

MINUTES of the meeting of the **CHILDREN, FAMILIES, LIFELONG LEARNING & CULTURE SELECT COMMITTEE** held at 10.00 am on 28 July 2020 at REMOTE MEETING streaming here: <https://surreycc.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcasts>.

These minutes are subject to confirmation by the Committee at its meeting on Monday, 21 September 2020.

Elected Members:

- * Amanda Boote
- * Mr Chris Botten (Vice-Chairman)
- * Mrs Liz Bowes
- * Mr Robert Evans
- * Mrs Kay Hammond (Chairman)
- * Mrs Yvonna Lay
- * Mr Peter Martin
- * Dr Andrew Povey
- * Mrs Lesley Steeds (Vice-Chairman)
- * Ms Barbara Thomson
- * Mr 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

Also in attendance:

- * Mrs Julie Iles, Cabinet Member for All-Age Learning
- * Mrs Mary Lewis, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People And Families

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS [Item 1]

Apologies were received from Tanya Quddus and Alex Tear.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS: 21 JANUARY 2020 [Item 2]

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

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST [Item 3]

None received.

4 QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS [Item 4]

None received.

5 CHILDREN'S IMPROVEMENT UPDATE [Item 5]

Witnesses:

Mary Lewis, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families

Jacque Burke, Director – Family Resilience and Safeguarding

Key points raised during the discussion:

1. The Director informed Members that the Service's annual conversation with Ofsted had taken place since the previous meeting of the Select Committee. Ofsted had been assured by the council's progress during the COVID-19 pandemic and the approach taken in children's social care to meet the needs of the county's vulnerable children. Members heard that assurance visits and targeted visits would resume in September 2020, albeit they were likely to be conducted virtually. Full ILACS (inspection of local authority children's services) visits would not be resumed until March 2021.
2. A Member asked whether there had been an increase in missing children cases during the COVID-19 pandemic and what the council did to locate missing children. The Director informed the Committee that there had been a reduction in the number of these cases during the pandemic. There were tight procedures in place for locating a missing child and for return to home interviews. The timeliness of the latter had greatly improved over the previous 12 months. The Service works with the Police – who were responsible for searching missing children – the missing child's family and all agencies known to the child to locate them. Where necessary, with Police agreement, the council publicised missing children.
3. The Chairman agreed to circulate the figures relating to missing children from the Surrey Children's Services Improvement Board Performance Compendium to the Committee. The Cabinet Member notified Members that missing looked-after children was a standing item at every Corporate Parenting Board meeting; adding that a missing incident for a looked-after child could be an event as minor as returning late from a social activity, and this should be considered when examining data relating to missing children.
4. A Member referred to compliance rates for audit requests, questioning how instances of non-compliance were monitored and followed up on. The Director responded that, whilst compliance had improved over time and the Service was committed to achieving full compliance, there would always be occasions where people were unable to complete audits and, occasionally, furlough will be granted in this respect. Earlier in the year, the challenge to recruit permanent social workers meant existing staff carrying out audits had to undertake additional operational tasks. There had been a significant, positive response at team-practitioner level to providing management oversight for 6,000 open files at the outbreak of COVID-19 in England. A dip sample of 10% of those case notes by the quality assurance team returned an agreement rate of 91% on risk management.

