

MINUTES of the meeting of the **CHILDREN, FAMILIES, LIFELONG LEARNING AND CULTURE SELECT COMMITTEE** held at 10.00 am on 15 February 2024 at Woodhatch Place, 11 Cockshot Hill, Reigate, RH2 8EF.

These minutes are subject to confirmation by the Committee at its meeting on Wednesday, 17 April 2024.

Elected Members:

- * Fiona Davidson (Chairman)
- * Jonathan Essex
- * Robert Hughes
- * Rebecca Jennings-Evans
- Rachael Lake BEM
- Bernie Muir
- * John O'Reilly
- * Mark Sugden
- * Ashley Tilling
- * Liz Townsend
- * Chris Townsend (Vice-Chairman)
- * Jeremy Webster (Vice-Chairman)
- Fiona White

Co-opted Members:

- * Julie Oldroyd, Diocesan Representative for the Catholic Church
- Mr Alex Tear, Diocesan Representative for the Anglican Church, Diocese of Guildford

(* = present)

1/24 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS [Item 1/24]

Apologies were received from Cllr Fiona White.
Cllrs Rachael Lake and Bernie Muir attended remotely.

2/24 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS: 6 DECEMBER 2023 [Item 2/24]

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

3/24 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST [Item 3/24]

None received.

4/24 QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS [Item 4/24]

Key points made in the discussion:

1. No public questions or petitions were received.
2. There were two Member's questions from Cllr Fiona Davidson, the first on the SEND capital programme and another on the commissioning of diagnostic and treatment services for Foetal Alcohol Spectrum

Disorder. Responses to these questions have been attached to these minutes.

3. The following supplementary was asked in relation to the second question: How many children and young people were referred for Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder assessments in the past two years and how many developmental paediatricians and Mindworks personnel have had formal training on FASD in the past three years?

5/24 ACTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS TRACKER AND FORWARD WORK PLAN [Item 5/24]

The Committee held a forward planning session on 24 January 2024.

6/24 ALTERNATIVE PROVISION [Item 6/24]

Witnesses

Clare Curran, Cabinet Member for Children and Families, Lifelong Learning

Julia Katherine, Director – Education and Lifelong Learning

Carrie Traill, Service Manager – Educational Effectiveness (Head of Education)

Dee Turvill – Alternative Provision & Participation Manager

Sandra Morrison, Assistant Director Inclusion & Additional Needs SE

Leanne Henderson, Participation Manager, Family Voice Surrey (FVS)

Gen Dearman, CEO of Challengers

Key points made in the discussion:

1. Family Voice summarised the findings from their Alternative Provision (AP) survey conducted in September 2023, which highlighted some children were receiving very little or no AP after missing 15 days of school. The Alternative Provision & Participation Manager said such cases were neither typical nor the exception but complex. On occasion more than one independent provider was offered to build up a full-time package.
2. The survey found inconsistencies in medical evidence required; Family Voice said this issue was not new, but there had been an escalation in emotional-based non-attendance since the pandemic. The Alternative Provision & Participation Manager informed the Committee that following a new medical policy in December 2023, a new medical panel aims to deliver consistency in the messaging to parents and the evidence requested which, while not a legal requirement, helps to ensure provision is appropriate.
3. The Cabinet Member thanked Family Voice for their exemplary work and noted that as a result of a Local Ombudsman review, there had

been a programme of improvement with the objective of a consistent and compliant approach to all children with alternative provision needs.

