

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

MINUTES of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee for Children's Services held at County Hall, Lewes on 16 March 2015.

PRESENT: Councillors Kathryn Field (Chair), Stephen Shing (Vice Chair), Claire Dowling, Michael Ensor, Roy Galley, Alan Shuttleworth and Francis Whetstone.

Nicola Boulter (Parent Governor Representative).
Cllr Johanna Howell (District & Borough Council Representative).

Lead Members: Councillors Sylvia Tidy (Lead Member Children & Families / designated statutory Lead Member for Children's Services).
Nick Bennett (Lead Member for Learning & School Effectiveness)

Senior Democratic Services Advisor Martin Jenks

Also present Stuart Gallimore, Director of Children's Services; Fiona Wright, Assistant Director (Schools, Youth & Inclusion Support); Mark Whiffin, Head of Finance, Stuart McKeown, Senior Democratic Services Adviser

32. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

32.1 RESOLVED – to confirm as a correct record the minutes of the last Committee meeting held on 17 November 2014.

33. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

33.1 Apologies for absence were received from

Councillors Kim Forward, Trevor Webb (substituting for Cllr Forward), Ann Holt (Church of England Diocese Representative) and Catherine Platten (Parent Governor Representative).

34. DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS

34.1 None.

35. URGENT ITEMS

35.1 No urgent matters were notified.

36. IN YEAR ATTAINMENT DATA FOR SCHOOLS 2015

36.1 The Chair introduced the report by clarifying that the attainment data summarised in the report was collected at the end of Term 2 and is focused on trends, rather than individual schools.

36.2 The Assistant Director (Schools, Youth & Inclusion Support) provided an overview of the attainment data in the report. The purpose of the data collection exercise is to enable schools and providers of school improvement services to identify where there

may be challenges around performance in the summer. This enables appropriate actions to be taken with schools to address those areas of under-performance.

36.3 During last year a similar strategy was deployed and an evaluation of the interventions was undertaken. Only those interventions which have had a consistent impact across a range of schools have been taken forward. As a consequence, the Standards and Learning Effectiveness Service (SLES) is confident that the intervention strategies on offer will be effective.

36.4 The department started collecting in year performance data for the first time last year at the end of Key Stage 2 (KS2) and GCSE. This year a wider set of data was collected including:

- Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)
- Key Stage 1(KS1): Number and percentage of Year 2 pupils currently working at Level 1A+ in each of Reading, Writing and Mathematics;
- Key Stage 2(KS2): Number and percentage of Year 6 pupils currently working at Level 3A+ in Reading, Writing and Mathematics (combined) and in each of these subjects separately
- Key Stage 4(KS4): Most likely predicted outcomes for pupils achieving five or more GCSEs at A*-C, including English and Mathematics.

36.5 The Standards and Learning Effectiveness Service (SLES) has identified very clearly which schools will need support, and where those schools will need to make improvements. Section 3 of the report outlines the criteria that are used to target interventions. The aim is to review performance with schools during Term 3 and have interventions in place by the end of Term 4. Not all intervention activities on offer are delivered by the SLES, some are commissioned from other providers.

36.6 The Assistant Director (Schools, Youth & Inclusion Support) outlined the predicted attainment levels based on the data that the department has received. The key findings are:

- If the KS1 results are in line with the predicted levels of attainment, then there will be a significant improvement. The trajectory of improvement is steeper than it has been previously. The department is a little cautious about the predicted results as they did not collect KS1 data last year.
- The predicted KS2 attainment data is slightly disappointing. This year there is an improvement with 73.5 % of pupils achieving or exceeding level 3a in reading, writing and maths combined and are therefore predicted to achieve level 4b or above. This compares with 72% last year, but is not as strong an improvement as hoped for. Therefore KS2 has been made a priority for interventions.
- For KS4 the predicted results for achieving five or more GCSEs at A*-C (including English and Mathematics) range between 63% at the highest and 56% at the lowest. The most likely results are 59% to 60%, which represents a significant improvement in outcomes and above national average this year.

