter of good practice, the Council's Forward Plan includes other items in addition to key decisions that are to be considered by the Cabinet/individual members. This additional information is provided to inform local residents of all matters to be considered, with the exception of issues which are dealt with under the urgency provisions. Only key decisions to be taken by officers are included.

For each decision included on the Plan the following information is provided:

- Page 33
- the name of the individual or body that is to make the decision and the date of the meeting or relevant time period for an officer decision
 - the title of the report and decision to be considered
 - groups that will be consulted prior to the decision being taken
 - a list of documents that will be considered when making the decision
 - the name and telephone number of the contact officer for each item.

The Plan is updated and published every month on the Council's website two weeks before the start of the period to be covered.

Meetings of the Cabinet/individual members are open to the public (with the exception of discussion regarding reports which contain exempt/confidential information). Copies of agenda and reports for meetings are available on the website in advance of meetings. Key decisions taken by officers will not be taken at a meeting – documents listed can be made available on request to the contact officer, with the exception of those which contain exempt/confidential information.

For further details on the time of meetings and general information about the Plan please contact Stuart McKeown at County Hall, St Anne's Crescent, Lewes, BN7 1UE, or telephone 01273 481583 or send an e-mail to stuart.mckeown@eastsussex.gov.uk. For further detailed information regarding specific issues to be considered by the Cabinet, individual Member or officer please contact the named contact officer for the item concerned.

EAST SUSSEX COUNTY COUNCIL
 County Hall, St Anne's Crescent, Lewes, BN7 1UE

For copies of reports or other documents please contact the officer listed on the Plan or phone 01273 335089.

FORWARD PLAN – EXECUTIVE DECISIONS (including Key Decisions) –1 March 2024 TO 30 June 2024

Additional notices in relation to Key Decisions and/or private decisions are available on the [Council's website](#).

Cabinet membership:

- Councillor Keith Glazier - Lead Member for Strategic Management and Economic Development
- Councillor Nick Bennett – Lead Member for Resources and Climate Change
- Vacancy – Lead Member for Economy
- Councillor Claire Dowling – Lead Member for Transport and Environment
- Councillor Carl Maynard – Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Health
- Councillor Bob Bowdler – Lead Member for Children and Families
- Councillor Bob Standley – Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability

Date for Decision	Decision Taker	Decision/Key Issue	Decision to be taken wholly or partly in private (P) or Key Decision (KD)	Consultation	List of Documents to be submitted to decision maker	Contact Officer
5 Mar 2024	Cabinet	SELEP Transition The South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) will be drawn to a close by April 2024. As such, many of the LEP's functions will be transferred to local institutions, including to the County Council, working with Team East Sussex, our de facto local growth board. The SELEP Transition Plan, accompanied by our own local East Sussex Integration Plan, sets out precisely which functions will be transferred to East Sussex, and the actions necessary			Report, other documents may also be submitted	Richard Dawson 01273 482305

		to integrate those functions over the coming months.				
5 Mar 2024	Cabinet	Council Monitoring: Quarter 3 2023/2024 To consider the Council Monitoring report for the third quarter of the financial year 2023/24 as part of the Council's Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources process.			Report, other documents may also be submitted	Victoria Beard 07894 708914
5 Mar 2024	Cabinet	The Ofsted inspection of East Sussex County Council's Children's Services Cabinet is asked to note the findings of the inspection Council's Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services 11 – 15 December 2023, which was published 6 February.			Report, other documents may also be submitted	Kathy Marriott, Amanda Watson 01273 481274,
6 Mar 2024	Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Health	Future offer following the Support with Confidence consultation The Support with Confidence scheme was a directory of accredited providers (personal assistants and businesses) offering care and support services in East Sussex. A public consultation on the future of the Support with Confidence scheme, and how might the offer support in a different way, ran from 27 September to 5 December 2023. In October 2023 the licence holders informed that they were withdrawing the brand, so the scheme closed on 31 December 2023. This decision relates to the future support	KD		Report, other documents may also be submitted	Candice Miller 07701 394502

		offer to personal assistants and personal assistant businesses and the residents wanting to use their services.				
6 Mar 2024	Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Health	<p>Re-procurement of Specialist Sexual Health Services</p> <p>To seek Lead Member agreement for the extension of the existing contract with the current provider, for six months, under the same terms and conditions until 30 September 2024; and</p> <p>Agree the proposed negotiated approach with a new service provider to take over the service management, from 1 October 2024, via the Negotiated Procedure without Prior Publication (Regulation 32 of the Public Contract Regulations 2015).</p>	KD		Report, other documents may also be submitted	Darrell Gale
11 Mar 2024	Lead Member for Transport and Environment	<p>Capital Programme for Transport Improvements 2024/25</p> <p>To seek Lead Member approval, following consultation with Local Members, of the list of transport schemes and associated expenditure included in the programme for design and/or delivery in 2024/25.</p>	KD		Report, other documents may also be submitted	Andrew Keer, Chris Tree 01273 336682, 01273 482247

11 Mar 2024	Lead Member for Transport and Environment	<p>East Sussex County Council Guidance on Parking at New Developments</p> <p>The County Council currently has published Parking Guidelines and a Parking Calculator that are used to guide parking provision in new development proposals. The guidelines and calculator have been reviewed and updates proposed, particularly in light of recent Census data relating to car ownership levels. The report will seek Lead Member approval for the updated guidelines and calculator.</p>			Report, other documents may also be submitted	Michelle Edser 07542 029131
11 Mar 2024 Page 37	Lead Member for Transport and Environment	<p>"Mini Section 278 Agreements" for developer led or third party highway works</p> <p>The County Council's Transport Development Control team is looking to introduce an amended mechanism for how developer led highway works are agreed with the County Council. Currently this is generally through Section 278 agreements, which will remain the case for the majority of schemes. However, where the proposed highway works are of a low value and present minimal risk to the County Council's highway asset, a new light touch process is proposed to be introduced. This will be in the form of Mini Section 278 agreements. The report to Lead Member will seek approval for this approach, along with the proposed guidance on this matter to be published.</p>			Report, other documents may also be submitted	Michelle Edser 07542 029131

14 Mar 2024	Lead Member for Strategic Management and Economic Development	SELEP transition - update scheme of delegations to officers To approve updates to the Leader's scheme of delegation to officers to reflect any changes to responsibilities as a result of the closure of South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) and the integration of relevant functions into East Sussex County Council.			Report, other documents may also be submitted	Alex Colbran 07729 108123
14 Mar 2024	Lead Member for Strategic Management and Economic Development	Levelling Up Partnership - Rother and Hastings To consider East Sussex County Council entering into legal agreements for Rother and Hastings Levelling Up Partnership projects.	KD P		Report, other documents may also be submitted	Mirco Cordeiro 07731 343705
14 Mar 2024	Lead Member for Strategic Management and Economic Development	Delivery of Infrastructure project, Queensway Gateway Road To determine the delivery option, total project costs, funding package and delivery programme for the Queensway Gateway Road infrastructure project.	P KD		Report, other documents may also be submitted	Alex Colbran 07729 108123
14 Mar 2024	Lead Member for Resources and Climate Change	Pacific House, Eastbourne The Lead Member will consider the proposed future property strategy for Pacific House, Eastbourne.	P KD		Report, other documents may also be submitted	James Harris, Nigel Brown 07394 410630
21 Mar 2024	Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Health	Household Support Fund Round 5 Approval of the proposed use of the Household Support Fund Round 5 for the period (1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025) for the spend on Adults. A report is also being	KD		Report, other documents may also be submitted	Paul Bolton 01273 336353

		considered by the Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability for the spend of this fund on children.				
25 Mar 2024	Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability	Household Support Fund Round 5 Approval of the proposed use of the Household Support Fund Round 5 for the period (1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025) for the spend on children and families. A report is also being considered by the Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Health for the spend of this fund on adults.	KD		Report, other documents may also be submitted	Jessica Stubbings 01323 463537
25 Mar 2024	Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability	East Sussex Childcare Sufficiency Duty 2024-2025 To approve the publication of the East Sussex Childcare Sufficiency Duty Report for 2024-2025.			Report, other documents may also be submitted	Jane Spice 01323 747425
28 Mar 2024	Lead Member for Resources and Climate Change	Write-off of Debts 2023/24 To seek Lead Member approval for writing off certain debts in excess of £10,000.	P		Report, other documents may also be submitted	Alina Dunn 01273 481250
28 Mar 2024	Lead Member for Resources and Climate Change	A new 4- year Partnership Joint Use Agreement for community and curriculum use related to Battle Area Sports Centre. To consider a 4 - year Joint Use Partnership Agreement renewal for Battle Sports Centre from March 2024 (current Agreement expiry date) to enable the continuation of the curriculum and community use of the Centre. The proposed new Agreement to be broadly based on the existing	KD		Report, other documents may also be submitted	Nigel Brown, Pauline Young 07394 410630, 01273 481180

		arrangements.				
28 Mar 2024	Lead Member for Resources and Climate Change	A new 10- year Partnership Joint Use Agreement for community and curriculum use related to Lewes Athletic Track To consider a 10- year Joint Use Partnership Agreement renewal for Lewes Athletic Track from 2024 to enable the continuation of the curriculum and community use of the facilities. The proposed new Agreement to be broadly based on the existing arrangements.	KD		Report, other documents may also be submitted	Nigel Brown, Pauline Young <i>07394 410630,</i> <i>01273 481180</i>
28 Mar 2024 Page 40	Lead Member for Resources and Climate Change	Updated Environmentally Sustainable Procurement Policy To consider some minor changes to the Environmentally Sustainable Procurement Policy previously adopted by the Council in 2022. The changes are required to bring the Policy up to date and further in line with identified best practice. Some of the changes also reflect feedback from last year's Climate Emergency UK Local Government Scorecards.			Report, other documents may also be submitted	Ian Roadnight <i>01273 482193</i>
28 Mar 2024	Chief Operating Officer	Former Sidley Depot Site, Bexhill - Disposal of Freehold Disposal of the Former Sidley Depot Site, Bexhill. To agree the final heads of terms for the sale of the site, as delegated by the Lead Member for Resources and Climate Change on 17 October 2023.	P KD		Report, other documents may also be submitted	Rebecca Lewis <i>07955 312 371</i>

