

MINUTES of the meeting of the **CHILDREN, FAMILIES, LIFELONG LEARNING & CULTURE SELECT COMMITTEE** held at 10.00 am on 21 September 2020 at REMOTE MEETING.

These minutes are subject to confirmation by the Committee at its meeting on Monday, 14 December 2020.

Elected Members:

- * Amanda Boote
- * Mr Chris Botten (Vice-Chairman)
- * Liz Bowes
- * Robert Evans
- * Mrs Kay Hammond (Chairman)
- * Mrs Yvonna Lay
- * Peter Martin
- * Lesley Steeds (Vice-Chairman)
- * Barbara Thomson
- * Chris Townsend
- * Mr Richard Walsh

Co-opted Members:

- Mr Simon Parr, Diocesan Representative for the Catholic Church
- * Mrs Tanya Quddus, Parent Governor Representative
- * Mr Alex Tear, Diocesan Representative for the Anglican Church, Diocese of Guildford

19/20 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS [Item 1]

Apologies were received from Simon Parr.

20/20 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING: 28 JULY 2020 [Item 2]

The minutes were agreed as a true record of the meeting.

21/20 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST [Item 3]

Members of the Select Committee held personal interests in Item 5. Those interests were not considered to be prejudicial and thus did not prevent the Members from participating in the discussion of the report.

Declarations:

- Chris Botten – Local Leader of Governance; Chair of Governance at Holland Junior School and Burstow Primary School.
- Robert Evans – Vice-Chair of Governors at Stanwell Fields C of E School.
- Tanya Quddus – Parent Governor at Grovelands Primary School.
- Peter Martin – Chairman of Governors at St Catherine’s School, Bramley.
- Richard Walsh – Governor at Littletons C of E Primary School.

- Chris Townsend – Governor at City of London Freemen’s School.

22/20 QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS [Item 4]

1. A Member asked how many, and what proportion of, looked-after children and care leavers lived in unregulated accommodation and what steps were taken to safeguard such young people from criminal exploitation.
2. The Assistant Director – Children’s Resources responded that the provision of a sufficient number of suitable placements for looked-after children and care leavers was a statutory duty. It was acceptable to place young people above the age of sixteen in unregulated accommodation when they needed support to achieve independence. If an accommodation provider was also providing care, then that setting would be regarded as an unregistered children’s home. It was the responsibility of the council to quality assure supported accommodation provision; a provider must submit a statement of purpose and a location risk assessment that details issues such as the risk of criminality. The Quality Assurance Team had oversight of all semi-independent providers and the council’s dynamic purchasing system invited providers to submit applications to the system, which are the subject to a quality assurance process. A child with care needs can only be placed in unregulated provision with the agreement of the Director – Social Care and with additional layers of quality assurance and supervision arrangements in place. The shortage of placements, particularly for children with the most complex needs, was a national issue.
3. The Member asked whether the council carried out regular visits to these settings. The Assistant Director stated that children’s social workers visited looked-after children at least every six weeks and more frequently visited those in unregulated or unregistered provision. An Independent Reviewing Officer had oversight of care plans and carried out regular statutory reviews for looked-after children in regulated placements. The role of regulator is fulfilled by the council for unregulated or unregistered accommodation settings. In the case of unregulated or unregistered accommodation, the council is subject to its own internal quality assurance assessments, i.e. due diligence and unannounced visits.

Action:

- i. For the Assistant Director – Children’s Resources to provide the proportion of looked-after children and care leavers living in independent accommodation and the steps taken to safeguard young people from criminal exploitation.