36.7 The Committee discussed the report and examined a number of issues that arose from the predicted attainment results. The Chair also relayed a number of questions raised by Catherine Platten via email.

Predicted attainment levels

36.8 The Committee welcomed the predicted improvement in attainment levels which provides an encouraging picture for school performance. This has been accompanied by a lower number of schools across the County which are in Ofsted categories of 'special measures' or 'requires improvement'. This has been thanks to targeted intervention and a huge effort to lift school performance.

36.9 Over the past two years the SLES has put in place a robust process to support and challenge school performance in East Sussex. The department believes that this is starting to show results. In future it will be increasingly important that resources at school level are targeted effectively to improve attainment. The challenge for the East Sussex County Council (ESCC) will be to make sure this happens.

Value added measures and those not achieving 5 GCSEs

36.10 The Key Stage 4 (KS4) results focus on those children that are likely to achieve 5 GCSE's and grades A-C including English and Mathematics. The Committee asked how the progress of children who do not meet these targets is measured and monitored. The analysis that has been undertaken of KS4 results does not capture those pupils who are not working at this level, but it will pick up the cohort whose performance is lower than expected.

36.11 At this stage in the school year, the department does not have data on value added measures and data on individual children. Both schools and Ofsted do look at how different children perform throughout their school career. Ofsted inspections aim to make sure there is progress over time.

36.12 The prior attainment performance data that schools receive is broken down into groups (e.g. by gender, free school meals, ethnic background, special educational need and disability etc.) Comparison data is provided so schools can take proper attainment into account when supporting children's learning. The practice of schools focussing on the performance of those pupils at the D/C grade boundary has improved, with a greater emphasis on all children's performance, including the higher performers.

Consistency of data collection from schools

36.13 The provision of the interim data from schools is not a statutory requirement, but ESCC does have a duty to know all schools. Therefore ESCC cannot require schools to provide interim data, but works with them to collect data based on accepted good practice. Guidelines are given to schools on how to collect good data to ensure consistency. Performance data is collected at the end of Term 2 and Term 4.

36.14 Last year 14% of schools underperformed against their own data. The analysis of the data aims to establish the reasons why there are inconsistencies in performance results. The SLES team has targeted these schools for intervention and has carried out some work around the accuracy of assessments.

36.15 Some schools collect performance data using a different methodology, others supplied no data at all. This is frustrating, but ESCC cannot force schools to provide interim performance data or provide it in a standard format.

Data collection measures and Fisher Family Trust (FFTD) target

36.16 Free School Meals (FSM) ever 6 is a measure that includes all children who have been in receipt of free school meals at some time in their last six years at school. FSM (ever 6) is used at a national level to define children in receipt of free school meals.

36.17 The SLES team does not think the Fischer Family Trust D (FFTD) target is too aspirational for East Sussex schools. If all schools achieve the FFTD target then East Sussex will meet the national average performance levels. There are some schools that exceed the FFTD target, but it may be a significant stretch for schools with children with low prior attainment. The FFTD target is used to encourage schools to set challenging targets and raise school aspirations.

36.18 The basis for collecting KS2 data has been changed this year so that separate results, as well as combined results, for reading, writing and mathematics are collected. This has been changed so that interventions can be made more precisely if there are identified weaknesses in particular subjects. This change may have depressed results slightly, but there has been progress compared with last year.

36.19 Interim performance data has been collected for the first time for KS1 and the early years foundation stage (EYFS). This and other interim data collection is designed to allow the SLES to identify risks around performance and intervene appropriately. Schools also have responsibility and their own resources for school improvement. The interim performance data helps schools to identify the need for more intervention and highlight the key issues.