March 2024	Director of Communities, Economy and Transport	Allowed for extension to the Services Agreement for the Provision of Tipping Points handling of dry mixed recyclables The Services Agreement for the Provision of Tipping Points handling of dry mixed recyclables is due to expire on 28 June 2024. The decision being made is to exercise the allowed for extension, provided by clause two of the contract 'Commencement and Duration', for a fixed period of two years. The new and final expiry date will be 28 June 2026.	KD		Report, other documents may also be submitted	Laura Tafa 07919 298462
April 2024 Page 41	Chief Operating Officer	Award a main contractor for The Joff Youth Hub, Peacehaven This is to appoint a contractor for works to extend, reconfigure and renew this existing youth hub. The works will increase the number of regular positive activities and clubs available to young people aged 11 to 19 (up to 25 for young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) in the areas.	P KD		Report, other documents may also be submitted	Nigel Brown 07394 410630
April 2024	Chief Operating Officer	Award a main contractor for the Heathfield Youth Hub This is to appoint a contractor for works to demolish and replace the existing building with a state-of-the-art rural Youth Hub. The works will increase the number of regular positive activities and clubs available to young people aged 11 to 19 (up to 25 for young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) in the areas.	P KD		Report, other documents may also be submitted	Nigel Brown 07394 410630

9 May 2024	Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability	Post-16 Transport Policy Statement 2024-2025 The Lead Member is recommended to approve the Post-16 Transport Policy Statement for the 2024-25 academic year following the required consultation.	KD		Report, other documents may also be submitted	Ian Crudge 0300 3309472
22 May 2024	Lead Member for Transport and Environment	High Weald Management Plan 2024-2029 The Lead Member will be recommended to adopt the latest review of the High Weald Management Plan, which covers the period 2024 to 2029. This will enable the County Council to meet its statutory duty of preparing and publishing a Management Plan for the High Weald Protected Landscape.	KD		Report, other documents may also be submitted	Virginia Pullan 01273 482639
22 May 2024	Lead Member for Transport and Environment	Response to Defra consultations on implementing Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 Under the Flood and Water Management Act 2010, East Sussex County Council became the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) for the county. The LLFA role includes a statutory consultee to major planning applications. Parts of the Flood and Water Management Act have never been implemented and this includes Schedule 3, which will introduce additional duties and burdens to the County Council, including the statutory role of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) Approval Body and Adopting Authority. The Government has recently indicated its intention to implement Schedule 3 and is due to consult			Report, other documents may also be submitted	Ed Sheath 01273 481632

		on a series of documents in Autumn 2023, which will set out how Schedule 3 will work in practice, as well as setting out matters such as proposed transitional arrangements and any new burdens monies. The report to the Lead Member will set out the County Councils proposed response to this consultation.				
25 Jun 2024	Cabinet	Council Monitoring: Quarter 4 2023/24 - Year end To consider the Council Monitoring report for the fourth quarter of 2023/24 as part of the Council's Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources process.	KD		Report, other documents may also be submitted	Victoria Beard 07894 708914
25 Jun 2024	Cabinet	Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR) - State of the County To consider the State of the County report and begin the Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources process for 2025/26 and beyond.	KD		Report, other documents may also be submitted	Victoria Beard 07894 708914
25 June 2024	Lead Member for Resources and Climate Change	To approve the granting of a new Lease to the Trustees of the West Hills & District Community Centre The current Lease dated 12 March 2008 expires 11 March 2023 and it is proposed that ESCC grant the Trustees a new Lease for a period of 25 years which will allow the Trustees to be able to seek grant funding.	P KD		Report, other documents may also be submitted	Joanne Johnston, Zoe Tweed 01273 336621, 07701 021868

June 2024	Director of Communities, Economy and Transport	SuDS in Schools: procurement of services and materials to fit Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) to seven schools in the Eastbourne/Southern Wealden area Request to procure the appointment of a Contractor to carry out the works of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) in selected schools in Eastbourne and Southern Wealden, which have a higher risk of flooding.	KD		Report, other documents may also be submitted	Nick Claxton <i>01273 481407</i>
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Report to: People Scrutiny Committee
Date of meeting: 11 March 2024
By: Director of Children’s Services
Title: Inspection of East Sussex local authority children’s services
Purpose: The report sets out the outcome of the Council’s Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services in December 2023

RECOMMENDATIONS

The People Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:

- 1) welcome the findings of the inspection of the work of ESCC for children and young people which was published on 6 February 2024; and
 - 2) note the action plan which is being developed to address the areas for improvement.
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1 Background

1.1 East Sussex County Council was inspected by the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted) under the framework and evaluation schedule for Inspections of Local Authority Children’s Services (ILACS) from 11 – 15 December 2023.

2 Supporting information

2.1 The outcome of the inspection was published 6 February and is attached at Appendix 1. The Council’s Children’s Services has been judged to be good overall and outstanding for the experiences and progress of children in care. This is a good outcome for the service and for the Council which has made keeping vulnerable people safe, a priority outcome. It is a very welcome recognition of all the hard, determined, and high-quality work we have done since our last inspection, through a time of pandemic, its continuing effects, and cost of living pressures. The judgement for each area of the inspection is set out below.

Judgement	Grade 2018 inspection	Grade 2023 inspection
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Outstanding	Good
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Good	Good
The experiences and progress of children in care (and care leavers 2018)	Outstanding	Outstanding
The experiences and progress of care leavers (introduced in January 2023)	N/A	Good
Overall effectiveness	Outstanding	Good

2.2. The inspectors spent most of their time with frontline staff, and the inspection outcome reflects the difference staff make to the lives of children and young people in East Sussex.

2.3 The report notes:

‘Children in East Sussex continue to receive consistently strong and effective support that helps them to improve their lives. Since the last ILACS inspection in 2018, the authority has responded well to the impact of COVID-19 pandemic, the increasing numbers of families experiencing financial hardship and the growing number children with complex needs who require help.’

2.4 The report highlighted key strengths including:

- Support for vulnerable children is a priority for leaders and cross-party leadership of the corporate parenting board demonstrates the collective will to do the right things for children and their families.
- Social workers are confident and experienced at identifying the range of risk factors impacting on children.
- Children’s identity and heritage are considered well in terms of planning for the right support, including their gender, sexuality and faith.
- Child-in-need and child protection plans focus on what matters most to children. They are reviewed in a timely way at multi-agency review meetings that are well attended.
- Disabled children with complex needs, supported by practitioners from the disabled children’s service, receive strong support.
- The oversight of elective home education is an area of strength. There is an effective system for the tracking of high numbers of pupils who are educated at home and staff seek to identify and support children who may be at increased risk of harm.
- Children in care, including disabled children, are well cared for and live in homes that meet their needs. Social workers consider children’s diversity needs very carefully so that they can support them to settle well with their careers and make progress in their education.
- Social workers know the children [in care] they support exceptionally well. They are insightful and attuned to children’s needs, helping them to express their views using individualised and bespoke communication methods.
- Governance of the virtual school is effective, and the virtual school makes a positive difference to children’s academic and personal development.
- [Care leavers] benefit from enduring and trusted relationships with workers who support them well...The support provided to care leavers makes a positive difference as they move into adulthood.
- Care leavers are supported to maintain links with family members and other adults to ensure that they have access to a network of people who can offer them long-lasting support into adulthood.
- Leaders are taking appropriate action to expand the range of opportunities for care leavers, for example through access to council-led mentoring schemes, apprenticeships or work experience, or links to local businesses and the culture sector.
- Investment in early help services, and current work to establish a new multidisciplinary model for locality teams, as well as plans to enable the specialist SWIFT services to deliver support at an earlier point, demonstrate the corporate commitment to delivering sustainable and impactful support for children.

- The long-standing stability of the workforce enables well-rooted relationships to develop with children and care leavers in East Sussex. Leaders make no secret of the fact that the workforce is their most valuable asset.
- Workers stay in East Sussex because they feel valued and supported to do well.
- Inspectors had the pleasure of meeting a group of articulate, caring and kind young people, all of whom said that they felt safe and had someone to turn to as a trusted adult.

2.5 Ofsted provided a child friendly summary to inform children and young people about the inspection outcomes. This is attached at Appendix 2.

2.6 The report identifies three areas for improvement:

- The quality of plans for children and care leavers so that they are all specific, measurable and timebound.
- The recording of management oversight, supervision and direction.
- The oversight, timeliness and rigour of the response to children:
 - experiencing neglect, including children in Public Law Outline pre-proceedings, and
 - in private fostering arrangement

2.7 The draft post-inspection action plan in response to the report is attached at Appendix 3. The final action plan will be shared with Ofsted by 17 May 2024.

3 Conclusion and recommendations

3.1 East Sussex has maintained a focus on the key priority outcome of keeping vulnerable people safe and responded well to the impact of the pandemic, increased demand and the challenging financial context for both families and the council. The People Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the contents of the inspection report and the draft action plan.

ALISON JEFFERY

Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Amanda Watson

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Email: Amanda.watson:eastsussex.gov.uk

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Appendix 1 – Ofsted Report

Appendix 2 – Ofsted's child friendly summary of the inspection outcomes

Appendix 3 – draft action plan

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Inspection of East Sussex local authority children's services

Inspection dates: 11 to 15 December 2023

Lead inspector: Tom Anthony, His Majesty's Inspector

Judgement	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Good
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Good
The experiences and progress of children in care	Outstanding
The experiences and progress of care leavers	Good
Overall effectiveness	Good

Children in East Sussex continue to receive consistently strong and effective support that helps to improve their lives. Since the last ILACS inspection in 2018, the authority has responded well to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the increasing numbers of families experiencing financial hardship and the growing numbers of children with complex needs who require help. Support for vulnerable children is a priority for leaders, including the chief executive, lead member and director of children's services. Cross-party leadership of the corporate parenting board demonstrates the collective will to do the right things for children and their families.