4. The CEO of Challengers spoke about the charity, which provides play for excluded children with disabilities and is funded mainly by the Local Authority directly but sometimes by schools. She shared that 12 of the 22 children they have supported over the last year have now reintegrated into education. She explained that children were with them for an average of 6.5 months and the longer they had been out of education before being supported by Challengers, the longer it took to get them back into education. The charity has a waiting list. Asked if it had been impacted by changes in short breaks funding, the CEO replied that it had affected parents' resilience and the behaviour and confidence of young people who received less play provision.
5. A Member asked if there were protocols that included clear criteria for what was expected from alternative provision providers, at the point of commissioning and in terms of quality of delivery. The Member also asked what assurance checks were conducted, especially on unregistered providers. The Service Manager for Educational Effectiveness responded that 58% of young people in AP attended either a short stay school or AP academy, both of which have a service level agreement with the Council and are monitored by Inclusion Officers on a half-termly basis. She added that 100 per cent of these are Ofsted rated Good or Outstanding. The independent sector has termly monitoring visits. Checks had increased under a new dynamic purchasing system. Each individual child has a plan monitored by their SEND case officer, with targets taking into account their past trauma. A Member expressed concern over some children experiencing changes in their case officer.
6. The current alternative provision strategy was agreed in 2021. The Member asked how the Council was meeting Family Voice's ambition for all children to access full-time education. The Alternative Provision & Participation Manager said the goal was for children to access a minimum of three hours a day but there were cases where due to demand this was not being met.
7. A Member asked if witnesses acknowledged that some school leaders, parents and carers felt that they had not been suitably involved in decision-making around alternative provision. The Service Manager for Educational Effectiveness said that the Service cares deeply about schools, parents, carers and other stakeholders. Comprehensive consultations took place when developing the Dynamic Purchasing System and the Service was committed to constant improvement. The Assistant Director said the Service had met with Family Voice to discuss their recommendations and had agreed to work together to develop solutions.

8. A Member asked about the length of time children spent in alternative provision and how successfully reintegration was being measured. The Service Manager for Educational Effectiveness said the average duration was six months, though some cases could be a lot more complex and require more time. Work was underway internally within the Council but also with partners to see how schools could expand existing alternative provision programmes within schools. The aim was to keep pupils in the same environment and disrupt their education as little as possible.
9. Noting that the Local Ombudsman had found 63% of reviewed cases were not compliant with duty, a Member asked if this had been rectified and how. The Assistant Director Inclusion & Additional Needs SE said that there had been training conducted with case workers on their responsibilities. The Service was also launching another dip sample to review cases against the quality used in the previous dip sample, which would be shared with the Committee when available.
10. A Member asked how the Council and Surrey schools were managing the safeguarding of children and young people whose alternative provision was part-time. The Assistant Director said issues would be identified by the Inclusion Officers' half-termly checks. Where independent alternative providers were used, the Council expected them to have DBS and other security checks in place. The Council would not dictate to schools which alternative provision providers to access, but would share those with a good history of compliance. The Chair emphasised that it was right for the safeguarding of children absent from school to be a priority.

Break at 11:54, meeting resumed at 12:04.

Actions

1. Alternative Provision & Participation Manager to provide the number of CYP not routinely accessing 15 hours of alternative provision a week.
2. Head of Education to provide the number of hours of AP a day received by the 42% of CYP not in a PRU/AP Academy.
3. Alternative Provision & Participation Manager to provide the number (and proportion) of AP placements provided by the third sector.
4. Head of Education to provide data on how many CYP who reintegrate into education following AP subsequently bounce back into AP.
5. Assistant Director – CFL Commissioning to provide more information on the breakdown of funding for Independent AP, given the wide variance (between £96-£153,000 per pupil).

Resolved:

The Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee:

- 1) Recommends that, by September 2024, the Service strengthens its Governance Group to ensure all parties engaged in Alternative Provision have a forum to discuss key issues, with the aim of improving provision and relationships between the Council, school leaders, parents, carers and providers.
- 2) In order to have knowledge of the quality of alternative provisions used and offered to children and young people, recommends criteria measuring the outcomes of individuals using AP are developed and implemented by the Service within six months, to include: educational attainment; employment destinations; number of weeks Children and Young People (CYP) spend in AP before being reintegrated into education; how many CYP are successfully reintegrated into education; and how many CYP return to AP following reintegration.
- 3) a) welcomes the agreement of SCC to agree each of the Family Voice Surrey (FVS) AP recommendations, and
b) recommends that SCC:
 - (i) prioritises the development of the parent handbook described in FVS Recommendation 3 with the aim of delivering it by the end of June 2024;
 - (ii) provides a delivery date for the recommendations that are entirely within its responsibility by April 2024;
 - (iii) and consults with partners to agree a delivery date for the other recommendations by June 2024.

7/24 FOSTER CARER SUFFICIENCY [Item 7/24]

Witnesses

Clare Curran, Cabinet Member for Children and Families, Lifelong Learning

Tina Benjamin, Director – Corporate Parenting

Matt Ansell, Director – Family Resilience & Safeguarding

Jo Rabbitte, Assistant Director – Children’s Resources

Sam Morris, Secretary to Surrey County Fostering Association (SCFA)

Key points made in the discussion:

1. The Director of Corporate Parenting shared that eight households had been approved as foster carers since the submission of the report, with more to go through the assessment process. If all were successful, there would be a further 26 general foster carers and 43 kinship foster carers in Surrey by the end of the financial year.