Destination measures

36.20 The Committee asked if destination data could be provided for those pupils leaving KS4 and secondary school, especially whether they go on to university. The Assistant Director (Schools, Youth & Inclusion Support) commented that this data was reported to the Scrutiny Committee last year, and included data on the number of pupils going on to places at the Russell Group Universities. The department does have a report for this year and the Assistant Director (Schools, Youth & Inclusion Support) will see if it is ready to distribute.

Summary and actions

36.21 The department has confidence in the data, the processes involved in identifying weaknesses in performance and the targeted interventions that have been put in place. Having taken this approach of intervening early and in a targeted way for a second year, the department believes this will build a sound foundation for improved attainment in the future.

36.22 The Committee asked if the Director of Children's Services could provide a range of information about children who are working below the 5 GCSE grades A-C level and what happens to them in terms of their performance and outcomes.

36.23 RESOLVED: – It was resolved to request the Director to provide information on children who are working below the 5 GCSE grades A-C level to a Scrutiny Committee "Away Day" so that the Committee can examine what happens to these children in terms of their performance and outcomes.

37. STANDING ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (SACRE)

37.1 The Chair of the Standing Advisory Committee on Religious Education (SACRE), introduced the report, which contains up to date performance data for Religious Education (RE). The purpose of the report is to raise the profile of the work that SACRE undertakes and the plans for future work. SACRE would welcome any suggestions from the Scrutiny Committee on how to spread information about its work further. The report includes a letter from Lord Nash in appendix 1 which outlines the responsibilities of SACRE; the need to review the RE syllabus every five years; and the requirement to submit annual reports to the national body.

37.2 The GCSE results for Religious Studies and the take up of the full and short courses are contained in appendix 2 of the report. The results for East Sussex are mixed but are not too far from the national average. The SACRE development plan is contained in appendix 3 of the report. This includes annual activity such as the training plan and an annual questionnaire which is sent out to schools. Members of SACRE also undertake School visits and attend Governors meetings throughout the year.

37.3 Actions that address pupil's spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development are contained within the SACRE development plan. New guidelines on promoting British values through SMSC were issued in November 2004 by the Department for Education (DfE).

37.4 The Committee discussed the report and the work of SACRE. The Committee debated a number of issues which are summarised below.

The teaching of Religious Studies in schools

37.5 The Committee commented that Religious Studies is taught very well in primary schools, but very few secondary schools offer a GCSE in Religious Studies. There are concerns about the standard of teaching at secondary level, with RE being delivered through the Personal, Social and Health Education (PHSE) syllabus. Secondary schools do not appear to cover Christianity and other faiths in any great depth.

37.6 The level of take up of the short course is very positive. Secondary schools such as Bishop Bell (Church of England) and St. Richards (Roman Catholic) appear to be meeting demand for GCSE at secondary level, despite the lack of provision elsewhere.

37.7 The report recognises the challenges in teaching Religious Education (RE) locally and nationally. There is a problem with recruiting RE teachers. A £4,000 - £9,000 training bursary is being offered by the DfE to encourage high quality teachers to take up RE teaching.

SMSC and British values

37.8 Spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development is the overall syllabus within which RE and British values are taught. Ofsted will be inspecting SMSC and the teaching of British values within this subject area. There is information on the DfE web site regarding the curriculum and schools should not find SMSC teaching challenging.

37.9 The Committee commented that British values are about respecting other people's beliefs and faiths. An understanding of different religions and ways of life is important for all young people. RE teaching is also important in developing an understanding of the art, literature and culture of the United Kingdom.

Concluding comments

37.8 The Lead Member for Learning and School Effectiveness explained that there will be input to school governors on SACRE's work through the Schools Forum. The Committee expressed their gratitude for SACRE's work.

37.9 RESOLVED: – It was resolved to agree the recommendations of the report to:

- 1) note the work of SACRE in improving the quality of religious education;
- 2) note the three year development plan for SACRE; and
- 3) continue to support SACRE in its role in promoting British values.