In most areas, the quality and impact of practice have remained strong, and the stability of the workforce is impressive. However, records of management oversight and challenge, as well as the quality of practice in discrete areas, including the two areas for improvement that were identified at the last inspection, are not consistently robust.

What needs to improve?

- The quality of plans for children and care leavers so that they are all specific, measurable and timebound.
- The recording of management oversight, supervision and direction.
- The oversight, timeliness and rigour of the response to children:
 - experiencing neglect, including children in Public Law Outline pre-proceedings, and
 - in private fostering arrangements.

The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection: good

1. Staff at the single point of advice (SPoA) provide a timely response to initial contacts in East Sussex. Essential information is gathered to help inform appropriate threshold decisions at this stage. This helps workers to identify the right service in line with children's needs. Consent is understood, sought and dispensed with appropriately. Parents' views are taken into account in decision-making.
2. Although an increase in demand has led to delays in allocation for a small number of families, the majority of families receive effective early help at the right time for them. Once allocated to an early help key worker, children and their families benefit from a high level of support. This enables children and families to build relationships rapidly with workers who understand their needs and work effectively with them to reduce risk and make enduring change.
3. Most children and families move quickly into the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) when necessary. For the majority of children, proportionate decision-making reflects children's needs and is responsive to the level of risks that they face. For most children, social workers' analysis and recommendations are thorough and based on timely and comprehensive information-gathering.
4. Social workers are confident and experienced at identifying the range of risk factors impacting on children. They plan intervention to reduce risk and progress safety plans. They work closely with parents, sharing reports and safety plans so that children are safer.
5. Management oversight is captured well within MASH information-gathering records, and the rationale for decision-making is mainly clear in terms of next steps or prioritisation leading up to and following strategy discussions. Re-referral rates are low. Managers in the MASH provide clear advice on next steps for children moving into statutory assessment. However, indicative timescales for completing the assessment in accordance with the child's needs are not defined at the outset. Some assessments are taking many weeks, with the

rationale not being clear. This was an area for improvement at the last inspection.

6. Most assessments are analytical and thorough, and they are often informed by research and practice learning reviews. They take into account parents' own experiences, concerns and vulnerabilities. Direct work is undertaken with children during the assessment process. This captures their experiences well, and they are helped to share sensitive and difficult feelings. However, evidence of this work is not always uploaded onto children's records.
7. Children's identity and heritage are considered well in terms of planning for the right support, including their gender, sexuality and faith.
8. Decision-making is robust and leads appropriately to escalation when needed to safeguard children. Strategy meetings are well attended and are held in line with the level of perceived risk to children. During child protection enquiries, experienced social workers visit children quickly at a time and place where the child feels comfortable.
9. Domestic abuse specialist workers support practitioners and families, helping to create immediate safety plans for children who have been exposed to domestic abuse. Culturally matched community groups are identified to provide ongoing and sensitive support to victims.
10. Child-in-need and child protection plans focus on what matters most to children. They are reviewed in a timely way at multi-agency review meetings that are well attended. While practice itself is strong, plans are not consistently sharply focused on what tangible change is needed and by when, and many do not contain well-articulated contingency plans.
11. Children who have a child-in-need or child protection plan receive regular visits from practitioners who build relationships with them and their families to support change and improvements. Practitioners are skilled and knowledgeable, using a wide range of direct work tools in their one-to-one meetings with children.
12. Disabled children with complex needs, supported by practitioners from the disabled children's service, receive strong support. Well-managed caseloads allow workers to respond to children's needs and to work with multi-agency partners effectively. Creative use is made of visual tools to capture children's views and wishes and these feed into children's plans. Plans are dynamic and they are flexed as children and families make progress and their circumstances change.
13. The multidisciplinary specialist family service (SWIFT) works alongside social care services to provide highly valued expertise in assessment and intervention across a wide range of need, including parental substance misuse, domestic abuse, mental health, and assessment work for families before or during court proceedings. A waiting list to access some services creates short-term delays

for some children. Senior leaders are aware of this and plans are in place to frontload the use of SWIFT in the Public Law Outline (PLO) process.

14. Some children experience neglect for too long. Episodes of marginal improvement are followed by a return to significant and impactful neglect, and there is insufficient evidence of reflection on what has and has not worked in the past. A new neglect toolkit has recently been launched and is yet to have an impact.
15. Oversight and challenge to drive progress during PLO pre-proceedings are not sufficiently effective. Some children are subject to pre-proceedings for too long. Letters to parents, as was the case at the last inspection, are not written in a way that makes clear the concerns regarding children's experiences and what needs to change.
16. The dangers of harm by exploitation are understood well, and risks are reduced through effective support provided to children at risk of extra-familial harm. Mapping identifies links between children and the adults who are exploiting them. Police plan disruptive actions, including specialist operations, and 'connected coaches' offer a multidisciplinary approach, providing intensive and effective support to children aged 11 to 17 and their families.
17. Staff in East Sussex are creative and effective in the way in which they engage children and families to continually improve the impact of their work. A well-established collaboration against child exploitation (CACE) group for parents of children who are exploited supports parents well and is a vital resource for them. Parent mentors also provide key support to families who are going through family drug and alcohol court (FDAC) proceedings.
18. Well-established systems, underpinned by strong relationships with partner agencies, enable an effective response to out-of-hours concerns.
19. Concerns about adults working with children are dealt with thoroughly by a well-managed local authority designated officer service that has good systems in place for the management of allegations, concerns and complaints.
20. Once notified about children living in private fostering arrangements, not all children are visited swiftly in their homes as part of the assessment of their safety. This means that potential risks are not rigorously assessed.
21. Children aged 16 and 17 who present as homeless receive an appropriate and effective response. They are provided with advice and information to help them to make appropriate decisions about the support that they need.
22. The oversight of elective home education is an area of strength. There is an effective system for the tracking of high numbers of pupils who are educated at home and staff seek to identify and support children who may be at increased risk of harm. The local authority has clear procedures to identify and monitor

children who are missing education. They work positively with families and schools to determine and address the main barriers to accessing education.

The experiences and progress of children in care: outstanding

23. Most children come into care in East Sussex at the right time and after other family options have been explored. Providing children in care with consistent support and minimising changes of social worker are priorities from the outset. The strong relationships that children have with their workers have a positive impact on the progress that they make.
24. Children in care, including disabled children, are well cared for and live in homes that meet their needs. Social workers consider children's diversity needs very carefully so that they can support them to settle well with their carers and make progress in their education. Children have many opportunities to learn and to have fun, including through dancing, horse riding and cookery. Workers advocate effectively for resources, including holidays and activities.
25. Social workers know the children they support exceptionally well. They are insightful and attuned to children's needs, helping them to express their views using individualised and bespoke communication methods. They visit children regularly and keep in frequent contact, including in the evenings and at weekends, so that children have positive, long-term relationships with a trusted adult. The frequency of visits and contacts is increased when children need additional support.
26. Continuity of allocated social worker is prioritised and these long-standing relationships have a positive impact on children's progress and experiences. Social workers are able to understand children's experiences, the impact of trauma and significant life events. Provision is in place for therapy and bespoke emotional support when it cannot be accessed from child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), and this supports children's evolving identity and independence.
27. Children's plans set out how their needs will be met, including for their health and education, and they identify what they need to thrive and to maintain important relationships. Care plans are updated in line with statutory timescales, but not routinely as situations change. Independent reviewing officers (IROs) are involved in placement decisions, assessments and care planning. Review records do not always provide the clarity to understand the journey of the children, but they are written sensitively to children who are encouraged to chair their own 'My Voice Matters' reviews. IROs escalate concerns promptly and appropriately.
28. Arrangements for early discussion of care and permanence plans for children, including, for example, with fostering and adoption colleagues, are unclear. There is no overall tracking to ensure that permanence plans and contingencies are in place, although this is not causing identifiable delay. Leaders are taking

appropriate action to establish a consistent method to record and track children's permanence plans.

29. The health needs of children in care are considered well. Health assessments, dental and optician checks are arranged for children, and strengths and difficulties questionnaires (SDQs) are completed as part of the health assessments. The findings are used to identify and plan for children's health and therapeutic care needs.
30. The importance of children maintaining connections with family and friends is fully recognised and prominent in the plans made for them. Consideration is given to brother and sister relationships and careful planning helps the children to live together whenever possible. Parents and wider family are enabled to spend positive time with their children.
31. Reunification is explored when this is realistic and in children's best interests. Placement with parents assessments are thorough; they analyse risk and represent the child's voice and health needs. They are appropriately reviewed and authorised by a senior manager.
32. A very small number of children with highly complex needs live in unregistered children's homes. The arrangements are closely monitored and the search to identify registered and suitable provision to meet children's needs is an ongoing process.
33. Supervising social workers provide regular supervision to foster carers, although this varies in quality. Training for foster carers has been enhanced, including a renewed focus on understanding diversity. Detailed and timely reports are provided for panel, which is overseen by a strong and knowledgeable panel chair. Decision-making and recommendations are timely and in line with the aim to promote the welfare of children in foster care.
34. Adoption for children, achieved through membership of the regional adoption agency (Adoption South East), is a strength. Governance arrangements are clear and effective. Early permanence for children is provided by fostering to adopt carers who are informed and well supported. The model of conducting virtual panels delivers a flexible and cost-efficient service that minimises delay for children's future planning.
35. Governance of the virtual school is effective, and the virtual school makes a positive difference to children's academic and personal development. Staff at the school provide helpful guides for designated teachers about personal education plans, as well as training and additional funding to support children accessing extra-curricular clubs. Schools are overwhelmingly positive about the support provided by the virtual school.

