

**MINUTES** of the meeting of the **CHILDREN, FAMILIES, LIFELONG LEARNING & CULTURE SELECT COMMITTEE** held at 10.00 am on 20 January 2021 at REMOTE MEETING.

These minutes are subject to confirmation by the Committee at its meeting on Thursday, 11 March 2021.

**Elected Members:**

- Amanda Boote
- \* Mr Chris Botten (Vice-Chairman)
- \* Liz Bowes
- \* Robert Evans
- \* Mrs Kay Hammond (Chairman)
- \* Mrs Yvonna Lay
- \* Peter Martin
- \* Andrew Povey
- \* 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

**Substitute Members:**

Mr Alex Tear

**1/21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS [Item 1]**

Apologies were received from Alex Tear.

**2/21 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS: MONDAY, 14 DECEMBER 2020 [Item 2]**

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

**3/21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST [Item 3]**

Chris Botten declared a personal interest in relation to Item 6. This interest did not prevent the Member from participating in the discussion.

Declaration: Member a Local Leader of Governance engaged by the Schools Alliance for Excellence.

**4/21 QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS [Item 4]**

None received.

**5/21 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR UPDATE [Item 5]**

**Witnesses:**

Rachael Wardell, Executive Director

**Key points raised during the discussion:**

1. The Chairman welcomed the new Executive Director to the Select Committee meeting and invited her to provide a summary of her findings after one month in post.
2. The Executive Director had a high level of confidence that the council's children's services had made significant improvement and were no longer 'inadequate', having completed the steps of the improvement plan from the previous Ofsted inspection (2018), and now implementing a "Getting to Good plan". Feedback from the Service's January 2021 mock inspection of the Children's Single Point of Access (C-SPA) and the Early Help Hub assured the Executive Director of the rigour of the Service's self-evaluation practices. The upcoming three-way peer review undertaken under the South East Sector Led Improvement Programme would provide a further opportunity for the Service to test its self-evaluation. The Executive Director acknowledged that there was still more work to be done to achieve a 'good' Ofsted rating, and was meeting with Ofsted and a senior inspections officer the following week to discuss Service readiness for the next unannounced Ofsted visit.
3. The Executive Director informed the Select Committee that a review undertaken jointly by the Department for Education (DfE) and NHS England confirmed that the Service had made good progress with its provision for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and, as a result could demonstrate clear and sustained progress and no longer needed to be subject to DfE scrutiny with six monthly meetings. The Executive Director and SEND Systems Partnership had reviewed progress at the last meeting in order to identify areas for continued focus.
4. The Directorate was operating well during the third Covid-19 lockdown despite continuing its improvement programme and receiving frequently changing expectations and guidance from DfE. The Executive Director was pleased to report that a reduced workforce (due to shielding, illness and self-isolation) was not preventing the Directorate from undertaking essential work, and face-to-face contacts were still being carried wherever possible. Covid-19 had delayed some of the Service's improvement work, but progress had not stopped or been lost.
5. During their first month in post, the Executive Director had identified several priority areas for the Directorate: children's social care improvement; children with additional needs and their families (SEND capital programme investment in specialist placements in the county); cultures and behaviours and inclusion practice in schools; and supporting children and young people with mental health and emotional wellbeing issues. At the end of 2020, the council agreed a new contract for emotional wellbeing and mental health services, which was now in the mobilisation phase – the Executive Director was the chair of the Assurance Board for the programme. The first meeting

confirmed the scale of the task; however, the workstreams were well established and met weekly, recruitment was underway, and progress was being closely monitored. Closing the attainment gap, which was widening due to Covid-19 restrictions, was another Directorate priority. It was also important for the Directorate to focus on the council's relationship and engagement with schools, and child poverty. The latter had implications for education and careers support, the council's economic strategy and post-Covid-19 recovery.