2. The Secretary to Surrey County Fostering Association (SCFA) noted that they had been working closely with the Service to make a foster carer charter to help foster carers feel valued and regarded as working in partnership with the Service. The Secretary shared a feeling widely held among foster carers that not all social workers understood what foster carers were managing on a daily basis, in addition to their birth families and jobs, and would like new social workers to undergo training in order to foster realistic expectations. They should be treated like colleagues, especially with respect to booking meetings. Foster carers were expected to conduct transport for the children's contact hours with their birth families, something that had continued after the pandemic, adding more pressure. She said as the people who often know the children best, foster carers would like to be more involved in the decision-making process. The Secretary also shared that carers would like to have paid respite and enjoy rights afforded to normal full-time employees such as paid leave. They would also like to see greater support from mental health services for foster children.
3. A Member asked the Council what they specifically could do to encourage Surrey foster carers to stay in their roles. The Assistant Director for Children's Resources said that they could be invited to the retention and recruitment board for foster carers, which would give them a platform to voice concerns.
4. The Secretary to the SCFA noted that fostering was seen as a middle-class role by some people in Surrey and the narrative had to change to debunk that myth and advertise the financial benefits of fostering. Word of mouth was the most important factor to improve recruitment. It was her view that the support given to foster carers by Surrey County Council was better than Independent Fostering Agencies and that this should be promoted.
5. The Director for Corporate Parenting explained there had been an overview of competitors' benefits in 2023. Fees and allowances were raised significantly for the first time since 2019 and there was a built-in annual inflation-linked increase. Paid leave had not been considered but could be investigated and costed. The Cabinet Member for Children and Families, Lifelong Learning said she could take that under consideration but that the interests of children and young people were the utmost priority.
6. The Chair asked how the Service could improve how children's social workers interact with foster carers. The Director of Family Resilience & Safeguarding invited representation from the SCFA to come to leadership meetings and discuss how to improve communication and support for practitioners.
7. A Member asked how the Directorate planned to drive forward and implement the draft foster carer charter. The Assistant Director for Children's Resources said the Service hoped to launch the charter in Foster Care Fortnight in May.

8. A Member asked how the Service planned on embedding the communication strategy and improving relations. The Director of Family Resilience & Safeguarding said he also had several examples of foster carers complimenting the excellent practice of social workers and he would be providing examples of best practice across the Service. The Director for Corporate Parenting added that when children were reviewed by Independent Reviewing Officers they could make sure the foster carer's voice is heard in the planning, something already happening in some cases. The Director for Quality and Performance said foster carers were rarely invited to child protection conferences and should be.
9. A Member asked what could be learned from Hampshire and Sutton local authorities' recruitment success. The Assistant Director for Children's Resources said they had a larger marketing budget and although they generated a high number of enquiries, Surrey's conversion rates were comparable. Surrey was now part of the Department of Education funded programme to recruit and retain foster carers as part of a £2.6 million recruitment hub in the South East running from May 2024.

Actions

1. Director – Corporate Parenting to inform Committee what the target is for Foster Carer recruitment and how this compares with predicted performance for the next three years.
2. Assistant Director – Children's Resources to provide a written response on what strategies Hampshire and Sutton are pursuing in order to have achieved a net increase of foster carers last year (as shown in appendix 3).

Resolved:

There is no doubt that SCC is committed to increasing the number of Surrey foster carers, and to ensuring that foster carers come from as wide and diverse a demographic as the children that Surrey cares for. Improving sufficiency has many advantages for all parties: children and young people, foster carers and foster families and Surrey County Council. To achieve this objective, the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee recommends that:

- 1) The Children and Families Directorate drives forward the Surrey County Fostering Association (SCFA) Foster Carer Charter, with the goal of agreeing a final version by Foster Care Fortnight in May 2024 and developing an implementation plan by the end of October 2024.
- 2) The Service actively considers the following 15 points that SCFA (those currently doing this difficult job) believe would improve recruitment and retention:

1. Involve foster carers in decision-making meetings to reinforce a partnership approach to fostering between foster carers and SCC/commissioned services.
 2. Create a culture where children's social workers (and other professionals) regard foster carers as colleagues to engender a relationship of mutual trust and respect.
 3. To foster an understanding of the foster carer role, the demanding daily lives of foster families and their lived experiences, perhaps ASYEs could shadow a foster carer or SCC could work with the SCFA to create a training course or webinar.
 4. Make SCC's policy that foster carers' emails are answered within a set SLA (suggested 72 hours) and social workers on duty are required to respond within 30 minutes to phonecalls and emails.
 5. Conclude Standards of Care and Allegations of Harm investigations within an appropriate timescale.
 6. Work with SCFA to update the Skills to Foster course to better prepare new carers and empower their voice.
 7. Centralise Gateway to Resources personnel to ensure they know carers, enabling a more child-centred matching approach.
 8. Work with the SCFA to consider and cost giving paid annual leave to foster carers in line with neighbouring LAs and IFAs.
 9. In collaboration with the SCFA, improve functionality of the Olive training platform, which is very difficult for foster carers to access and use.
 10. Review the transport to contact policy to consider returning to the pre-Covid situation where contact supervisors provided transport for CYE on contact visits.
 11. Social work Assistant Directors to join the Foster Carer Recruitment and Retention Board.
 12. Create a Surrey Offer that better promotes the support offered by SCC that is unrivalled by IFAs.
 13. Provide the services of a benefits and tax advisor when required.
 14. Publicise that it is not necessary to be a homeowner, and make it known to prospective carers who may be on benefits, including kinship and connected carers, that it is possible to be a foster carer on benefits without benefits being significantly impacted.
 15. Introduce a retention scheme with bonuses or a letter of recognition from the SCC Director for certain milestones.
- 3) Safeguarding and Corporate Parenting set up a working group, comprising children's social workers (representing each quadrant) and foster carers, and empower it to explore how relationships between these key stakeholders in the fostering process could be improved, and to develop recommendations for implementation by the end of September 2024.

8/24 CHILDREN'S HOMES - OFSTED REPORTS PUBLISHED SINCE THE LAST MEETING OF THE SELECT COMMITTEE [Item 8/24]

Witnesses

Clare Curran, Cabinet Member for Children and Families, Lifelong Learning

Tina Benjamin, Director – Corporate Parenting

Key points made in the discussion:

1. The Chair praised officers for the continued Good rating in the latest Ofsted report.

9/24 PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW [Item 9/24]

Witnesses

Clare Curran, Cabinet Member for Children and Families, Lifelong Learning

Patricia Denney, Director – Quality and Performance

Key points made in the discussion:

1. The Chair noted that there would be an opportunity to discuss performance metrics at the next performance sub-group meeting on 20 February 2024.

10/24 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING 17 APRIL 2024 [Item 10/24]

The Committee noted its next public meeting would be held on Wednesday 17 April 2024.

Meeting ended at: 1.20 pm

Chair

Member Questions to Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee – 15 February 2024

Q1

1. Can you please confirm the total number of additional SEND school places originally planned as part of the SEN Capital Programme?
2. How many additional SEND school places have been delivered to the end of December 2023 as part of the SEND Capital Programme? How many more are due to be delivered by the conclusion of the programme?
3. Can you please confirm the dates for each phase of the programme (1 – 4). Please also identify how many school places were originally planned to be delivered in each phase, how many school places have actually been delivered and/or are due to be delivered in each phase?
4. Can you please update the table in Annex 1 provided in the report to Cabinet dated 25 January 2022 to show projects planned up to the end of Phase 4, as well as updating the table with all the most recent information. Please add the following additional information to the table.
 - Gender of pupils catered for at the school/unit.
 - The original planned delivery date for the additional places.
 - The target planned delivery date for the additional places – if different.

Cllr Fiona Davidson

RESPONSE:

1. Between 2019 and 2023 Surrey's Cabinet approved the strategies and capital investment for four phases of Surrey's Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Capital Programme. With c£217m investment the programme was tasked to create around 2,440 permanent additional school places in state-maintained specialist schools, and SEN Units in mainstream schools in Surrey between 2019/20-2026/27. This was in order to expand SCC's state-maintained specialist education estate from around 3,320 places in 2019 to create capacity for 5,760 state-maintained specialist places by 2030/31. Original programme briefs are set out below.