The experiences and progress of care leavers: good

36. Most care leavers are helped to make good progress in their lives. They benefit from enduring and trusted relationships with workers who support them well. Social workers and personal advisers keep in frequent contact with care leavers. These relationships continue in accordance with care leavers' needs, regardless of age. Personal advisers are committed and persistent in helping to improve care leavers' lives and experiences, and they encourage them to make changes, even when this is challenging and support is not welcomed. The support provided to care leavers makes a positive difference as they move into adulthood.
37. Care leavers are introduced to social workers and personal advisers at a time that is right for them and following their 14th birthday. Children are allocated a personal adviser by the time they are 17 and a half years old, and, when needed, social workers continue to support care leavers past their 18th birthday. This fluid approach provides an opportunity for joint working and the development of new relationships and reduces the impact of changes of worker and feelings of loss that could leave care leavers feeling unsupported.
38. The majority of pathway plans are created with care leavers but they are not consistently specific and timebound so that impact and progress can be tracked and measured. Stronger plans identify needs well and lead to relevant actions to help care leavers. Independence skills are mostly well considered via the passport to independence work as care leavers move towards adulthood. However, for a small number of care leavers, their voices are not sufficiently captured. Some pathway plans are not sufficiently ambitious or aspirational. Plans do not always reflect the depth of the support that is actually being provided and how this is helping care leavers to make positive progress and changes in their lives.
39. Care leavers are supported to maintain links with family members and other adults to ensure that they have access to a network of people who can offer them long-lasting support into adulthood.
40. Care leavers have good access to a range of health services that support their general physical health and emotional well-being. These include a dedicated mental health practitioner who works directly with them. Workers offer both practical and emotional support. However, not all pathway plans capture opportunities and activities that will help care leavers to stay healthy.
41. Many care leavers are helped to stay in education, employment and training and to achieve their career and further education goals. When things are difficult or they need help with future options, care leavers are appropriately signposted to youth employability services and weekly drop-in sessions that provide practical help, advice and guidance. Care leavers who are not in employment, training or education are supported to return at a time that is

right for them. Leaders are taking appropriate action to expand the range of opportunities for care leavers, for example through access to council-led mentoring schemes, apprenticeships or work experience, or links to local businesses and the culture sector.

42. The local offer, co-created with care leavers, contains helpful information about the wide range of financial and practical support, specialist advice and services that are available to them. A small number of aspects of the offer are not sufficiently explicit, including access to the dedicated mental health practitioner and prescriptions. Care leavers living in East Sussex receive council tax exemptions, but those living elsewhere do not.
43. Care leavers in custody are visited regularly and receive encouragement to access opportunities that will positively support them on their return to their community. Personal advisers work well with families and other professionals to plan in advance for their return.
44. Former unaccompanied asylum-seeking care leavers are well supported by a specialist team of practitioners who are experienced and skilled in understanding the impact of earlier life experiences and trauma and supporting them with their asylum applications.
45. Care leavers who are young parents receive good levels of support, practical help and guidance on becoming a new parent. There is also appropriate support for care leavers who live separately from their child.
46. The needs and vulnerabilities of care leavers aged over 21 are identified and addressed within visits and other contact, but the records of these activities are not sufficiently clear. Their progress and development are not captured well at regular intervals. This makes it difficult for care leavers to look back and see their progress when reading their records.
47. Most care leavers live in accommodation that meets their needs and where they feel safe. This includes staying with former carers, returning to family, or living in supported accommodation or in private or council-rented homes. A small number of care leavers live in unsuitable accommodation; they are being provided with support to help them move into something more suitable.
48. Good use is made of the annual children in care and care leavers survey to understand the experiences of care leavers and identify areas for development, especially around emotional well-being and loneliness. Managers acknowledge the need to improve engagement and to strengthen direct opportunities for the voices and experiences of care leavers to influence service development.

The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families: good

49. Services that support vulnerable children are a shared and unifying priority in East Sussex. The chief executive, lead member and director of children's services are well informed by the frequent and varied occasions when they meet with children and care leavers to hear them talk about their experiences. This feedback helps to shape services and plans. Leaders are exploring how they can better enable children to contribute routinely to corporate parenting board meetings.
50. Investment in early help services, and current work to establish a new multidisciplinary model for locality teams, as well as plans to enable the specialist SWIFT services to deliver support at an earlier point, demonstrate the corporate commitment to delivering sustainable and impactful support for children.
51. Regular reporting to the chief executive when children are placed in unregistered children's homes, and the monthly review of the children who are assessed as being at the highest risk or highly vulnerable, mean that the challenges that children and families experience are understood at a senior level.
52. Leaders are realistic in their self-evaluation and are clear about the areas where improvements are needed. For example, they are aware that children's and care leavers' plans are not consistently SMART and they are taking appropriate action to improve quality.
53. Positive reports from the judiciary and the Child and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), along with feedback from designated safeguarding leads in schools, confirm senior managers' commitment to delivering effective partnership working. The highly valued and effective FDAC service is an example of their determination to work collaboratively to provide the right support to children and families.
54. Leaders have created a range of effective specialist services, including connected coaches, who provide intensive support to children on the edge of care or who are returning to live with their families, in response to the escalating volume and complexity of children's needs.
55. A wide range of performance information is reported and analysed to help to identify trends in demand and assess the impact of the support provided. However, in a small number of areas, incomplete data inhibits an up-to-date understanding of the needs of children and care leavers. Leaders know this and have plans to improve the data available to them.

56. For some of the most vulnerable children, including those subject to PLO pre-proceedings, there is insufficiently rigorous tracking and oversight of progress to ensure that plans are implemented at the right pace for children.
57. An extensive quality assurance framework helps leaders to maintain clear oversight of activity. Audits provide leaders with a line of sight to frontline practice and are well received by the workforce as an opportunity to pause and reflect on their practice.
58. The quality and impact of supervision are very variable and mean that practitioners, and thereby children, do not always benefit from effective management direction and challenge. Records of supervision are not consistently detailed.
59. The long-standing stability of the workforce enables well-rooted relationships to develop with children and care leavers in East Sussex. Leaders make no secret of the fact that the workforce is their most valuable asset. Staff retention rates are impressive, and time after time inspectors saw children and care leavers who have developed trust and confidence in workers, many of whom have supported them for long periods of time.
60. Workers stay in East Sussex because they feel valued and supported to do well. They hold manageable caseloads and are able to visit children regularly to build effective relationships. They speak highly of the support that they receive from practice managers and they value the range and frequency of learning and development opportunities. These opportunities help workers to develop their professional skills, as well as those who want to progress their careers into more senior roles.
61. Inspectors had the pleasure of meeting a group of articulate, caring and kind young people, all of whom said that they felt safe and had someone to turn to as a trusted adult.

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6 February 2024

Add recipient details (local authority to complete)

To the children and young people in East Sussex

Inspection of children's services

In December 2023, Ofsted inspectors visited your area. They looked at children and young people's experiences of the help, protection and care given to them by workers at the local authority. They also looked at what leaders at the local authority do to make these services better.

We have asked the workers at the local authority to share this letter with you. It tells you the main things that inspectors found. There is a more detailed report on our website that you can read if you would like to.

What grades did inspectors give the local authority?

Judgement	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Good
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Good
The experiences and progress of children in care	Outstanding
The experiences and progress of care leavers	Good
Overall effectiveness	Good

What did the inspectors find?

- Children in East Sussex continue to receive consistently strong and effective support that helps to improve their lives. When children or families need help, this is provided as soon as possible. If children are at risk, social workers and other professionals take action to make them safer.
- Children are helped by experienced social workers who visit them regularly and know them well. Sometimes specialist workers also become involved, so that the right additional support is provided. Specialist services, such as connected coaches and the collaboration against child exploitation (CACE) group for parents, make a big difference to children's lives.
- For a small number of children, the plans created to support them and their families are not clear enough.
- When children are unable to live with their parents or other family members, they live with local foster families or in other homes, where they feel safe and supported.
- Children who cannot live with their families are often supported by the same social worker for a long time. Children get to know and trust their workers, who help them to keep in touch with their friends and family, because they know this is important.
- Older children leaving care are supported to get to know and trust their personal advisers, who provide them with ongoing help as they become adults. Most care leavers receive good support, although sometimes it is not ambitious enough.
- Children in care and care leavers participate in forums and have a voice. Managers look carefully at the feedback completed by children in care and care leavers, and they are looking for more opportunities to increase involvement in discussions about how they can provide the best support.
- Leaders in the council want to do the right things for children and their families. Social workers and personal advisers love working in East Sussex because they feel valued and supported.
- Inspectors had the pleasure of meeting a group of articulate, caring and kind children and young people, all of whom said that they feel safe and have someone to turn to as a trusted adult.