6. A Member asked how the Service continued to safeguard children during lockdown when unannounced visits were not permitted. The Executive Director explained that visits were being planned differently whilst ensuring the safeguarding of children, foster carers and staff. Foster carers needed to engage in a significant process of assurance before taking a child into their care, thus the Service was confident that children's safeguarding needs were being met in these placements. Nevertheless, face-to-face, announced visits with these children did continue and the Executive Director assured Members of the level of visibility of children during the pandemic.
7. A Member asked what was being done to curb the rise in the number of Special Guardianship Order (SGO) placement breakdowns. The Executive Director stated SGO placements usually provided good outcomes for children as they were generally used when a young person was already known to the accommodating family. The Service gave as much support to SGO placements as it did to adoptive placements and worked with families prior to the making of an order, to ensure the child would be well served there. It was desirable to support Special Guardian families in whatever way possible to avoid placement breakdown.
8. A Member asked how the Executive Director perceived the growing independence of schools from Local Authority influence. The Executive Director responded that this policy direction for schools generally did not accord with the public's expectations, as parents tended to prefer council oversight of school-related issues. The Executive Director stated that it was vital that the Local Authority maintained good relationships with schools because it had overall responsibility for education and wellbeing of children living in Surrey. During Covid-19, the Department for Education (DfE) placed greater expectations on Local Authorities' engagement with schools and passed more guidance through the council. This strengthened the council's working relationship with Surrey schools and highlighted the utility of Local Authorities as the middle tier between schools and the DfE.

**6/21 SCHOOLS ALLIANCE FOR EXCELLENCE AND CHILDREN'S EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT IN SURREY [Item 6]**

**Witnesses:**

Julie Iles, Cabinet Member for All-Age Learning

Liz Mills, Director – Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture

Jane Winterbone, Assistant Director – Education  
Maria Dawes, Chief Executive Officer, Schools Alliance for Excellence

**Key points raised during the discussion:**

1. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Schools Alliance for Excellence (SAfE) introduced the report, summarising the key points. SAfE's short-term priorities were as follows: providing reactive support to schools through the Covid-19 pandemic; safeguarding headteacher wellbeing; focusing on quality first teaching and working together to ensure best practice is shared; supporting and challenging vulnerable schools; the disadvantaged strategy; and working with the Local Authority to support the joint approach to inclusion.
2. SAfE was considering the implications of the Covid-19 pandemic on its school improvement contract and had subsequently amended its Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) due to the cancellation of Key Stage and GCSE examinations in 2020 and 2021 – as those qualifications had not been assessed in the ordinary way, attainment data was not comparable to previous years.
3. A question was asked about the changes made to SAfE's performance indicators in light of the Covid-19 pandemic and the lack of performance data and routine Ofsted inspections. The CEO responded that performance indicators were to be reviewed again in light of the third national lockdown and changes to the assessment of GCSE, AS and A-Level qualifications in 2021. SAfE was giving more prominence to disadvantaged and vulnerable children in the amended KPIs, with four of the six KPIs now focused on that cohort. SAfE was also trying to shift focus onto measurable outcomes for Key Stage 4. In 2021, SAfE would be able to compare the gap between the non-disadvantaged and disadvantaged cohort across Surrey.
4. A Member asked what the implications were of the cancellation of GCSE, AS and A-Level examinations in 2021. The CEO responded that, compared to 2020, exams had been cancelled earlier in the 2021 academic year, so SAfE had time to undertake a detailed consultation with schools to consider how best to assess Key Stage 4 and 5 children. The Director added that the Service was working on destination planning, supporting key stage transitions, and providing additional support for pathway planning for young people.
5. SAfE asked that all maintained schools complete a key-skills needs analysis, which was a self-assessment of schools' strengths and areas of concern. SAfE was also working with the Service to identify vulnerable schools and was supporting an increased number of settings due to Covid-19. SAfE would also be identifying where more formal intervention could take place for those schools where little progress was perceived to have been made.
6. The Select Committee was informed of a number of key overarching issues in Surrey's most vulnerable schools, as identified through the risk assessment process: safeguarding; challenges for small schools;

budgetary constraints; governance; Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and inclusion; and inexperienced leadership. SAfE was working with the council and Phase Councils to identify mitigating measures against all the aforementioned issues.

