

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE SPECIAL CABINET MEETING
HELD ON 11 DECEMBER 2023 AT 9.30 AM
COUNCIL CHAMBER, WOODHATCH PLACE, 11 COCKSHOT HILL,
REIGATE, SURREY, RH2 8EF.**

These minutes are subject to confirmation by the Cabinet at its next meeting.

Members: *=present

*Tim Oliver (Chairman)
*Natalie Bramhall
*Clare Curran
*Matt Furniss
*David Lewis
*Mark Nuti
*Denise Turner-Stewart
*Sinead Mooney
Marisa Heath
*Kevin Deanus

Deputy Cabinet Members:

*Maureen Attewell
Paul Deach
*Jordan Beech
*Steve Bax

In attendance:

Rachael Wardell, Executive Director for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning, Surrey County Council
Julia Katherine, Assistant Director, Inclusion and Additional Needs, Surrey County Council
Liz Mills, Director for Education and Lifelong Learning, Surrey County Council
Harriet Derrett-Smith, ICB Representative, Surrey Heartlands
Claire Poole, Chief Executive Officer, Family Voice Surrey
Sally Allen, Chair of Family Voice Surrey
Sandra Pycock, Associate Director of Children, Young People and Families and Lead for Additional Needs and Disabilities, Children and Families Health Surrey
Clare Stone, ICS Director of Multi-Professional Leadership and Chief Nurse
Anne-Louise Payne – Schools Representative
Jack Mayhew – Schools Representative
Justine Leonard- Director of Children and Young People's Services – Mindworks
Fiona Davidson, Chairman of the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning & Culture Select Committee
Catherine Powell, Residents' Association and Independent Group Leader

**PART ONE
IN PUBLIC**

187/23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE [Item 1]

Apologies were received from Marisa Heath and Paul Deach.

188/23 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST [Item 2]

There were none.

189/231 PROCEDURAL MATTERS [Item 3]

189/23 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS [Item 3a]

There was one member question. The question and responses were published in a supplement to the agenda.

The member asked a supplementary question, if the council's policy of nobody being left behind was being met by the council only providing statutory services in relation to short breaks and respite care which was reducing positive outcomes for children with disabilities. The Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning explained that the council did not have additional funds to invest into short breaks but an action had been taken away to review the access to play and leisure short breaks for families most in need. The member queried if Cabinet could reconsider the introduction of an early pre-school screening which included ASD to support increased nominations for Surrey's very successful local early autism program. The Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning agreed to take this away and provide the member with a response in due course. With regards to children who have not had their health reviews it was queried if a breakdown of these numbers could be provided to check if some of these children were from areas of higher deprivation. The ICS Director of Multi-Professional Leadership and Chief Nurse agreed to take this away and provide the member with a response in due course.

The Leader stated that if the council was successful in getting more funding from central government then this would be spent on short breaks and early help.

190/23 PUBLIC QUESTIONS [Item 3b]

There were four public questions. The questions and responses were published in a supplement to the agenda.

A member of the public asked a supplementary question, which was what consideration was being given to those most in need of an urgent neurodevelopment assessment as there was currently no pathway. The ICB Representative, Surrey Heartlands stated that the

neurodevelopment pathway still remained open for children with complex needs and communication would be going out around what is available to children, families and schools in the following week. This would also be shared with Family Voice Surrey. It was recognised that there were a multitude of needs that children and schools wanted support with. Conversations would be happening with the ICB around seeking further investment to support the demand for assessment. The Director of Children and Young People's Services – Mindworks explained that for those children not in school the neurodevelopmental pathway was available to them and any child for whom it might be indicated that they have neurodevelopmental needs. A referral could be made by any professional who is supporting that child and their family.

191/23 PETITIONS [Item 3c]

There were none.

192/23 LOCAL AREA SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND/OR DISABILITIES (SEND) INSPECTION OUTCOME AND ACTIONS [Item 4]

Introductions:

The Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning stated that the report published by Ofsted found inconsistent experiences and outcomes for children and young people led by the local area partnership. She reiterated that inconsistent as a grading was not good enough for Surrey's children. It was vital partners work together to take forward findings and deliver improvements. The frustrations of families was recognised and the Cabinet Member apologised that parents were struggling to access the support they needed. A rating of inconsistent meant that there were still some children that had good experiences and outcomes. There were national challenges around additional needs and disabilities which were not unique to just Surrey. In Surrey between January 2015 and October 2023 the number of EHCPs issued rose by 150%. The local area partnership was continuing to work with government in relation to policy reform and funding, ultimately to achieve better outcomes for all children across the SEND system. The priority was to ensure that necessary changes are made to services to improve the lives of the most vulnerable children, young people and their families.