38. RECONCILING POLICY, PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES (RPPR) 2015/16

38.1 The Director of Children's Services introduced the report. He noted the views previously expressed by the Committee that they would have liked more choice around the reductions to service budgets. As the Council is very close to starting to look at the next medium term financial plan, there is an opportunity for the Committee to reflect on and feed into the next corporate budget setting process.

38.2 The Committee discussed the idea of holding an "Away Day" to review the impact on services of the reductions in funding that had already taken place. It would be useful to start with areas of statutory service provision and then look at levels service provision provided by the department. The Committee thought it would be helpful to look in more

detail at some service areas and suggested undertaking a number of structured visits to see a range of front line services at first hand.

38.3 The Director of Children's Services stated that the department would be happy to arrange visits to front line services, or attendance at Scrutiny Committee meetings by particular services. He will liaise with the Senior Democratic Services Advisor to put in place arrangements for the visits. The issue of statutory levels of service provision is more difficult because it involves a judgement about the level of risk involved and the depth of the service offer.

38.4 The Lead Member for Children and Families agreed that it is important to know the statutory level of service, but it is important to maintain service levels. At present ESCC's children's social care services have been judged by Ofsted as 'Good' with some service areas 'Outstanding'. The Lead Member for Children and Families warned that if services were allowed to slip down to 'Inadequate', it would take a lot more resources to bring them back up to 'Good'.

38.5 The THRIVE programme has recently won two awards for the services it provides. The Committee sent its congratulations to all the staff involved in the service for this success and in recognition of their work.

38.6 The Committee agreed that they would like to start looking at the budget setting process earlier than in previous years and will hold an "Away Day" to start this process. The Committee also agreed that it would like to undertake a number of visits to front line services as part of this work.

38.7 RESOLVED: - It was resolved to:

- 1) note the recommendations of the report;
- 2) hold an "Away Day" for the Scrutiny Committee to examine the impact on services of the changes to funding that have already been implemented as part of the current medium term financial plan; and
- 3) undertake a number of structured visit to front line services.

39. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

39.1 The Committee discussed the work programme and the potential areas for future reports and scrutiny reviews.

39.2 The Chair of the Raising the Participation Age (RPA) Scrutiny review board gave an update to the Committee on the progress of the review. The review board has found that the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) in East Sussex is low and the review board is now examining careers advice provision. The review board has visited Priory School in Lewes and attended the Youth Conference to gather evidence about careers provision.

June Meeting

39.3 The Committee asked if it would be possible to have a report at the 15 June 2015 meeting on the outcomes of the Serious Case Reviews that have been undertaken. The Director of Children's Services stated that he thought that this would be possible, but he would check with the Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB).

39.4 In the light of the announced changes to funding for children's mental health services, the Committee asked for an initial report to be brought to the June Scrutiny Committee meeting on how ESCC's Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) will benefit from the improved funding.

September Meeting

39.5 The Committee requested a report on the THRIVE programme be brought to the Scrutiny Committee being held on the 21 September 2015 to update the Committee on

the end of the programme and to examine any financial implications for the budget setting process.

RESOLVED: It was resolved that the work programme will be amended in line with paragraphs 36.23, 38.7, 39.3, 39.4 and 39.5 above.

40. FORWARD PLAN

40.1 The Committee considered the Forward Plan for the period 1 March 2015 to 30 June 2015. The Senior Democratic Services Advisor outlined the items on the Forward Plan that were relevant to the remit of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee.

40.2 The Committee requested that at briefing on the outcome of the consultation on the proposed changes to Discretionary Home to School Transport be emailed to the Scrutiny Committee members prior to the Lead Member meeting on the 12 October 2015.

41. URGENT ITEMS

41.1 None received.

The meeting ended at 11.40 am.

The date of the next meeting is Monday 15 June 2015

COUNCILLOR KATHRYN FIELD
Chair