Yours faithfully

Tom Anthony
Lead inspector
His Majesty's Inspector

Ofsted ILACS Action Plan 2024

Improvement Area	Actions	Lead(s)	Timescale
The quality of plans for children and care leavers so that they are all specific, measurable and timebound	<p>Child's Plan and Care Leavers Pathway plan steering group to develop enhanced guidance and implement workforce development plan to strengthen consistency of SMART plans.</p> <p>Case audits to include greater focus on plans being specific, measurable and timebound.</p>	<p>Nicola McGeown (Principal Social Worker)</p> <p>Chris Jackson (HoS Locality)</p> <p>Sally Carnie (HoS Looked After Children)</p>	May 2024
The recording of management oversight, supervision and direction.	<p>Relaunch of Supervision policy across all Practice Managers and Operational Managers.</p> <p>Further development of guidance on recording with mandatory attendance at training.</p> <p>Supervision audit redesigned to include sharper focus on recording of management oversight and challenge</p>	Nicola McGeown, (Principal Social Worker)	June 2024
The oversight, timeliness and rigour of the response to children:	<p>Roll out of Neglect Toolkit across teams</p> <p>Implementation of multi-agency neglect forum.</p>	Nicola McGeown, (Principal Social Worker)	In progress
(i) experiencing neglect, including children in the Public Law Outline pre proceedings and	<p>Implement improvements to Public Outline Tracker and include in performance reporting dashboard.</p> <p>Deliver targeted training on parental assessments to improve timeliness.</p>	<p>Chris Jackson, (HoS Locality)</p> <p>Chris Jackson, (HoS Locality)</p>	<p>March 2024</p> <p>June 2024</p>
(ii) in private fostering arrangements.	Revise and implement procedures regarding visits in private fostering cases (language schools).	Jo Nash, Strategic Lead MASH & DAT	April 2024

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Report to: People Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: 11 March 2024

By: Director of Children's Services

Title: SEND Pressures

Purpose: To provide an overview of the impact of the current SEND framework on ESCC services and how ESCC are responding to increasing demands

RECOMMENDATIONS

1) That People Scrutiny Committee note the pressures that are evident within the SEND system, the impact of these national challenges in East Sussex and the actions that are being taken to address them within the legislative constraints.

1 Background

1.1 The pressures on the SEND system, at a national level, are well documented and there is much evidence of the unintended consequences of the Children and Families Act, which is the legislative framework for SEND. There are a number of changes within the legislation that have led to increased demands, the main ones include:

- A reduction in threshold for eligibility for a statutory assessment, which has resulted in far more children being issued with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP).
- A broadening of the remit of the statutory assessment process to include Health and Care, but with statutory responsibilities for provision (and right of redress) falling disproportionately on Education.
- A strengthening of the rights of parental preference within the legislation, but a lack of resources to meet these raised aspirations.

1.2 As a result of the above, since 2015, Local Authorities across the country have seen:

- Increases in demands for Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments
- Increases in the number of children and young people (CYP) with an Education, Health and Care Plan
- Increases in demands for specialist placements
- Increases in costs in administering the statutory processes and in the provision for children with EHCPs, especially those in the independent/non-maintained sector (INMS)
- Significant pressures on SEND budgets

1.3 Although the impact of the Children and Families Act has varied from one local authority to another, there have been some broad themes that have emerged over the last nine years which demonstrate that the overall SEND system is not operating in the way it was envisaged. This has culminated in a framework which does not deliver improved outcomes for CYP with SEND, does not enable inclusion, undermines parental confidence in local mainstream education, and has led to a significant financial pressure on councils up and down the country, many of whom now require intervention from central government. There are frustrations and pressures across the SEND system for families, schools and local authorities.

1.4 As a result of the ongoing challenges, the DfE undertook an extensive review of the SEND system, involving feedback from the full range of stakeholders, which culminated in the publication of the [SEND and AP Green Paper](#) and associated [SEND and Alternative Provision \(AP\) Improvement Plan](#) in March 2023. Although this correctly identifies some of the key issues within the current system, there is some debate as to whether the proposed solutions are the correct ones.

1.5 In advance of any legislative changes, the DfE have set up regional SEND and AP Change Programme Partnerships (CPPs) in order to test some of the proposals that are within the SEND and AP Improvement Plan. East Sussex is part of the Southeast CPP (along with West Sussex and Brighton and Hove, and led by Portsmouth,) and so we have an opportunity to be involved in the evaluation of the proposals and influence decision-making within the DfE.

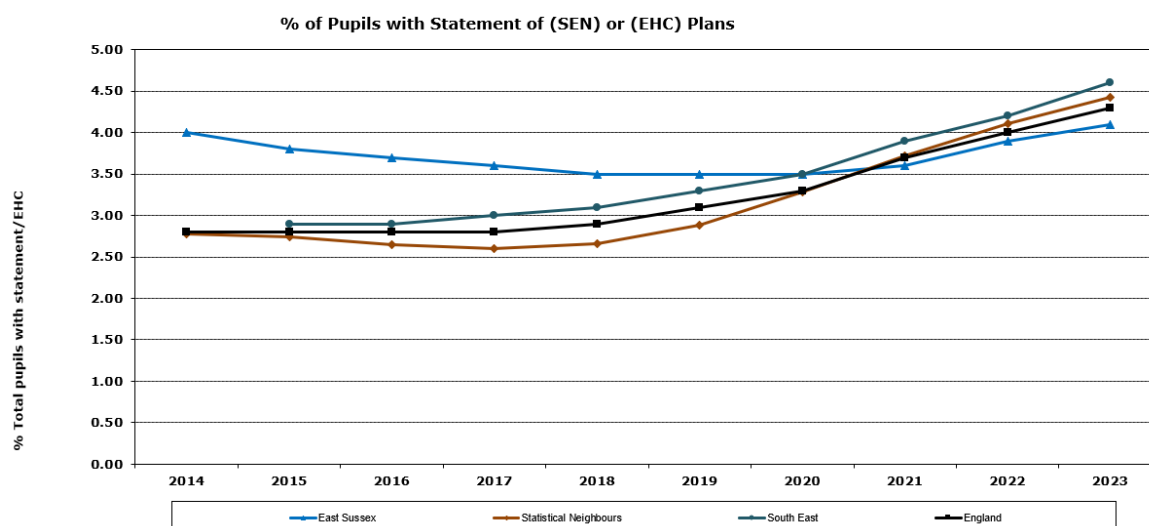
2 Supporting information

Profile of SEND in East Sussex

2.1 At the last national data count, just under 14% of pupils in East Sussex had SEND. This is slightly above national averages and has increased since 2016 when the proportion of children identified by schools as having SEND was well below national and statistical neighbour averages.

2.2 East Sussex County Council currently (at the end of January 2024) maintains just over 4,500 Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) across children aged 0-25. This number has increased by 1,400 over seven years and evidences the increased demand on the Local Authority to issue and maintain significantly more statutory plans in recent years.

2.3 The graph below shows the change in the proportion of school-aged pupils with an EHCP, set against national, regional, and statistical neighbour comparators. For several years East Sussex had well above the national average number of children with an EHCP; over the last three years we have been broadly in line with national figures and are, now, slightly below. This is mainly because the numbers of EHCPs, nationally, have increased at a much faster rate since 2019.



2.4 The level of demand for EHCPs across the county is high and has seen an annual increase since the implementation of the reforms. The number of requests for assessments received last academic year was 1,064; this is almost double the number that we received three years earlier (554). Although not all these requests were agreed for assessment, all of

these must follow a statutory decision-making process to determine an outcome, which is a legal duty of the Council.

2.5 All requests for assessment, and determinations of provision to be included within EHCPs, are considered by a multi-agency panel of professionals from across the Local Authority, schools and Health. This is to ensure that we have a robust decision-making process that provides a clear rationale for our decisions and is linked to the evidence submitted to the panel. To meet current levels of demand, we run two panels each week, each lasting a full day. At times of exceptional demand, we have had to increase this to three per week.

2.6 Despite these high and increasing demands, the Council's performance in completing statutory assessments within the prescribed timescales is good. The most recent national data shows that East Sussex completed 87.6% of new assessments within 20 weeks, compared to a national average of 47.7%.

2.7 Demand for specialist provision across the county is one of the biggest challenges for us as supply is currently not able to meet the number of requests. This is despite opening three new special schools across the county since 2019. Including the number of special schools in the Independent and Non-Maintained Special (INMS) sector, East Sussex has the highest number of special schools per head of school population (3.6 per 10,000 pupils) out of all 19 Local Authorities in the Southeast of England (with an average of 2.3 per 10,000 pupils). As a result of this, we have a very high proportion of our children with EHCPs placed in special schools (40.5% c.f. 34.4% nationally).

2.8 Outcomes for children with SEND across East Sussex compare poorly with national figures¹. The performance of both EHCP and SEN Support pupils was generally below average across primary. For example, EHCP pupils' performance in each of reading, writing and maths at KS1 was ranked in the bottom quartile of local authorities in England. In particular, just 7% of EHCP pupils achieved the expected or higher standard in maths, one of the lowest rates in England. At KS4, the picture is slightly better, with EHCP pupils performing well for the Attainment 8 and Progress 8 measures, but SEN Support students still falling well below average (the second lowest among statistical neighbours, and in the bottom quartile of local authorities in England).

2.9 Staying-on rates in education, employment or training for young people with SEND in East Sussex has also showed a decline. At 85.9%, the proportion of SEN Support pupils remaining in education, employment or training after KS4 was the lowest among statistical neighbours and placed East Sussex in the bottom quartile of England local authorities.

2.10 Absence rates for both EHCP and SEN Support pupils across all phases continued to be higher than the England averages, with East Sussex often ranking in the worst performing quartile of England local authorities. At 9.1%, the overall absence rate of SEN Support pupils in mainstream primary schools was the one of the highest in England, well above the England average of 7.9%. The rate of persistent absentees among SEN Support pupils in East Sussex's mainstream secondary schools was 45.6%, again one of the highest rates of all local authorities in England.

2.11 At 29.1%, the suspension rate of SEN Support pupils across all phases was higher than both the statistical neighbour and England averages and ranked in the lowest performing few local authorities in England. Additionally, at 0.21%, the permanent exclusion rate of SEN Support pupils in mainstream primary schools ranked East Sussex the second lowest among statistical neighbours and in the lowest performing quartile of local authorities in England. However, the suspension rate of EHCP pupils in mainstream primary schools was 11.0%, which was the lowest among statistical neighbours and 2.8% points lower than the England average of 13.8%

¹ Data in paragraphs 2.9 through to 2.11 is from November 2023 national comparators.