5. A Member asked how the Service had been providing training on the analysis of motivational interviewing and the identification of what good supervision looks like. The Director replied that a number of catch-up training sessions had been arranged for practitioners who had already undertaken two-days of training on the technique and that a commitment had been made to ensuring that the whole service undertook the training and used it in practice. Owing to turnover of front-line staff, additional two-day training courses had been commissioned for new starters. Group supervision where team managers were encouraged to challenge practitioners over the use of motivational interviewing had increased. All families open to the family safeguarding team received a parenting assessment and motivational interviewing, the related supervision of this was around motivational practice. The Director commented that the improvement of the inconsistent culture and mindset around practice was a continual, iterative process, which was a focus for the Service.
6. A Member requested that officers quantify information in future select committee reports, where possible.
7. A Member noted that 20% of cases audited were deemed 'inadequate' and questioned when 100% of cases would be handled adequately by the Service. The Director responded, whilst the Service was never satisfied with an inadequate judgement, it was unlikely that any authority would never have an inadequate assessment. Nevertheless, the Service would continue to aim to reduce the percentage of inadequate audits. The Cabinet Member stated that a review of inadequate cases had been carried out, which had identified that the most significant factor driving inadequacy was changes in social workers and team managers; the greatest threat to improvement was recruitment of permanent staff. The Cabinet Member concluded that virtual visits during COVID-19 would not have led to good and outstanding practice and hoped adequacy would increase with the recommencing of face-to-face social work visits.
8. A Member referred to measures of success and asked whether the Service was on target to meet these targets. The Director stated that success was tracked using a number of KPIs (key performance indicators) and a comprehensive evaluation of the Service's use of the family safeguarding model was about to commence. A Department for Education grant had been received to support the implementation of the family safeguarding model, which aims to reduce repeat referrals. A significant reduction in the number of child protection plans and referrals to children's social care had been achieved but these numbers had risen again during the pandemic, with a doubling in the number of open children's social care assessments compared on the relevant period in 2019. Analysis had been undertaken to ascertain how this increased demand would be met. Quantitative measures and KPIs are tracked monthly and the Director offered to retrospectively share the KPIs with the Committee.

9. A Member referred to the failures in the previous Ofsted inspection around 16- and 17-year olds in care and asked how many in this age group were currently residing in unsuitable accommodation. The Director explained that there was a reasonably high spend to provide this age group with accommodation that met their needs. Finding suitable accommodation for adolescents was a national challenge and had become increasingly difficult during the COVID-19 pandemic.

10. A Member asked how many of the 16- and 17-year olds residing in supported accommodation outside of Surrey and were receiving education. The Director offered to circulate this information to the Committee.

11. A Member noted the monthly case audit programme and questioned why 29% of overall judgement grades in the North East Quadrant were inadequate, as this was significantly higher than the other quadrants. The Member asked why this continued and what was being done to reduce the percentage of inadequate ratings. The Director stated that, in fact, the monthly performance data showed that the North East was outperforming the other three quadrants in other areas and it had greatly improved its compliance in timeliness. A newly appointed assistant director in the North East Quadrant had previously worked for Hampshire County Council, which was an outstanding local authority. Extensive quality assurance work was being undertaken, the findings of which informed training. The Director highlighted the North East Quadrant's culture of rewarding staff for good work and was confident that the right leadership was in place.

12. A Member asked what feedback had been received from residents and service users about children's services during the improvement programme. The Director explained that as part of the evaluation of family safeguarding, a large qualitative study of family experience had been commissioned. Complaints received often relates to what was agreed in a meeting, incongruences between what the Service offered families what families believed they needed, and report timeliness before child protection conferences. Such complaints were used to inform performance measures. Whilst the Service, did not routinely ask families for feedback, apprentices spoke to service users about their experiences during COVID-19 pandemic. The feedback received was largely positive; it was reported that child protection conferences had been made easier by remote technology and the Service was consequently considering a hybrid model for future use, where appropriate.

13. A Member asked how recruitment to the Service was progressing. The Director described recruitment as the Service's biggest challenge. The Council had been in partnership with Community Care for the previous 12 months and embarked on a recruitment drive during the previous 6 months. Twenty-two, 9, 30 and 15 practitioners had been appointed in the North

East, South West, North West and South East Quadrants, respectively; and 7, 12, 10 and 18 full-time vacancies remained open, respectively. Some newly recruited staff lived overseas so there had been a delay in them starting their roles due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Forty newly qualified social workers were to join the Service.

14. A Member asked for an update on the situation regarding unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. The Director informed the Committee that a newly established specialist team was dedicated to working with this cohort and expressed confidence in practice improvement around this. There had not been a rise in cases and numbers sat below the Department for Education threshold.