The ICS Director of Multi-Professional Leadership and Chief Nurse stated that action against the four key recommendations from the inspection report was paramount. Although the report recognised areas of improvements there was still more to do. From a health perspective, change would be led in relevant areas for improvement and then reported back through the additional needs Partnership Board in line

with local and inspection requirements and also reported back to Surrey Heartlands and Frimley executive teams.

School Leader, Anne-Louise Payne explained how schools and families had been involved with the inspection. She was pleased that it had been recognised in the inspection that communication between education and colleagues in health and social care was improving. More colleagues from education had been encouraged to join the Additional Needs Partnership Board to have more of a voice and contribute to collaborative working. Tribute was paid to school based staff, many of whom are amongst the lowest paid in the profession and who supported some of the most vulnerable learners.

The Executive Director for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning stated that in the Children, Families and Lifelong service the ambition along with partners, is that the local area partnerships arrangements for children with additional needs and disabilities will lead to positive experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND and should improvements be needed the partnership takes prompt action. There was still some way to go to achieve this. It was explained that a recovery plan had been put in place to tackle delays in education, health and care needs assessments. Additional resource would be put into communications with a lead officer for communications so parents and families can find information more easily. An additional communication team would be established to be the first point of contact for enquiries from families and stakeholders.

The Chief Executive for Family Voice Surrey welcomed the report and explained that families had told them that they felt that the final report did not fully and comprehensively reflect their experiences and feedback. Families had stated that inconsistencies were frequent and when things went wrong, they went badly wrong. This can be devastating and had significant negative impacts on families. Too many families reported being at financial and emotional breaking point in order to secure a basic right, often by a tribunal. There were positive experiences from some families. The Chief Executive promised families that they would continue to work in close alignment with the partnership representing the voice of parent carers and striving to authentically influence the decision making process.

The Chair of the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee welcomed the report and stated that the results were not a surprise to Select Committee members. It was reassuring that inspectors saw evidence of improvements in partnership working which was crucial to improving outcomes. Mindworks' triage and neurodiversity appointment wait times were a particular concern to the Select Committee as is communication between professionals, and between services and families. Communication is a blindspot. The Select Committee recognised that there were a large number of dedicated professionals working hard to do their very best for families

and young people, but there was also evidence of introspection in the service which was probably exacerbated by the pressures of demand and limited funding. The Chair urged that the response to the inspection findings should truly put families at the centre of the updated Strategic Plan and engage them as active collaborators. Services need to stand in the shoes of service users, to learn a different perspective.

Key points raised during the discussion:

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources stated that work had been undertaken by the council to look at council budgets and it had been confirmed that funding would be put aside to help implement the recommendations from the Ofsted inspection. The Cabinet Member asked health partners if they could provide any assurance around funding and budgets for SEND related work going forward. The ICS Director of Multi-Professional Leadership and Chief Nurse stated that there had been additional funding into children's services and this would continue moving forward. Discussions around additional funding would be happening in due course.

The Cabinet Member for Health, Wellbeing and Public Health asked what actions would be taken to improve and accelerate children's access to speech and language therapies and treatments. The Associate Director of Children, Young People and Families and Lead for Additional Needs and Disabilities, Children and Families Health Surrey recognised that children were waiting too long for therapies but significant progress had been made in the last few years with the reduction of waiting times for occupational therapy and the early years speech and language pathway. Work was continuing with partners around how we could continue to ensure children's needs are identified as soon as possible.