23/20 SCHOOL GOVERNOR SUPPORT [Item 5]

Witnesses:

Julie Iles, Cabinet Member for All-Age Learning

Liz Mills, Director – Education, Learning and Culture

Jane Winterbone, Assistant Director – Education

James Durrant, School Governor at Oakwood School

Key points raised during the discussion:

1. A Member asked what the main challenges faced by school governors were and what support was in place to enable governors to overcome these challenges. The Cabinet Member responded that the role of school governor was a demanding position that placed many responsibilities and a significant workload on the volunteers undertaking the role: including the requirement to keep up to date with legislative changes, the variety of skills required of governing bodies, and holding schools to account regarding the discharge of their duties owed to looked-after children and children with additional needs. The Cabinet Member highlighted that governors freely volunteer their time in the best interests of their school communities. A school governor commented that there was a wide range of places from which school governors could access information and support, and that, before reading the report, she had been unaware that support from Cognus was available, and asked how governors were made aware of such support. The Director assured members that the Service was constantly trying to improve the accessibility of information and support available to governors.
2. A Member queried whether academy schools received the same level of support as local authority funded schools. The Director explained that the council's statutory duties were different for non-maintained schools, and that the council had a responsibility to appoint local authority governors to community schools. The council, however, went beyond its statutory responsibilities by endeavouring to provide accessible governance information and support to schools of all types, as part of a holistic approach to maintaining strength in Surrey's entire school system.
3. A Member who was a governor of an independent school commented that he had never received governance information from the council in that role. The Assistant Director explained that all independent schools received a weekly information bulleting from the Schools Relationships Team, but it was then the responsibility of the schools to disseminate that information. The Assistant Director offered to add the Member to the bulletin's circulation list. A member of the Surrey Governance Association (SGA) asked if it would be possible for such information to disseminated directly to representatives of governing bodies, as the council maintained a database of governors.
4. A Vice-Chairman asked whether governors would like to receive support in any additional areas. The Cabinet Member explained that webinars provided throughout the COVID-19 pandemic had been a positive additional resource and were well attended by governing bodies; subsequently, recordings of the briefings had been made available for retrospective viewing. The council was

working with the SGA to increase the schedule of availability through the Schools Alliance for Excellence (SAfE) in order to make information more accessible. The Assistant Director added that a number of webinars had been scheduled for the following school term and these would focus on usual governance business, rather than purely on COVID-19 related issues. At the webinars, governors could provide feedback on topics they wanted to be covered in future sessions and SAfE was receptive to these requests – the next webinar was to look at finance, as this had been requested at a previous session.

5. A Member stated that, out of the 5,600 school governor posts in Surrey, approximately 400 (1 in 14 governors) attended the webinars. The Member questioned how those who did not attend were communicated and engaged with. The Cabinet Member informed the Select Committee that she met with Cognus on a termly basis to discuss these matters and the importance of governors keeping their training records up to date. The Director stated that the Service was in its second year of working with Cognus; this organisation was not well known, and the Service would be seeking feedback for how they could improve joint working. The Assistant Director stated that the recordings of webinars could be viewed retrospectively, so viewing figures could be higher than the 1 in 14 who attend the live sessions.
6. A Member commented that SAfE had proved invaluable during the pandemic and that they were pleased with the level of support provided. However, in cases of children with safeguarding needs, when a timely response regarding the delivery of social support was required, school governors lacked support. The Member asked what was being done to improve support for governors with this challenge and improve the council's response times. The Director replied that there was an embedded family resilience system across children's social care. The Children's Single Point of Access (C-SPA) was the first point of contact for all concerns regarding children and where safeguarding concerns should be escalated. Schools had a statutory responsibility to lead in respect of early help and understanding their pupils' needs. Nevertheless, where further support was required, the Safeguarding Partnership would consider requests for support and connect them to interventions appropriate to the level of need. Governors had an important role in ensuring such arrangements were in place in schools; to help them in this role, Strictly Education (with whom the council had a non-compete clause in this respect) offered training on safeguarding and inclusion to lead governors of safeguarding. In the upcoming school term, council officers would be leading on the provision of training on trauma-informed practice and looked-after children via a webinar hosted jointly by SAfE and the Head Teacher of Surrey's Virtual School. Online training through the Safeguarding Partnership and Designated Safeguarding Lead Network meetings was also available and led by the Education Safeguarding Team. Questions from head teachers or governors were encouraged to ensure that governors received the support with safeguarding queries.