Actions:

- i. For the Chairman to circulate the missing children statistics in the Surrey Children's Improvement Board Performance Compendium to Members of the Select Committee.
- ii. For the Director – Family Resilience and Safeguarding to circulate information regarding the number of 16- and 17- year olds residing in supported accommodation outside of Surrey; and how many of this cohort receive education, to Members of the Select Committee.

Recommendations:

- i. That, at the 21 September 2020 meeting of the Select Committee, the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families provide an update on the children's improvement programme, including future audit findings, updates on the implementation of the recommendations of the audit programmes, and the outcome of any Ofsted monitoring.

6 UPDATE ON THE SCHOOLS ALLIANCE FOR EXCELLENCE [Item 6]

Witnesses:

Julie Iles, Cabinet Member for All-Age Learning

Liz Mills, Director – Education, Learning and Culture

Maria Dawes, CEO – Schools Alliance for Excellence

Key points raised during the discussion:

1. The CEO of the School's Alliance for Excellence (SAfE) informed Members that SAfE was a non-profit, schools-led organisation seeking to bring coherence to the local education system to enable young people to achieve the best possible outcomes through education. Strong partnership working between schools and the other partners is key to the efficacy of SAfE. SAfE is contracted by Surrey County Council to deliver statutory school-improvement services on the behalf of the Local Authority. An objective of SAfE was to encourage all

schools in Surrey to become members; currently two thirds of schools were signed up to pay the 89p-per-pupil subscription fee and the CEO hoped that this proportion would increase following the high levels of engagement seen from all schools with SAfE's professional learning events which were provided free of charge during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. SAfE had identified 26 maintained primary, 2 secondary and 2 pupil referral units and special schools that needed additional school-improvement support. SAfE had worked with these schools throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and had already started risk assessments for the following academic year. Owing to the pandemic, it was likely that there would be a 50% increase in the number of primary maintained schools that would require additional support from SAfE.
3. SAfE had also helped schools to develop remote learning, risk assessments and reopening plans, had supported governors through webinars, and supported headteachers with their wellbeing, free of charge throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Uptake and engagement from schools during this period had been significant.
4. SAfE's key roles in the coming year were to be supporting all schools to ensure that pedagogy and the learning children receive is of the highest quality and to narrow the learning gap, which would be exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.
5. Paul Bailey, Partnership Development Manager, queried, on behalf of Simon Hart, Chair of the Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership, whether safeguarding could be referenced in the objectives of SAfE. The CEO stated that the responsibility for safeguarding remained with the Local Authority but, nevertheless, SAfE always endeavoured to ensure the safeguarding of children and it remained a top priority. The Director stated that safeguarding was integral to the Local Authority's Ofsted rating and explicitly stated in the contract with SAfE, adding that this matter could be tabled for further discussion at the board of directors.
6. A Member highlighted that the majority of schools under the support and challenge category were Primary education settings and asked for what reasons this was so. The CEO stated that this was because there were only eleven maintained secondary schools; it was a product of the structure and status of a school, rather than due to Secondary settings outperforming Primary settings.
7. Member asked about improving the educational performance of disadvantaged children in Key Stages 2 and 4. The CEO stated that, on average, disadvantaged children in Surrey performed worse than they might do in other areas; this was a key focus for SAfE. Schools were being supported through webinars to ensure that they did not lose focus on disadvantaged children, especially given the expected increased learning gaps due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Director

was happy to provide information regarding exam results and performance when the data became available.