The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care queried what would be done to address issues around transitions in education for children and young people with SEND. The Assistant Director for Inclusion and Additional Needs explained that there was support in place for children who were coming up to a transition. For those on SEN support, this would come via schools and discussions would take place between SENCO's. Additional support had also been provided for these children through the ASPIRE project. For children with EHCPs, transitions would be managed via the annual review process and partners would be encouraged to input into this. As recognised in the inspection report further work was required to strengthen joint working in transitions and create clearer pathways. The Director for Education and Lifelong Learning explained that work was taking place with the Director in Adult Services responsible for transitions around improving the outcome and experiences of young people in this area. The Inclusion and Innovation Working Group, led by schools was also focusing on transitions. School Leader, Jack Mayhew provided some more detail around the Inclusion and Innovation Working Group explaining that the work had been a

success and practical steps had been taken to make schools more inclusive to neurodivergent learners. Training had also been rolled out from practitioners to school leaders and SENCOs around how professionals come together and make a difference for young people.

The Deputy Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning asked when children, young people and families would start to see the impact of the improvement work. The Executive Director for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning explained that the inspection report highlighted that some children, young people and families were already experiencing the difference that the new steps being taken by the council and partners were making. For example 250+ specialist school places had been opened in Surrey every year for the last three years and positive feedback had been received from young people and their families on the in county provision. The Executive Director believed that over time this positive feedback would increase.

The Deputy Cabinet Member for Highways asked how the decision to withdraw the schools referral to the developmental diagnostic assessment pathway was helpful and how this would help with efforts to ensure that children and young people get the right help at the right times. The Director of Children and Young People's Services, Mindworks acknowledged the wait time was long and apologised to families. With regards to the neurodevelopment pathway, it was explained that the diagnostic element was one element of the comprehensive pathway and met NICE guidelines. The pathway was delivered in partnership with school based colleagues and professionals in schools. The emphasis in the last term had been on early help and getting children support as early as possible in the pathway. Work was being undertaken with commissioners and other partner providers to look at the offer from the beginning of the new term. Nationally there was significant demand for neurodevelopmental diagnosis.

A member of the Cabinet asked Family Voice Surrey what one single improvement would make the biggest difference to children, young people and their families. The Chief Executive Officer, Family Voice Surrey stated that the one improvement that would make the biggest difference would be better communication so families knew exactly where their children were in the system.

The Cabinet Member for Property, Waste and Infrastructure explained that the council was expanding its specialist school estate and alternative provision to almost 6000 places with a huge capital investment of £230 million. One way this was being done was to link units to mainstream schools. Many primary settings had come forward to offer this but fewer secondary schools had been willing to engage. It was asked if partners could help influence this proposal. School Leader, Jack Mayhew stated that a school within his Trust, Guildford County School was looking to engage with the property team on this

area. Although there was some engagement with this sector more engagement was needed with secondary schools. There was a recognition from school colleagues that units within school settings were most effective for children.

A member of the Cabinet queried what was being done to support children and young people in schools facing mental health and emotional struggles. School Leader, Jack Mayhew stated that access to mental health support was a big concern for schools. He supported the decision to expand funding for EP services and stated there should be a focus on send case officers work as they had a fundamental role linking with families and schools.

The Leader of the Council thanked partners for joining the meeting and for their input. The Leader recognised there were areas where things were going well and better communication was a key component of this. A Select Committee of the council would be reviewing the inspection report in January and so would Surrey Heartlands and Frimley ICB's. More needed to be done to deliver consistent and high quality support to children and their families. The council accepted the findings of the inspection report which reflected the council's own self-assessment of where it was and also recognised the feedback from Family Voice Surrey. The number of SEND cases coming through the system had greatly increased and therefore a shift to early help and prevention was much needed.

RESOLVED:

1. That Cabinet notes the outcome of the Local Area SEND Inspection.
2. That Cabinet supports the actions that are being taken by the Additional Needs and Disabilities Partnership in response to the inspection recommendations.
3. That Cabinet oversees the Council's work as part of the AND Partnership and its delivery of the Inclusion and Additional Needs Strategy.

Reasons for Decisions:

The Local Area arrangements to support children with additional needs and disabilities were inspected by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) from 11 to 29 September 2023. The outcome of the inspection was published on 24 November 2023.

The inspection outcome is that the local area partnership's arrangements lead to inconsistent experiences and outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Ofsted and CQC require the local area partnership to work jointly to update its existing strategic plan based on the recommendations set out in the inspection report.

The recommendations and proposed responses are set out in this report.

Meeting closed at 10:49

Chairman