7. A Member expressed concern over the number of sources of information and support for governors. They asked how the council intended to provide a more strategic approach to improve the current fragmented system of governance support. The Director submitted that the fragmented system of governance support was due to the fragmented English education system, and informed the Select Committee that, in Surrey, there was a review of governance arrangements underway in order to ascertain how arrangements could be streamlined to improve access of information for governors. The Member welcomed the review and requested that its outcome be reported to the Select Committee.
8. A Member asked what was being done to recruit school governors. The Director stated that the difficulties of recruitment were largely caused by the increasing responsibilities, time commitments and level of accountability placed upon school governors. The recruitment methodology and campaigns were to be improved over the coming year and the Leaders in Governance programme was ongoing. The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting lack of face-to-face meetings could further change the recruitment landscape. The Cabinet Member informed the Select Committee that she met with Cognus on a termly basis to discuss governor vacancies; the skillset of a person put forward to be a governor and recommendations from associated contacts were all considered during the recruitment process.
9. A Member asked how many school governor vacancies there were. The Assistant Director agreed to provide this information to the Select Committee.
10. A Member asked what was being done to increase the diversity of school governing boards. The Director agreed that there was a lack of diversity across Surrey's education system and work needed to be undertaken to increase workforce diversity and ensure that all children felt represented in their schools. Conversations regarding this issue had taken place with school leadership councils and SAfE, and the council had extended the offer of unconscious bias training to schools. The Director assured the Select Committee that encouraging greater diversity in the work force would be a priority over the coming year.
11. A Member asked whether head teachers who sat on their school's board of governors had a conflict of interest making it difficult for governing boards to hold the head teachers to account and what advice was given to governors in this regard. The Director stated that it was important that a governing body held head teachers to account and had real oversight of the operation of school whilst avoiding conflicts of interest. The Assistant Director stated that an effective head teacher would help a governing body to be strategic in its role in order to avoid generating a conflict of interest. It was critical that governors could triangulate information received from different sources to corroborate information provided by head teachers, to avoid over-relying on the latter. A member of the SGA stated that head teachers had the right to be governors and governing bodies had a duty to challenge Head Teacher.

Actions:

- I. For the Assistant Director, Education to share the number of school governor vacancies with the Select Committee.
- II. For the Director – Education, Learning and Culture to report the outcome of the review of school governance arrangements in Surrey to the Select Committee.

24/20 VERBAL UPDATE ON THE REOPENING OF SCHOOLS [Item 6]

Witnesses:

Julie Iles, Cabinet Member for All-Age Learning

Liz Mills, Director – Education, Learning and Culture

Key points raised during the discussion:

1. The Director summarised that most Surrey schools had reopened as expected, but some had remained closed due to flooding. Some schools with a large number of high-needs children had initially adopted an approach of partial opening. Such schools were receiving targeted support to fully reopen. The council had published information encouraging parents to return their children to school. School attendance in Surrey was higher than the usual number of children. However, there had been a higher-than-average number of children being withdrawn from school to receive home education – targeted work on this issue was being undertaken. Social workers and Special Educational Needs teams were being equipped with materials to reinforce the back to school campaign. Some schools had experienced staff or student absences due to COVID-19, but all schools had risk assessment plans in place and were relying on 'bubbles' of children in school. Overall, the Director was pleased with the work that was ongoing between school leaders, the Schools Alliance for Excellence (SAfE), and public health teams, despite the receipt of Department for Education guidance at a late stage. Work to encourage vulnerable learners to attend school was continuing to go well, with a dedicated team monitoring this. Throughout the summer term, the Learners Single Point of Access (L-SPA) had launched and provided parents and professionals with guidance and support and had proved a positive addition, with 60% of enquiries resolved at first contact – the launch of the L-SPA was welcomed by the Chairman. Some of the additional central government funding obtained through the COVID-19 grant was being used to provide a support package to assist the narrowing of the learning gap that resulted from extended school absences and closures during the pandemic. Support pathways for vulnerable learners with anxiety who were struggling to return to school were being developed. Some concerns remained; for example, the Test and Trace system had created unsatisfactory waiting times for testing. The Chair of the Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership

had relayed these concerns to the Department for Education. Family interventions for vulnerable children and further targeted work with schools were needed; and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the wellbeing of children was also a concern – enhanced training on domestic abuse was being provided to Designated Safeguarding Leads.