7. Results for all Key Stage outcomes for Surrey's disadvantaged children continued to be lower than this cohort nationally. Despite the significant amount of work undertaken by the council and Surrey's schools, the gap was not reducing, and was likely to widen due to the impacts of Covid-19. SAfE worked with the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) on why the outcomes gap had not narrowed and the evidence highlighted a number of key reasons: in Surrey, 80% of children entitled to free school meals attended schools where less than 21% of pupils were entitled free school meals; disadvantaged children were spread out in small pockets across county, leading to an approach of individualised interventions. The EEF and Ofsted identified that a whole-school/whole-class approach was more effective at improving outcomes for disadvantaged children than individual intervention. The CEO identified three focus areas for SAfE going forward: ensuring all children accessed quality first teaching; ensuring all children were supported to develop their literacy and vocabularies with early language acquisition; and ensuring excellent curriculum design.
8. It was also noted that the gap in outcomes for disadvantaged pupils relative to their non-disadvantaged peers had not reduced. A Member asked why previous efforts to reduce this gap failed and how confident officers were that current approaches would be effective. The CEO responded that as there were few schools in Surrey with large cohorts of disadvantaged pupils, the majority of schools received small aggregate sums of pupil premium funding and had to adopt the approach of individualised interventions. Schools were now better at identifying their disadvantaged pupils, and SAfE was emphasising the effectiveness of adopting a whole class approach to improve outcomes for disadvantaged children. SAfE was also working with EEF around Quality First Teaching and ensuring literacy rates in young people, to enable access to the whole curriculum, whilst 32 of Surrey's secondary schools had signed up for the secondary disadvantaged strategy work. The Director added that throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, the council's library services had put together a book offer for families to use at home. The culture box work targeted vulnerable and disadvantaged children in Surrey by providing learning resources that enabled them to attain and progress as their non-disadvantaged peers were able to.
9. The Cabinet Member stated that 94% of Surrey's schools were currently rated good or outstanding, but Ofsted inspections and the Key Stage data would be impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. There were reports in the media of concerns that school closures might erase a decade of improvement made on closing the attainment gap. Surrey was ranked 54<sup>th</sup> of 150 Local Authorities with regard to the disadvantage gap, whilst Key Stage 4 attainment was 17.4 points lower for Surrey's disadvantaged students, compared to its non-

disadvantaged cohort. Overall, Surrey's disadvantaged pupils were not as well served as disadvantaged pupils nationally and the Cabinet Member acknowledged that this was not good enough.

10. A broad and balanced curriculum was key to improving outcomes for disadvantaged children and SAfE was looking at opportunities for innovative curriculum design whilst working to improve the consistency of school curricula across the county. Previously, Ofsted encouraged a focus on literacy and maths, but had shifted the focus of its school evaluation framework onto curricula and curriculum design. Some schools had limited capacity to develop other subjects, so SAfE was developing a recommended primary curriculum and provision of resources that could be easily adopted and opted into, for a fee, by schools.
11. The impact that the third national lockdown was having on pupils' education and development and the work of SAfE was explained. SAfE was working with schools to promote best practice with regard to remote learning and was supporting those settings that were struggling with the provision of high-quality, remote teaching. The CEO assured Members that the majority of schools were providing a much-improved, high level of learning and were focusing on the most vulnerable children. Children who did not engage with remote learning during the previous lockdowns were invited to attend school, and schools remained open with up to 30% of children on site. The CEO chaired a Task Group that had focused on ameliorating the attainment gap and which was now looking at how schools could best use their Covid-19 catchup funding to support children. The Assistant Director informed Members that there was also a multiagency Task Group that focussed on how best to support schools in managing children and young people with mental health and wellbeing concerns, in light of the increased number of referrals to the Single Point of Access.
12. A Member asked how many times SAfE had escalated safeguarding issues to the council during the previous 12 months, what the main safeguarding issues were, and how the council responded. The Assistant Director responded that, in the previous calendar year, up to three safeguarding issues were escalated to the council. The Assistant Director met regularly with the Local Authority Designated Officer to discuss thematic issues arising from referrals. All schools were asked to undertake a safeguarding audit, which the Service was quality assuring through dip sampling. Working with designated safeguarding leads, the Service was emphasising the importance of a safeguarding culture and promoting an annual report to governors on the key indicators around safeguarding. The CEO stated that some individual schools commissioned external safeguarding reviews which were not as robust as they should be, nor within the council's control. These reviews could give a misleading level of assurance to governors about the quality of safeguarding in their school.
13. A Member asked what was being done to improve the "inexperienced leadership" in some Surrey schools, as noted in the report. The CEO

explained that the low number of applications for headships in Surrey was problematic and Covid-19 pandemic had exacerbated this problem, leading to a number of the appointment of a number of inexperienced headteachers. In response, SAfE launched a new programme for early career headteachers, strengthened the new headteacher induction programme, introduced the deputy heads network, and provided a series of support through Heads Up. The CEO expected a number of headteachers to retire or leave their positions following the Covid-19 pandemic, which would increase the challenge of recruiting high-quality replacements.