Financial Appraisal

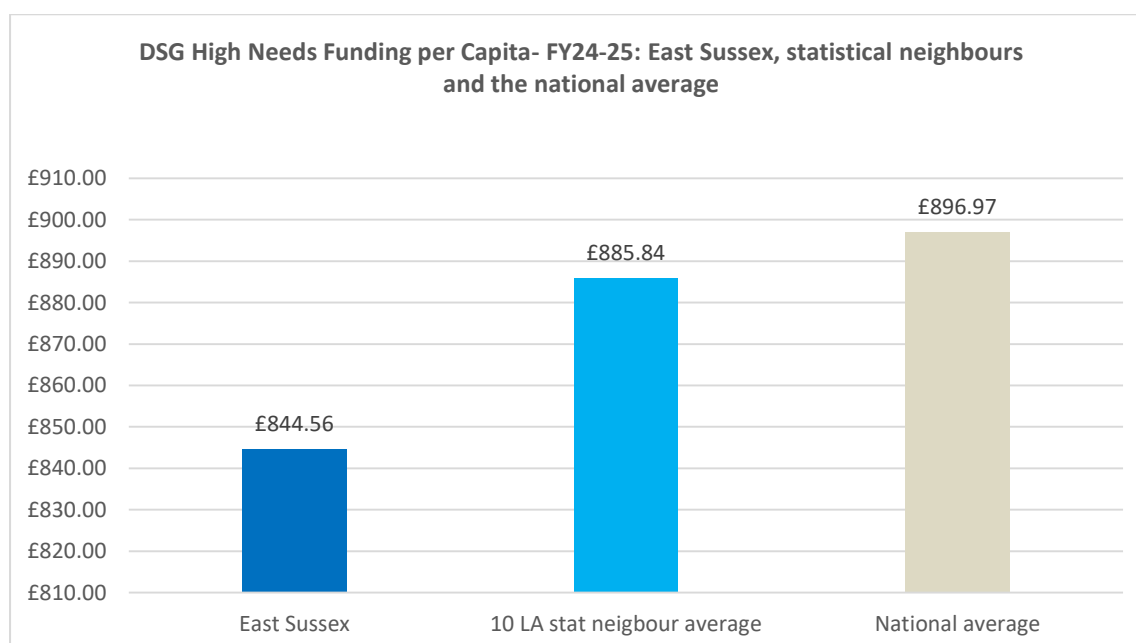
2.12 There are two elements of financial demands around the statutory SEND processes: the costs of undertaking statutory assessments to determine if a child needs an EHCP (this is a statutory function of the LA) and the costs of making provision that is outlined in an EHCP (this is funded through the schools' High Needs Block).

2.13 As outlined in 2.2 above, the level of demand for statutory assessments has almost doubled in the last 3 years yet the central government grant to account for this has not kept up. In the first years following the reforms, a New Burdens Grant was made available to the LA in order to run the statutory processes, but these have since ceased. This has meant that we have had to continually adapt how we utilise our broader staffing complement to ensure that the Local Authority is able to meet our duties consistently.

2.14 The allocation of High Needs Block funding to the Local Authority is determined by a national formula and is allocated to Local Authorities to meet specialist support and provision for pupils with SEND. This includes, amongst other things:

- Top-up funding for mainstream schools (for costs above £6k per child)
- Funding for high needs learners in Further Education (FE) Colleges
- Place and top-up funding for state run special schools and specialist facilities attached to mainstream schools
- Fees for placements in Independent and Non-Maintained Schools
- Personal budgets and packages of support for children with EHCPs not on the roll of a school
- Alternative provision for pupils who are permanently excluded from school
- Specialist support services for schools to improve expertise and inclusive practice in mainstream schools.

2.15 Although a certain element of the funding within the formula is determined by the number of pupils in special schools, overall the level of need and demand is not accounted for in the settlement to Local Authorities. This means that Local Authorities like East Sussex, where a high proportion of EHCPs are in special schools, are disadvantaged by the current funding system. Additionally (as shown in the graph below), East Sussex receives relatively less funding than national average and statistical neighbours per capita.



2.16 The biggest demand on the High Needs Block funding comes from the INMS sector, where the average placement cost is £45,000 per year, and in some cases can be as much as £300,000 per year. In the last financial year, East Sussex spent £18.1m (around 25% of our overall High Needs Budget) on approximately 400 children who attended INMS schools; this year we are forecasting to spend £22.6m on a similar number of pupils. Despite the high costs, the needs of pupils supported in INMS are, for the most part, not more complex than those in our local state-run special schools and are used when our local provision is full. An added complication with the INMS sector is that, unlike state run special schools where the costs are determined by the LA, the law requires us to pay any fee that is determined by the provider; this includes annual price increases which in many cases are above inflation levels.

2.17 The growth in demand for personal education budgets and Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS) packages for children with EHCPs, including an increase in the number that are directed at Tribunal, is a newer challenge for the Local Authority. These are requests from families for bespoke education packages (named in EHCPs) which are not delivered by a single education provider. Some of these will be requested where we are unable to source a school that a parent feels can meet the needs of their child, but others will be where a family feels that a bespoke education package best placed to deliver the provision in an EHCP, often following a period of protracted non-attendance or a school breakdown. In these cases, the Local Authority is either required to source, or fund parents to do so, provision that meets needs outlined in EHCPs which, in addition to educational tuition, will include a range of therapies which need to be sourced in the private sector at inflated costs. Again, this is a national issue, but is placing a significant demand on the Local Authority both in terms of costs of provision and the personnel time taken in sourcing bespoke packages. At the time of writing, 37 children in East Sussex with an EHCP are on an EOTAS package.

2.18 Since 2017, East Sussex has been relatively successful in managing costs within the overall allocation of the High Needs Block. In many other Local Authority areas, Local Authorities have regularly had to ask Schools' Forum to vire funding from the schools' block to the HNB in order to meet pressures or have been dependent on bailouts from central government through the Safety Valve Programme (which comes with additional burdens on those Local Authorities). However, in 2024/25 we are projecting, for the first time in 7 years, a pressure on the High Needs Block.

Managing Demands

2.19 Ensuring that the Local Authority has the right level of staffing to respond to statutory demands has been a key priority for us. Nationally, there have been significant challenges with recruiting to key staffing groups that are fundamental to an effective SEND system:

- Educational Psychologists (EPs): Following a recruitment challenge in 2015 where we lost a number of EPs to neighbouring Local Authorities, we have developed a long-term strategy for recruitment to staff in this group. This strategy includes creating entry-level Assistant EP posts (who we support to get ready for acceptance onto the EP training programme), offering posts to trainee EPs who are undertaking doctoral studies and being funded by one university to support their training programme. Through this we have seen a number of staff not only successfully train as EPs, but also return to East Sussex as qualified psychologists. This means that, despite a national shortage of EPs, East Sussex has a relatively low number of vacancies compared to other Local Authorities.
- Assessment and Planning Officers (APOs): These are responsible for overseeing and administering the statutory processes around Education, Health and Care needs assessments and plans. Following a loss of 50% of this staffing team just over a year ago, we have revised our strategy for recruitment and retention. This has involved breaking up different elements of the roles and employing staff to undertake specific functions. For example, we have created a team of staff to support with Annual Review processes and given a single manager responsibility for induction and Continuing

Professional Development of all our casework staff which means that workloads are more manageable and retention of staff is currently good.

2.20 In order to both manage upward pressure for special school places, and to broaden the expertise of schools in managing more pupils with SEND, we have actively developed specialist facilities, attached to mainstream schools. Since 2019, we have opened five new specialist facilities (three at primary and two at secondary) and have also expanded the number of places in two other specialist facilities. This means that we are able to support more pupils with higher levels of need in their local, mainstream school, alongside their peers.

2.21 Again, in recognition of the need to ensure that we broaden expertise and capacity in local mainstream schools and that the right children get access to special schools, East Sussex has developed a range of specialist support services that work directly with schools to improve inclusive practice. These services provide a responsive offer to schools to either support individual children or improve whole-school practice around SEND and are delivered by different teams in the Education Division.

2.22 In addition to the specialist support available to schools, last year Schools' Forum identified £5m to re-invest into school-run projects to improve inclusive practice in mainstream schools and improve outcomes for children with SEND. Schools were asked to work in partnership to bid for funding and the first of these projects have been rolled out this year. Details of the projects and the schools involved are available on our [Local Offer](#). All projects will be evaluated in terms of their impact in improving inclusive practice with a view to sharing good practice across all schools.

2.23 Although costs within the INMS sector are difficult to manage, East Sussex has had a policy of challenging all excessive levels of costs and agreeing contracts with schools where we place large numbers of pupils that provide a more cost-efficient framework for the Council. This has allowed us to manage costs more effectively in this sector than in other areas, but the recent increases in inflation have been exploited by some schools to ask for disproportionate fees or in-year rises which the council has an obligation to pay.

3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

3.1 Overall, the challenges within the national SEND System are having a significant impact on the Council and keeping up with demands is a big challenge for the CSD. Earlier this month, a debate was held in parliament around the current challenges and East Sussex sent a briefing to all local MPs (Appendix 1) outlining the main drivers and potential solutions that could be explored to address these.

3.2 East Sussex is working closely with our partners and stakeholders to achieve the best possible outcomes for CYP with SEND in East Sussex. We have developed a comprehensive [SEND Strategy](#), based on a comprehensive strategic needs assessment, which sets out our aspirations and how we will achieve these in partnership, across the county. This Strategy is overseen by a SEND Strategy and Governance Board which sets the strategic agenda and works to ensure that all partners in the local system help deliver the aspirations for children with SEND.

3.2 Although East Sussex is part of the national SEND and AP Change Programme and will have the opportunity to feed into any potential changes to the SEND System, it is unlikely that this will have any impact on demand in the short term. Although the SEND and AP Green Paper rightly identifies a number of the challenges within the current system, the DfE is keen to test areas which do not require legislative change and, therefore, the outcomes of the programme are not likely to deliver the transformation that the system needs.