2. The winter flu season was a concern in terms of workforce resilience. The Service was supporting health colleagues with the delivery of the immunisation programme.
3. A Member asked what proportion of pupils who were expected to return to school had done so. The Director informed members that attendance was slightly lower than at the same time last year, albeit this figure was higher in Surrey than the national average. The Director assured the Select Committee that more work would be done to ensure all pupils who were expected to attend school were doing so.
4. A Member asked how many children and staff across the county had tested positive for COVID-19 since the beginning of the new school term and what the standard guidance was for schools when a child tested positive. If a child or teacher was displaying symptoms of COVID-19, then the guidance was for them to self-isolate for fourteen days and seek a test. If the test returned positive, a conversation would take place with Public Health England; Public Health England would undertake a rapid risk assessment and a decision would be made on what the course of action should be, which could range from no further action to whole school closure. The Cabinet Member informed the Select Committee that, alongside the Local Resilience Forum and the Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership, they had made representations to the Department for Education to express how difficult it was to keep school settings open if relevant tests were not prioritised.
5. A Member asked how the narrowing of the learning gap was to be achieved, particularly for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The Director stated that there were a number of things happening to support disadvantaged learners and children with additional needs. Government funding was available for the recruitment of tutors and other support staff and each school had plans for how this would be spent. There was to be a particular focus on literacy as the subject enabled access to the rest of the school curriculum. A number of webinars were to be delivered to school leaders; an audit tool had been made available for schools; and a targeted plan was in place and was supported by the national leader for education. Over 1,500 laptops had been received from the Department for Education and had been distributed to relevant pupils by schools, although over double that number had been requested by schools; the Service was continuing to work with the Department to source additional devices. The Director foresaw at least some of children's education being delivered digitally until the conclusion of the COVID-19 pandemic; the Service was to continue its focus on home-based learning, and SAfE had focused resources on understanding evidence-based best practice in this respect.

6. A Member stated that some bus drivers were having to turn away children who were waiting for public transport to or from school and asked whether this could be explored to ensure that all children were able to attend school. The Director stated that she would make enquiries and inform the Select Committee of her findings. The Cabinet Member added that there was a campaign in Surrey for getting back to school safely, with targeted posts being used on social media. There had been a high number of late applications for home-to-school transport and an increased amount of government funding had been received to help the council address any capacity issues. The Cabinet Member was eager to promote active travel to school.
7. A Member asked for further information on the reopening of special schools . The Assistant Director commended the response of special schools and informed the Select Committee that all pupils expected to return to these settings had done so. Guidance on personal protective equipment and the delivery of personal care had been provided to special schools by the Service in collaboration with health colleagues. The impact of limited testing under Test and Trace was being seen primarily in special schools due to the larger numbers of staff needed to support pupils. In special education settings, 7 children and 21 staff had tested positive between the beginning of term to 7 September. The Assistant Director offered to share the most recent figures with the Select Committee.
8. A Member stated that schools had incurred extra costs due to COVID-19 and asked what financial reimbursements would be made to help compensate schools. The Director commented that much of those costs were associated with increased cleaning (noting that teachers were cleaning classrooms between lessons), the provision of free school meals to eligible pupils who were self-isolating, and the provision of personal protective equipment and hand sanitiser. The Service had received government guidance to continue fully paying providers throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, even where services were being not being delivered. Schools had been asked to use their surplus balances before making claims for the reimbursement of increased costs that were not met by specific government schemes. The Service would continue to lobby the Government for additional funding where necessary.