14. Members were informed that the sustainability work being undertaken with small schools, as detailed in the report, was around viability and budget pressures. The Assistant Director explained that the national funding formula removed lump-sum funding for schools whilst pupil-led funding resulted in considerably tighter budgets for smaller schools. It was important for the Local Authority to work with these schools on how best to tackle these budgetary issues.
15. Members queried why 24% of Surrey schools did not subscribe to SAfE. The CEO responded that schools opted out for varying reasons; some schools preferred to work individually and did not engage with the Phase Councils. SAfE was communicating the importance of joint working to non-subscriber schools to encourage them to subscribe to SAfE and build a more inclusive school community.

#### **Recommendations:**

- I. The Select Committee note the work that SAfE has made over the last term particularly supporting schools through the COVID-19 pandemic.
- II. That the Select Committee note the on-going support to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.
- III. The mitigations to address the issues identified by the risk assessment process are embedded and monitored by SAfE and the Local Authority.

#### **7/21 EDUCATION AND CAREERS SUPPORT FOR VULNERABLE YOUNG PEOPLE [Item 7]**

##### **Witnesses:**

Julie Iles, Cabinet Member for All-Age Learning

Liz Mills, Director – Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture

Jane Winterbone, Assistant Director – Education

Anwen Foy, Head Teacher, Surrey Virtual School

Benedicte Symcox, Operations Lead, Family Voice Surrey

##### **Key points raised during the discussion:**

1. The Head of Surrey's Virtual School had been in post since June 2020 and had experience as the headteacher of Virtual Schools in a number of other local authorities. Virtual Schools were established as champions of local authorities to promote and track the progress and educational attainment of children or young people who were in care to ensure they receive the correct support, have their needs understood by teachers, and achieve educational outcomes comparable to their peers. Surrey's Virtual School was fully staffed with a new team, following the restructure, that had been assembled by the governing board.
2. The Operations Lead explained that Family Voice Surrey was a parent carer forum that provided independent collective representation for families with children who had any degree of special needs or disability from 0-25 years old. The organisation welcomed the council's work around transition into adulthood, which presented a challenging time for families with children with additional needs. Many families who reached out to Family Voice had children who were not in education, employment or training (NEET), which was a stigmatising label. One of the most commonly raised issues was about SEND children not being able to manage a full-time working week.
3. A Member asked what governance arrangements were in place for the Virtual School. The Head Teacher stated that there was a dedicated governing board, chaired by the Cabinet Member for All-Age Learning, which had taken an active role in the Virtual School's improvement journey. The governing board had recently discussed being reconstituted as a subgroup of the Corporate Parenting Board.
4. It was noted that the cohorts least likely to progress to post-16 education or training were those with poor or persistent absence; those who had been excluded; those whose first language was not English; children of young parents; and children with illness. These cohorts needed targeted support to help their transition into post-16 placements. Through the Participation Strategy, officers wanted to explore how to achieve a more impartial approach to providing guidance and advice in school settings to children. The Head Teacher stated the importance of understanding young people's individual strengths and having ongoing conversations with them to help them see themselves as a learner post-16 with more positivity. The Head Teacher emphasised that education stability and minimising disruption was key, but it was difficult to find post-16 provision where young people could start mid-year.
5. It was explained that the Service was working with schools and post-16 colleges to make the Maths and English core learning offer more exciting and relevant for those who had not yet passed their Level 2 assessments in those subjects. Functional Skills became a key element of the curriculum and provided a key step towards attaining these Level 2 qualifications. Adult learning courses for GCSE Maths and English were well attended in Surrey and the Service would continue to promote the importance and accessibility of those courses. There were also a number of developing pathways designed to meet a



wider range of children's needs. Failing to achieve Level 2 in Maths and English often presented a barrier to engagement so it was important to create other pathways, such as apprenticeships and internships, to enable all people to progress.