8. A Member asked how SAfE supported senior school governors. The CEO responded that governors were key to enabling school improvement. Therefore, in partnership with Surrey County Council, SAfE offered four webinars to support governors during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to a part-time retained resource, SAfE was also working alongside Cognus Governor Services, the body which delivered the council's statutory responsibilities in relation to school governance, to develop a new process for local leaders of governors. The Director informed the Committee that governors responded positively to these webinars and suggested that this method of engagement could be used in the future.
9. A Member questioned why the contract between SAfE and the council had not yet been agreed. The CEO confirmed that the contract had been agreed since the report was drafted earlier in the year. The contract was to be amended to enable the transfer of statutory assessment and moderation duties from the council to SAfE.
10. A Member asked whether SAfE was seeking to take contracts with other local authorities. The CEO stated that SAfE would not have any other contractual arrangements to deliver statutory school improvements in other local authorities, as the focus of SAfE was on ensuring that Surrey's educational settings received the best support through a local education partnership.
11. A Member expressed concern that the Director and the Assistant Director - Education sat on SAfE's board of directors. The CEO informed the Committee that legal advice was taken when establishing the governance arrangements, safeguards were included in order to avoid conflicts of interest, and the board of directors' membership was kept under review. The CEO stated that having representatives of the contracting local authority was typical of local education partnership boards. Board members declared any relevant interests at each meeting and would recuse themselves from decisions where a conflict of interest was present. Contract monitoring was conducted by the council's commissioning team, rather than Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Directorate officers.
12. With regard to an Ofsted inspection, a Member queried why one school had dropped from an 'outstanding' to 'good' rating, and why two previously 'outstanding' secondary schools were now rated 'good'. The CEO responded that the new Ofsted framework introduced in September 2019 had a greater focus on school curricula and this was why the schools' ratings were downgraded. SAfE was looking carefully at these schools and would provide support around curriculum development. The CEO assured the Committee that the decline in rating was not due to issues relating to safeguarding or outcomes for disadvantaged children.

13. A Member noted that a number of schools did not provide adequate distance learning for pupils during the COVID-19 pandemic and asked how SAfE would ensure that all children educated in Surrey received the right level of education going forward. The CEO stated that during the last weeks of the academic summer term, SAfE had communicated with every school to check on risk assessments being carried out for the anticipated return to school in September. Moreover, the aim was for every school to have a contingency plan in place for remote learning in case of a second lockdown. A priority was to ensure that remote learning was of the same quality as that delivered in school settings, should it be required again.
14. A Member asked how SAfE differed from the previous provider that Surrey contracted to deliver school improvement services, Babcock 4S. The CEO explained that Babcock 4S was a commercial company which had an 80% joint-venture arrangement with Surrey County Council. SAfE is a schools-led company which worked closely with the Local Authority and is staffed by team of eight which utilises existing expertise from within the school system. The rest of SAfE's partners are schools and SAfE was working with them to further develop the partnership's priorities. SAfE had joined the Association for Local Education Partnerships and worked with their counterparts in other areas.
15. A Member asked about the pressures on governors and whether those were appropriate. The CEO commented that there were variety of governance roles and SAfE needed to work with governors to clarify their roles and to increase their skills.
16. A Member asked how much money the council had spent on consultants during the development of SAfE. The Director stated that Christine Gilbert had worked nationally on the development of educational partnerships and had been used by Surrey County Council in an invest-to-save approach. Christine Gilbert had been consulted to carry out targeted work and her experience meant that the partnership could be developed in a timelier manner. The consultant had provided templates and model educational partnerships to inform the development of SAfE. The Director was content to share the level of funding with the Select Committee.
17. A Member questioned why one-third of schools in Surrey had not joined SAfE. The CEO informed the Committee that SAfE was delivering the council's statutory responsibility for delivering school improvement, therefore even those schools which had not signed up to SAfE were still risk assessed and were supported by the partnership. Analysis was being undertaken to show non-member schools how they had benefitted from the free services that SAfE provided during the COVID-19 pandemic. The CEO explained that the organisation emphasised a collective approach to improving education

and would promote this to encourage high-performing schools to support lower-performing ones.

18. A Member cited the education recovery plan for Surrey and asked the Director whether emotional recovery and mental health would be looked at, particularly for those who could not sit their GCSE. The CEO notified the Committee that emotional recovery was being looked at and planned for. Schools and sixth form colleges were working to put plans in place to ameliorate the emotional gaps suffered by young people. The recovery curriculum would cover social and emotional aspects for children.