Actions

- I. For the Select Committee to maintain a watching brief regarding transitions within and from education.
- II. For the Assistant Director, Education to share with the Select Committee the numbers of children and staff in special education settings who had tested positive for COVID-19 since the reopening of schools.
- III. For the Director – Education, Learning and Culture to ascertain why some children in Epsom and Ewell had been turned away from public transport to school.

25/20 NO WRONG DOOR TASK GROUP REPORT [Item 7]

Witnesses:

Mary Lewis, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families
Lesley Steeds, Chairman – No Wrong Door Task Group and Vice-Chairman of the Select Committee

Jo Rabbitte, Assistant Director – Children's Resources

Key points raised during the discussion:

1. The Chair of the Task Group explained that the Task Group had been formed at the suggestion of the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families. The key reason for adopting the No Wrong Door model was that children entering care as teenagers generally had a worse experience than younger entrants. Adolescent entrants often experienced wide ranging social and emotional needs and greater placement instability and tended to attain worse outcomes than young entrants, particularly regarding education, employment, training, and post-care accommodation stability. Looked-after children often reported that they would like better communication between staff, to remain with their birth family where possible, to receive more consistent support, and to be able to access support more easily. The No Wrong Door model sought to address those needs and mitigate the challenges experienced by adolescent entrants to the care system. The Task Group primarily utilised targeted requests for information, public surveys, and remote meetings with witnesses to gather the information required to assess the suitability of No Wrong Door for introduction into Surrey.
2. The Task Group found that the model had been effective at reducing care episodes, improving outcomes for service users and creating cost savings elsewhere; and was consistent with the priorities and policies of Surrey County Council. The introduction of the model had strong support at Member and senior officer levels within the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Directorate. Fundamental issues continued to persist in children's services. However, despite the presence of some barriers, the conditions in Surrey were such that the model would likely be efficacious if introduced in the county.
3. The Chair of the Task Group thanked its Members, supporting officers and inquiry respondents.
4. The Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families thanked the Task Group for the Report. She stated that work with teenagers needed to improve and would be increasingly important over next few months due to the increased number of adolescents entering care under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 during the COVID-19 pandemic. This was cause for concern as outcomes for young people entering care in their teenage years were generally poor; the No Wrong Door provided a way of preventing adolescent entry to care. The Cabinet Member stressed that it was important for an organisation to make sound and timely judgement when adopting a

new model and stated that the council was well placed to do so, due to and the council's high-quality residential care homes.

5. A Member questioned how the more sceptical views on the No Wrong Door Model held by Cambridgeshire and Wiltshire County Councils had been considered against the positive feedback received from Rochdale Borough Council. The Chairman of the Task Group assured the Member that the Task Group had taken very careful consideration of all evidence received.
6. The Member added that they would like to recommend that the implementation of the No Wrong Door model in Surrey be brought forward. The Chair of the Select Committee stated that the report was going to the October meeting of Cabinet and that the Select Committee could add suggestions to encourage the development of the policy.

26/20 RECOMMENDATIONS TRACKER AND FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME [Item 8]

Key points raised during the discussion:

1. The Chairman proposed that a standing six-monthly high-level performance report be added to the Forward Work Programme. The Select Committee was in agreement.
2. A Member requested that updates on (1) the Virtual School and (2) the provision of support on careers education for vulnerable groups be provided at a future meeting.
3. The Cabinet Member for All Age Learning stated that the best governance arrangements were being looked at for the Virtual School and suggested that the Select Committee consider the findings of the review of governance arrangements. The Cabinet Member added that the timing of the consideration of alternative provision at a future meeting was important as work in this area was ongoing.

27/20 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING: 14 DECEMBER 2020 [Item 9]

The Committee noted its next meeting would be held on 14 December 2020.

28/20 PRIVATE WORKSHOP [Item 10]

Meeting ended at: 12:10pm

Kay Hammond 14 December 2020

Chairman