3.3 Despite being able to manage costs relatively well to date, the next financial year is projected to be challenging for the Council, particularly in relation to the costs of provision from the High Needs Block. We are actively working with Schools' Forum to explore how we

manage these cost pressures but, with the ongoing demand for special school places, this will be a challenge moving forward.

ALISON JEFFERY
Director of Children's Services

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Briefing Re Pressures in SEND System

The implementation of the Children and Families Act (2014) placed significant new and unfunded burdens on Local Authorities. The Act made wholesale changes to the previous system and brought with them a range of unforeseen consequences which have been exacerbated by broader societal challenges. This has seen an exponential increase in the number of children being identified as having significant Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, many to the level where it is felt that they cannot be provided for in their local mainstream school.

Local Authorities have, for a number of years, been flagging up problems within the system and a number of different reviews have been initiated to identify those factors which have created a system which is neither sustainable nor is delivering the outcomes that were envisaged for children and young people. Most recently, the SEND Green Paper identified a range of factors (following extensive consultation) some of which are, now, being tested through the SEND and AP Change Programme. Although broad, this change programme has some significant challenges: many of the things that are being tested are not the main drivers for demand nor costs and, more importantly, no legislative changes are being made as part of the programme and so those things which do drive demand and costs are not being addressed.

Set out below are some of the main issues with the current system, alongside some potential solutions, which are leading to both an inequitable and financially unsustainable system:

- The threshold for Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments was lowered as part of the C&F Act (2014) which has resulted in an increase in the demand for LAs who are not resourced to conduct the volume of assessments, let alone the provision which is requested as part of these. Associated with this is the statutory requirement for an Educational Psychologist to be involved in every assessment; this is a profession for which there is a national shortage and Local Authorities are, now, competing with each other to appoint to posts. Furthermore, Schools' Notional SEND Budgets are not sufficient to meet needs of children in their community, nor is this funding ringfenced. This means that there are insufficient resources in local schools to meet emerging SEN and a drive for this to be met with enhancements from the High Needs Block or in specialist settings.

Potential solution: A review of the threshold for a full SEND needs assessment is urgently required. As has been suggested elsewhere, an option would be to give mainstream schools the resources, autonomy and responsibility to support pupils with SEN short of an education, health and care plan (EHCP) without labelling them as such. This would allow for a readjustment of the threshold for accessing an EHCP, met only when it was evident that provision in a mainstream setting was either not possible or was possibly only with specified extraordinary support.

- Fees from Independent and Non-Maintained Special (INMS) Schools have risen significantly over the last few years, often at rates greater than inflation. In East Sussex, our current commitment to placing around 400 pupils with EHC Plans in these schools takes up 25% of our entire SEND budget, with average costs in this sector approaching £50k per pupil per year. LAs have no legal recourse to challenge

unreasonable price increases and the DfE/ISI are reluctant to hold INMS to account in adhering to the limited legislative requirements that are in place.

Potential solution: In addressing the rise in costs in INMS, a national tariff of costs has been mooted by the government on a number of occasions, but never taken forward and LAs have no 'teeth' whatsoever to respond to above-inflationary increases in fees. Establishing a fixed range of fees for pupils associated with their needs would ensure that costs in the independent sector are kept at a manageable level and would lead to a fairer level of resource compared to state-run equivalents. Short of this, giving LAs powers to specify the funding that would be allocated to provide for pupils of specific needs, then giving INMS the option to run provision based on these figures, would create a system that is comparable with other commissioning arrangements. Furthermore, legislating for any entity that receives state funding to be transparent with costs and outcomes would ensure that LAs can deliver better value for money and would deter people moving into the provider sector who, at present, see this as a for-profit investment.

- The Tribunal System is weighted unfairly against councils and local evidence suggests that Tribunals will often opt for a 'gold-plated' offer when this is on the table from the independent sector. The requirement for LAs to be effective custodians of the public purse is not given sufficient weight in decisions which is being exploited by those in the independent sector to present provision at any cost in the knowledge that there is a good chance that it will be deemed more appropriate than a lower-cost offer. Furthermore, judgements will include elements to be funded by the state that have a tenuous link to educational provision, often ignoring a parent's own duties to support their child (e.g. driving lessons).

Potential solution: Tribunals should be required to give greater weight to the costs associated with provision and take into account the need for councils to be responsible custodians of public finances. At present, a council must demonstrate that a school is not an efficient use of resources, which is open to a lot of interpretation by Tribunals. Furthermore, far greater clarity needs to be given with regards to the type of provision that should be funded by different sectors within the system (i.e. Education, Health and Social Care) and Tribunal decisions should be equally binding on all statutory partners, not just the LA.

- The capital programme overseen by the DfE is woefully inefficient and unable to deliver new buildings at the pace the current demand requires. New schools build and opened by Local Authorities are, usually, completed much quicker and have fewer procurement issues than large, national programmes. In East Sussex, we have one special school which was 90% complete when the large contractor appointed by the DfE went into administration. Due to the lack of profit and high risk associated with completing a school that is almost finished, finding a contractor at a national level has already delayed the opening of this school to new children with no sign of a new contractor being appointed any time soon.

Potential solution: A wholesale revision of the way capital projects for new special schools are delivered should be undertaken. At present, local councils only have control over the building of new schools where they have sourced capital funding. All

new DfE funded Free Schools are built through the Department. Evidence shows that the centralised programme is incredibly slow and local councils are far more efficient and effective at running local building programmes. A de-centralised model where more capital funding is devolved to councils (where more provision is needed) to commission and oversee building programmes at a local level would result in a swifter increase in specialist provision.

Set out above is strong evidence for the need for systemic reform to the SEND system that needs legislative change. The implementation of the C&F Act 2014 has been consistently proven to be ineffective in delivering the outcomes for children and their families and the only beneficiaries are the independent providers who are exploiting the limitations on Local Authorities. Although the Change Programme has the potential to make some minor improvements, without a total revision of the thresholds for assessment, the funding mechanisms for mainstream schools, the financial requirements on the private sector and the tribunal system, costs are only likely to rise and more LAs will fall into financial difficulties.

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Report to:	People Scrutiny Committee
Date of meeting:	11 March 2024
By:	The Chairperson of the East Sussex SACRE
Title:	Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) Annual Report
Purpose:	To update Members on the role and work of the East Sussex SACRE

RECOMMENDATION:

The People Scrutiny Committee is recommended to comment on and note:

The work of SACRE in the implementation of the Local Agreed Syllabus, raising the profile and importance of religious education and supporting the high-quality teaching of Religious Education in East Sussex and academies.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This annual report is prepared by East Sussex's Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE). It provides a picture of the support given for Religious Education and Collective Worship during 2022-23. SACRE also provides advice to the Local Authority on matters relating to Religious Education and Collective Worship. This report is a public document sent to the National Association of SACREs (NASACRE) and the Department for Education (DFE).
- 1.2 This academic year has been about strengthening what we do: not only have we focused on supporting those responsible for delivery of the new Agreed Syllabus, but we have also made time and space to listen to the voices of those involved in Religious Education across the county. Our primary and secondary subject networks are established and remain an important part of the offer to schools alongside a wealth of resources to make teaching a rich and rewarding experience. As a result, we too are learning more about what is happening in schools and the impact of this vital subject.
- 1.3 Meetings are well-attended by members who are steadfast in their commitment to the development of high-quality Religious Education for all. Council members are knowledgeable about the area they serve as well as the latest issues in the field. Typically, discussions have focused on effective implementation of the new Agreed Syllabus, the importance of Collective Worship and rigorous self-evaluation of our own work. We have taken the time to reflect on our own policies and practices to make sure they are up-to-date and fit for purpose. This has meant meetings are purposeful and the quality of debate satisfying.

2 Statutory responsibilities – The Local Agreed Syllabus

- 2.1 The East Sussex Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education, 'Faith and Belief in the 21st Century', is the statutory curriculum for all maintained schools in the county and was first taught from September 2022. It was developed with external advice from RE Today in consultation with school and subject leaders, children, young people, and their families. The

curriculum also covers a second resource, 'Understanding Christianity', which is already taught by most of our diocesan schools. This has ensured the syllabus has broad appeal.