Actions:

- i. For the Director to provide information regarding exam results and educational performance of disadvantaged children in Surrey.
- ii. For the Director to share the cost of consulting on the establishment of SAfE with the Select Committee.

Recommendations:

- i. That the Cabinet Member for All-Age Learning give an update on the work of the Schools Alliance for Excellence at the January 2021 meeting of the Select Committee.

7 PREPARATIONS FOR THE REOPENING OF SCHOOLS [Item 7]

Witnesses:

Julie Iles, Cabinet Member for All Age Learning

Liz Mills, Director – Education, Learning and Culture

Key points raised during the discussion:

1. The Cabinet Member updated the Committee that the Department for Education had praised Surrey County Council for the work carried out around risk assessments for vulnerable groups of children during the COVID-19 pandemic. Free school meals had continued for those in need and targeted webinars had proved valuable for governing bodies and school leadership teams during the pandemic.
1. The Director informed Members that a dedicated team for safeguarding had been put in place and the council had exceeded other local authorities regionally and nationally in this area. The Director added that school attendance would be mandatory again from September and there was guidance for each school setting on how to implement social distancing measures. Nationally, there was a consultation underway to support decision making around year-10 and year-12 students. The Service was prioritising school readiness and transition arrangements and was continuing to work with the Department for Education to ensure national guidance was disseminated locally.

2. Another area of focus for the Service was to be examinations and accountability arrangements, as the learning gap between socially disadvantaged children and other cohorts would have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. The Director continued that the Service would target financial support available from central government, including the £1 billion catch-up support package. There was a plan in place for every child and young person not in a regular school setting.
4. The Chairman relayed the concern of Family Voice regarding the enforcement of school attendance in September, given that a number of children would require high levels of support to catch up to where they were educationally six months previously. The Director stated that the Service wanted all children and young people to return to full-time education in September and that in fact a large number of children with statutory plans had remained in educational settings throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. All guidance was about providing assurance to enable parents to return their children to school full time. Additional support would be provided to make this transition possible for all children; emotional well-being and mental health support was to be redirected to support school pupils and an additional support service was to be provided to parents. Officers from the Service met with Family Voice every week to pick up on concerns and use them to inform planning.
5. A Member was concerned about some schools not providing adequate remote learning for their pupils during the COVID-19 pandemic and asked what would happen if there was a second lockdown. The Director assured Members that there was regular contact with schools regarding this and the majority of schools did provide home learning programmes, which would be the national focus of Ofsted going forward. Maintaining the quality of education provision would be a challenge for all schools and best practice should be shared to ensure school leaders could provide the best support for pupils. Schools which had been underperforming in this area would receive support and challenge to assist their improvement.
6. A Member emphasised the importance of prioritising pupils who would have the most significant learning gaps, referring to the increased incidence of traveller families in Surrey with children who miss education. The Director stated that there was a dedicated team focusing on support for these children, particularly those in primary school – this would be a focus in September.
7. A Member stated that many parents were anxious about returning their children to school when the government had just increased the quarantine period for those returning from abroad. Considering this, convincing all parents that schools were safe for their children could present a challenge.

Recommendations:

- i. That a verbal update on the implementation of the Recovery Plan supporting the reopening of educational settings is given to the Select Committee at its next meeting on 21 September 2020.

8 RECOMMENDATIONS TRACKER AND FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME [Item 8]

Key points raised during the discussion:

1. A Member expressed their concern about the number of failed Special Guardianship Orders. The Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families stated that data for these issues were included in the performance compendium.
2. A Vice-Chairman suggested a report in December on the impact of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the EU on the recruitment of staff from other countries; and that more detailed work be undertaken to examine the impact of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
3. A Member suggested that a report on traveller children be brought to a future meeting of the Select Committee.
4. The Chairman stated that they would discuss the Select Committee's forward work plan with the Vice-Chairmen and Scrutiny Officer.

9 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING: 21 SEPTEMBER 2020 [Item 9]

The Committee noted its next meeting would be held on 21 September 2020.

Meeting ended at: 2.41 pm

Chairman