ITEM 4

Capital Strategy	Approval date	Original brief
SEND Capital Programme Phase 1 Brief	24/09/2019	580
SEND Capital Programme Phase 2 Brief	29/09/2020	213
SEND Capital Programme Phase 3 Brief	26/01/2021	400
SEND Capital Programme Phase 4 Brief	25/01/2022	872
SUB TOTAL		2,065
Safety Valve bid (DfE Special Free Schools Programme):	07/03/2023	170
TOTAL		2,235

2. The SEND Capital Programme created 917 new specialist school place availability between 2019 and the end of December 2023. This was carried out through successful delivery of 42 permanent construction projects in schools across Surrey.

New places from projects delivered in full and handed over to schools are phased in over a 2-5 year period, depending on the scale of individual schemes. This is because schools need to build their staffing capacity to support the new places.

Additional state-maintained specialist school place availability created through Capital Delivery between 2019-2023 is as follows:

Academic Year	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	TOTAL
New Places	77	74	285	247	234	917

As of academic year 2023/24, this has expanded SCC's state-maintained specialist education estate capacity from around 3,320 places in 2019 when the programme started to around 4,240 places now. The expectation is that the programme, in partnership with the Service remain on track to create state-maintained specialist education estate capacity for 5,760 state-maintained specialist places by 2030/31.

ITEM 4

3. Dates and places for each phase of the SEND Capital Programme (1 – 4) below:

Phase	Cabinet Decision/ timescales	New Permanent Accommodation Delivered	New Permanent Accommodation To Be Delivered	TOTAL
1	SEND Capital Programme Phase 1 Cabinet Decision 24-Sep-2019 'For delivery from 2019/20 over the next four years'	396	380	776
2	SEND Capital Programme Phase 2 Cabinet Decision 29-Sep-2020 'For academic year 2021-2022'	149	106	255
3	SEND Capital Programme Phase 3 Cabinet Decision 26-Jan-2021 'For September 2021'	375	40	415
4	SEND Capital Programme Phase 4 Cabinet Report 25/01/2022 'From 2023 onwards'	56	903	959
	TOTAL	976	1,429	2,405

4. Spreadsheet emailed to Members available on request, julie.armstrong@surreycc.gov.uk

Q2

The first gold standard study in the UK (University of Salford, 2021) to assess Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder found FASD in between 1.8% of the population studied, and 3.6% when possible cases were also included. By comparison, the prevalence of autism is described as around 1%. There is no cure for FASD but research shows that early intervention can improve a child's development.

1. Do Mindworks' neurodevelopmental assessments consider FASD as a diagnosis? If not, why is that?
2. Does SCC commission FASD diagnostic and treatment services? If not, why is that?
3. If FASD services are commissioned, what level of provision is commissioned (e.g., the capacity of each service commissioned) each year?
4. Are professionals employed by SCC and partners (social workers, family centre personnel, SENDCOs) working with children and young people trained to recognise the potential signs of FASD? How is this training delivered?

Cllr Fiona Davidson

RESPONSE:

1. Yes, it is Mindworks' understanding that FASD would be considered a diagnosis.
2. Surrey Heartlands ICB, commission circa 8 assessments a year for children over 6 years of age, which is evidenced based.
3. Surrey Heartlands ICB, commission circa 8 assessments a year for children over 6 years of age, which is evidenced based. As part of the wider improvement work to improve outcomes for children with neurodiverse needs, this will be reviewed.

In addition to referrals for direct FASD assessment, the community Developmental Paediatricians, when assessing children under 6 years of age with, for example, suspected Autistic Spectrum Condition, will look to identify if there are signs related to FASD eg head size. If needed, these children would be supported by the tertiary (specialist) hospitals (and/or tertiaries in-reaching to local hospitals). The Developmental Paediatricians will also call the FASD consultant at SABP for clinical advice if required. Referrals can then be made to SABP's assessment service, if appropriate, for those over 6 years of age.

4. Training for individuals working with Children and Young People is available through the Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership and delivered by practitioners from SaBP iaccess (adult substance misuse treatment service)

All community paediatricians attend the FASD Training Course provided by the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, and Mindwork's Neurodevelopmental colleagues have also been trained.

The national service of FASD operates from SABP and further information on local provision can be found here – [FASD : Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS Foundation Trust \(fasdclinic.com\)](https://www.fasdclinic.com)