- 2.2 The Agreed Syllabus is under licence for five years for all schools in East Sussex. Costs have been met by SACRE and include a programme of professional development for teachers. We are pleased to see the syllabus has also been adopted by several single-academies and smaller multi-academy trusts in the county.
- 2.3 'Faith and Belief in the 21st Century' is up to date and relevant. It focuses on the world's major religions whilst allowing for wider world views and the exploration of thematic, moral, and ethical questions. Teaching, learning and assessment centres on three strands: making sense of beliefs; understanding the impact; and making connections. New schemes of work cover Key Stages 1 to 3 whilst a core programme of study for Key Stage 4 has been developed by Claire Ramalli, our Specialist RE Advisor, and several local teachers with support from RE Today.
- 2.4 This is the first year of a three-year training programme delivered by RE Today through our Subject Networks. These meetings have maintained their popularity and become an essential part of our offer for specialist or non-specialist teachers alike. Claire Rivers, our Primary Lead, and Sam Keddie, our Secondary Lead, bring considerable expertise to the networks, making them hugely worthwhile. Furthermore, Executive Principal, Kirsty Eydmann shares her experience of adapting the syllabus to meet the needs of her pupils with other professionals working in similar settings. Combined, these meetings provide a high level of support to our colleagues working in schools and allow for ongoing feedback into the continued development of the syllabus and our training offer.
- 2.5 Over the course of the year, Subject Network Meetings have benefited from sessions being led by national experts such as Dr Kate Christopher exploring Islam and Worldviews; Stephen Pett discussing the teaching of Hinduism; and Katie Harrison sharing the benefit of her experience on delivery of Collective Worship. In addition to these regular twilight meetings, an annual conference is held for each phase. This year, the primary conference was held online and led by Lat Blaylock whilst the secondary conference was face-to-face, hosted by Chailey School with 14 schools and SACRE represented.
- 2.6 In a recent survey of teachers attending Primary Subject Network Meetings, all respondents indicated they had engaged with and implemented the new Agreed Syllabus. 92% of respondents were positive about the ease at which the new Agreed Syllabus had been incorporated into their school's long-term planning. 88% of respondents were positive about how they had found implementation of scheme's activities and assessments. They said that pupils had found the materials more challenging yet more engaging than those previously used. Whilst teachers appreciated the quality of the complementary resource 'Understanding Christianity' some also reported that it added an additional layer of complexity.
- 2.7 The picture was similar at secondary with the vast majority of respondents being positive about the syllabus. Whilst teachers valued the materials and support on offer it has been more challenging to engage secondary schools and teachers despite a similar offer that comprises twilight sessions, an annual conference and bespoke support. Whilst secondary respondents enjoy online delivery, they also value face-to-face engagement.
- 2.8 The academic year has seen development of protocols for 'Good Practice Visits' which enable Members to see for themselves the excellent work that goes on in schools and to talk first-hand to those responsible for delivery of the Agreed Syllabus. Good Practice Visits are intended to support universal adoption of the Agreed Syllabus in all maintained schools and more widely; identify expertise and facilitate school-to-school support through the Subject Network Meetings; and recognise and celebrate good practice in delivery of the new Agreed Syllabus.

- 2.9 By making visits, Members can see practice across the county, positively re-enforce the work undertaken by schools and be reassured by network leaders of the support being offered. Moreover, visits allow Members to further build their own knowledge and skills as well as deepen their understanding of the quality of religious education. So far this year, visits have been made to Willingdon Primary School and Ratton School - secondary academy in Eastbourne. Upcoming visits include Blackboys Church of England Primary School and Grovelands Community Primary School, Hailsham. Even from the limited number of visits so far, it is clear schools are engaging with the new Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education and are committed to the developing of a thoughtfully designed curriculum.
- 2.10 Helpfully, the local authority has provided SACRE with entry and attainment data. Members understand outcomes have been unevenly impacted by the pandemic. Having said that, comparing entries for 2018, 2019 and 2022, it is evident that take-up of GCSE Religious Studies (Full Course) has fallen below national average. Conversely, attainment compares favourably being above national average for 9–4 and 9–5. Going forward, East Sussex SACRE will promote an increase in entries to the subject whilst aiming to maintain outcomes above the national average.

3 Statutory responsibilities – Collective Worship

- 3.1 It is the responsibility of SACRE to monitor schools' statutory responsibility to hold Collective Worship. Whilst there are many schools across the county that offer impactful Collective Worship, there is also some variation in the system. Therefore, this aspect of our work remains a priority and an area we are keen to better understand through our good practice visits. To further support this, in June 2023, Katie Harrison from the Oak National Academy ran a session through the Primary Subject Network on inclusive, invitational, and inspiring practice.
- 3.2 Parents have a statutory right to withdraw their children from Collective Worship. Guidance on good practice and protocols for withdrawal are made available to schools; the Specialist RE Advisor can also offer further support if needed. SACRE recognises parents' legal right to withdraw but would like to see all children and young people have access to rich and stimulating Collective Worship.
- 3.3 No complaints were made to SACRE during the year about Collective Worship.
- 3.4 There were no requests for a determination to vary statutory requirements. SACRE's Determinations Policy was updated in line with NASACRE guidance and approved in March 2023. The next date for review is March 2025.

4 Links with other organisations

- 4.1 East Sussex SACRE continues to stay connected with national events and views. Our Chairperson, Roy Galley, is a former member of the NASACRE Executive and continues to play an active role in their discussions. He also maintains helpful links with other national organisations such as the Religious Education Council (REC). Work on the new Agreed Syllabus also renewed our co-operation with the Diocese and Archdiocese.
- 4.2 SACRE Members keep up to date through NASACRE termly briefings and regular attendance to online training. The Chairperson also reports on national, regional, and local issues. Training accessed this year by Members included: 'Applying for and gaining a Westhill/NASACRE Award'; 'SACREs – A way forward?'; 'How to effectively use pupil and teacher voice in your SACRE'; 'What's happening to Collective Worship beyond determinations?'; and the enduring 'So, you've joined your local SACRE...'
- 4.3 Our Specialist RE Adviser continues to attend Southeast Central Regional SACRE meetings, engages with good practice from around the region and reports back to the Standing Advisory Council. She is also an executive member of AREIAC and keeps up to date with national reports and research linked to Religion and Worldviews. Through the RE Hub for the

Southeast area, she has begun to participate in their work and become more aware of the events they promote.

- 4.4 SACRE continues to work closely with RE Today on implementation of the Agreed Syllabus. We also draw on resources from the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE) – the subject’s professional association, dedicated to supporting and empowering professionals in the field of Religious Education.

5 Other areas of work

- 5.1 East Sussex SACRE promoted several opportunities across the county including the ‘Jewish Living Exhibition’ which ran in Brighton for several weeks as well as a visit to the Synagogue in Hove which was taken up by several teachers.
- 5.2 Given our focus on the development of the new Agreed Syllabus, there was no additional training offered to governors this year however we will be restarting this programme with a session on Collective Worship next year.
- 5.3 Our Chairperson engaged with schools through the ‘Virtual Schoolbag’ (VSB), writing to thank them for their work on making the new Agreed Syllabus such a success and later in the year congratulating them on their GCSE outcomes for Religious Studies.

6 SACRE arrangements

- 6.1 There were three meetings of SACRE during 2023, held in a hybrid format, allowing in-person or online attendance which enabled all our meetings to be quorate. Meetings were held:
- 17 November 2022 Attendance: 55%
 - 2 March 2023 Attendance: 70%
 - 15 June 2023 Attendance: 87%
- 6.2 The Annual General Meeting (AGM) was also held on 2 March 2023. Roy Galley was reappointed Chairperson and Peter White appointed Vice Chairperson. All meetings are open to the public and minutes are available online. Two Members stepped down over the course of the year.
- 6.3 Representatives of the Diocese of Chichester and the Archdiocese of Arundel regularly attend meetings. We continue to have fair representation across faiths and from those of no faith. Representatives include Church of England, Muslim, long-serving Unitarian, Bahai and Jewish Members. Although we are very aware of the importance of expanding our membership to reflect the diversity of faith and belief in the county, recruiting new members remains a considerable challenge. In a similar way, the membership reflects the wide range of schools in the county and includes primary, secondary, diocesan, maintained, academies, and special schools.
- 6.4 An undoubted highlight of each meeting is the opportunity for members to share their belief through a standing item called ‘My World, My Faith’. This allows Members to develop a deeper and more personal understanding of faith and belief in the communities they serve. Visiting speakers have included Oliver Stevens, Lead Elder from the King’s Church in Eastbourne, who gave an overview of his work and offered to facilitate school visits to the Church. Feedback from the Primary and Secondary Subject Network Meetings as well as Special Schools has also taken on increased importance.
- 6.5 This was the final year of our three-year development plan. Over the lifespan of the plan considerable progress has been made in supporting the quality of RE teaching and learning in all schools alongside a review of the Agreed Syllabus. SACRE has also taken significant steps to improve the effectiveness of our own work through rigorous self-evaluation and robust review of policies, procedures, and protocols.

- 6.6 The next iteration of the development plan is tightly aligned to our self-evaluation and whilst we have actions in each of the five sections, SACRE has identified the 'standards and quality of provision of Religious Education', 'Collective Worship' and 'contribution to promoting cohesion across the community' as main priorities going into the next cycle.
- 6.7 Underpinning this growth will be more good practice visits to schools, continuing support for the Subject Network Meetings and development of SACRE's page on the Local Authority's website through which we aim to provide authoritative and trustworthy resources to schools. Moreover, we will utilise the expertise at our disposal to broaden our training offer and improve the support we provide for the delivery of Collective Worship. Finally, we will continue to encourage visits to SACRE from a diverse range of faith groups from across the county, so they better understand our work and any potential role for them.
- 6.8 Each meeting has a budget update and closes with consideration of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion. New role descriptors and a five-year forward plan were considered and adopted in June 2023. All other documents are on a two-year review cycle to ensure they support Members as they discharge their statutory duties.
- 6.9 SACRE continued to receive a budget of £15,000. This has enabled us to maximise our role by securing advice from our Specialist RE Advisor. It has also paid the licence fees for the new Agreed Syllabus and the accompanying support package from RE Today. Furthermore, our funding supports the continued growth of the Subject Network Meetings as well as engagement with NASACRE including attendance to their annual conference. SACRE is supported by Children's Services through provision of a Representative and an experienced Clerk.
- 6.10 Although funding for the next two years has been reduced to £10,000, because the license fees for the new Agreed Syllabus have now been paid, it allows us to maintain all our current activities. This amount is an increase to the budget typically received prior to SACRE's review of the Agreed Syllabus. Having said that, to realise our ambition for an annual student conference, we will seek to gain additional funding from external sources such as professional organisations and charities.

7 Advice to the Local Authority

- 7.1 SACRE is legally obliged to produce an Annual Report and it is best practice for this to be considered by the County Council. The following advice is given by SACRE to the Local Authority:
- Support SACRE in understanding how the local authority promotes community cohesion and how we can diversify representation of Members to better reflect the wide range of faith and belief across the county.
 - Help strengthen the evaluation of standards and quality of provision for Religious Education in schools by working in partnership with SACRE, providing data when appropriate, and harnessing the potential of the school-led system.

Councillor Roy Galley
Chair of SACRE

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