6. A Member asked how the council monitored the number of NEET young people in Surrey. The Assistant Director stated that the post-16 tracking team (U-Explore) was due to join the council's Education team the following month. This team had an annual tracking activity cycle and contacted all of those who did not have a post-16 placement arranged. This team provided up-to-date data on the number of students who were enrolled and participating in EET and followed up on those who were not or who were not participating full time. This was to be an ongoing piece of work given the 100% participation target of the Participation Strategy.
7. A Member asked why the council was seeking to bring the Year 11-12 Transition Service in house and whether, in doing so, any financial savings or efficiencies would be provided. The Assistant Director explained that the budget remained the same and the transfer of the tracking team into the Education team meant data could be looked at more holistically and in greater detail and would enable better post-16 placement planning. All the work brought inhouse was linked to the themes and priorities of the Prioritisation Strategy and would make the post-16 offer more responsive.
8. A Member asked what proportion of Surrey's young people who were at risk of becoming NEET upon completing Year 11 successfully transitioned into education, training or employment by the second half-term of Year 12. The Assistant Director responded that targeted intervention work undertaken in the previous year had positive outcomes, resulting in 94% of young people who were at risk of becoming NEET transitioning into education, training or employment. This was partly a result of the DfE funding that was granted to the council for the alternative provision cohort, who historically did not make positive post-16 transitions. Children in alternative provision who remained enrolled at their mainstream school were not funded at the same level as their full-time peers, so the council subsidised the difference. Changes to exams and disruption to children's learning due to the Covid-19 pandemic meant that the council was working with children's settings to ascertain what additional criteria should be added to risk of NEET indicators. The council was also tracking those who did not access education during the lockdown.
9. A Member queried whether the council had a monitoring role over the careers advice and guidance given to vulnerable young people. The Assistant Director responded that it was not a statutory duty for the Service to monitor the quality of information, advice and guidance (IAG) given to young people in their settings; however, they understood the importance of raising the profile of IAG with all settings and identifying and sharing good practice. The Head Teacher added that the Virtual School had worked with U-Explore to undertake work

with care-experienced young people and a member of the Virtual School team was training for a level six IAG qualification to expand the capacity within the team.

10. The Surrey Transition and Education Programme would no longer receive funding from the European Union (EU) due to the UK's withdrawal from the EU, so the council was exploring opportunities to secure future funding, for example through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Hampshire County Council were bidding to secure an extension of the European Social Fund funding until spring 2023, however this was not guaranteed.
11. Providing high-quality Personal Education Plans (PEPs) was challenging but officers were pleased with the consistent termly improvements in PEP quality and the outcomes for young people. Each PEP needed the input of a social worker, designated teacher, foster carer, and young person, which made achieving consistency and quality challenging. Nevertheless, many improvements were made and Surrey now compared well to its neighbouring Local Authorities: in autumn 2019, the percentage of children and young people who had their PEP completed within timescale was 80%, compared to 93% in autumn 2020, rising to 96% when post-16 data was omitted. Robust quality assurance criteria based on best practice and DfE guidance were introduced, whereby PEPs were quality rated as amber, red or green. The percentage of green-rated PEPs increased from 53% in autumn 2019 to 69% in autumn 2020. Feedback on PEPs was more consistently provided to designated teachers (who also received termly training), foster carers and social workers via a termly newsletter. The Service was also listening to feedback from User Voice and Participation groups. Overall, PEP improvement was an ongoing journey with consistent term-on-term improvement evident.
12. A Member asked for more information regarding the Surrey Participation Strategy. The Assistant Director explained that the previously termed NEET strategy needed a refresh so the Service drafted a revised participation strategy comprising four strategic priorities: a focus on the most vulnerable cohorts; adopting a joint partnership approach; linking with businesses to offer a wider range of apprenticeships and opportunities for young people; and the effective use of data. Sat under those priorities were other themes pertaining to impartial advice and guidance and the importance of young people understanding their skill base. Going forward, it was important that the Service looked at the at the risk of NEET indicators through a Covid-19 pandemic lens and involved settings in the tracking process wherever possible. The offer for the post-16 SEND cohort was another critical element of the strategy, as members of this cohort were significantly less likely to be in employment at 24 years of age.
13. The Operations Lead – Family Voice Surrey stated the importance of acknowledging that vulnerable children and SEND children were more likely to require additional support to gain independence. Education

and information provided to SEND children and their families crucially did not explain how to navigate the vital systems that did not flex to the limitations of children with SEND, such as Universal Credit, and how to communicate with work coaches. Better guidance in these areas was key to helping young people gain and manage their independence.

**Recommendations:**

- I. That the Cabinet Member for All-Age Learning report on the Surrey Participation Strategy to the Select Committee in autumn 2021.

**8/21 ACTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS TRACKER AND FORWARD WORK PLAN [Item 8]**

1. The Assistant Director informed the Select Committee that they had discussed with transport colleagues and the school in question why some children were turned away from public transport to school in Epsom. The Assistant Director was assured that the issue was resolved.

**9/21 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING: THURSDAY, 11 MARCH 2021 [Item 9]**

The Select Committee noted that its next meeting would be held on Thursday, 11 March 2021.

Meeting ended at: 12.34 pm

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**Chairman**