

**MINUTES** of the meeting of the **CHILDREN, FAMILIES, LIFELONG LEARNING AND CULTURE SELECT COMMITTEE** held at 10.00 am on 2 March 2023 at Committee Room, Woodhatch Place, 11 Cockshot Hill, Reigate, RH2 8EF.

These minutes are subject to confirmation by the Committee at its meeting on Thursday, 25 May 2023.

**Elected Members:**

- \* Liz Bowes (Chairman)
- \* Fiona Davidson
- \* Jonathan Essex
- Tim Hall
- \* Robert Hughes
- \* Rebecca Jennings-Evans
- \* Rachael Lake
- \* Michaela Martin
- \* Mark Sugden
- Liz Townsend
- \* Chris Townsend (Vice-Chairman)
- \* Jeremy Webster (Vice-Chairman)
- \* Fiona White

**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

**1/23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS [Item 1]**

Apologies were received from Tanya Quddus.

*Fiona Davidson arrived at 10:02am.*

**2/23 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS: 15 DECEMBER 2022 [Item 2]**

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

**3/23 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST [Item 3]**

None received.

**4/23 QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS [Item 4]**

1. One public question was received about the digital record-keeping system known as the Single View of a Child Integrated System (SVOAC), from Kate Goode and Leanne Henderson of Family Voice Surrey. A response to this question has been attached to these minutes. No supplementary question was asked.

**5/23 CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS [Item 5]**

1. The Chairman commended the hard work and commitment of staff whom Members had met on visits to quadrants in Walton and Woking.

*Fiona White arrived at 10:05am.*

**6/23 ACTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS TRACKER AND FORWARD WORK PLAN [Item 6]**

**Key points made in the discussion:**

1. A Member queried who held the remit of children's mental health services (Mindworks). The Scrutiny Business Manager explained it fell under health scrutiny and the approach being taken was for the Adults and Health Select Committee (AHSC) to host meetings, with Members of this Committee joining relevant items to ask questions and contribute to recommendations.
2. Members commented that they would prefer to bring Mindworks' witnesses and performance data before their own committee. The Cabinet Member for Education and Learning added she recognised that ASHC was the statutory committee for scrutiny of a health partner, though 'Partnership work to secure support for children and young people's mental health and well-being' was said to need improvement in the 2022 ILACS (Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services) report.

Actions/ requests for further information:

1. Democratic Services to include actions in relation to Mindworks made at AHSC meetings in the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning & Culture (CFLLC) Select Committee's actions tracker for ease of reference.

**7/23 ADDITIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES MONITORING [Item 8]**

**Witnesses:**

Clare Curran, Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning  
Rachael Wardell, Executive Director – Children, Families and Learning  
Liz Mills, Director – Education and Lifelong Learning  
Julia Katherine, Assistant Director – Inclusion and Additional Needs

**Key points made in the discussion:**

1. The Assistant Director informed the Committee that all its recommendations were incorporated into the strategy that was agreed by Cabinet in January 2023. An easy-read version had been commissioned and the first webinar for families would be

broadcast in April. Performance indicators against strategy priorities would be reported to the Committee regularly and include health indicators and timeliness of Education Health and Care needs assessments.

2. A Member voiced concern about the Council's ability to meet its Safety Valve Agreement obligations without the required capital investment, after it was awarded a fraction of what it bid for (£8m of £56m). The Executive Director stated the Safety Valve Agreement currently remained on track but the agreement's terms had assumed that bids would be successful. The Council was in a dialogue with the DfE about the Government's under investment. The Executive Director was not optimistic more funding would be forthcoming in the short-term and, in this instance, the agreement would therefore need to be relaxed. The special free school announced this week would help, but did not close the gap.
3. The percentage of Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) due in January 2023 that were completed on time (within 20 weeks) was two per cent. A Member asked when the 70 per cent target would be reached. The Director for Education and Lifelong Learning said the latest figure was 10 per cent and they aimed for 60 per cent by the next Committee meeting in May. Delays were caused by professional assessments. The Assistant Director reported special educational needs teams were now almost fully staffed and were writing around 2,000 new EHCPs a year. These were done in-house; a lot of quality assurance would be required if external agencies were used.
4. The EHCP assessment process was taking an average of 142 days to complete, against a target of 112 days (i.e. phase 2). At its worst it was 226 days (December 2022). Every case over 40 weeks had been looked at and, the 138 that took between 40 and 50 weeks all involved an additional complication.
5. A Member asked if the practice of parents funding their own Educational Psychologists should be encouraged. The Executive Director said that could result in a significant injustice in the system and the Code of Practice expected Educational Psychologist (EP) advice to be commissioned by the local authority. The Assistant Director conveyed that only 12 higher education institutions in the country trained EPs; the University of Surrey was not one of these. Surrey County Council had trainees on placement each year and had employed eight supervised assistant EPs, on the Committee's suggestion. The Department for Education's (DfE) *SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan* includes training 600 more educational psychologists (EPs) across the country, to start by 2025.
6. A Member enquired how schools were supported during the period waiting for assessment to avoid disruption to children.

The Assistant Director stated support for schools was commissioned from Schools Alliance for Excellence (SAfE) and from the specialist schools' Specialist Teachers for Inclusive Practice (STIPs). EHCPs were only for children with the most significant needs and sometimes an assessment was not required when Ordinarily Available Provision could meet a child's needs.

7. A Member was pleased the Council had committed to working with Family Voice Surrey to develop the parent portal, which would allow parents access to their child's records via the Single View of a Child Integrated System.
8. Of Surrey's 12,000 EHCPs, the primary need of 141 children was a hearing impairment and 24 of these (17 per cent) were educated outside of the county. These were likely to have a complexity of other needs requiring a more specialist placement. A Member asked if there was sufficient provision for visually impaired children following the closure of a specialist unit at George Abbot School and if there were plans for a specialist sixth form unit at Woking College. A written response was offered.

**Actions/requests for further information:**

1. The Director of Education and Lifelong Learning to provide how many of Surrey's children are blind / visually impaired and what proportion of these are being educated out of county, and share if there are / were plans for a new specialist unit in Surrey.
2. The Director of Education and Lifelong Learning to clarify if the average 142 days to complete the EHCP process in Surrey refers to working days or calendar days.
3. The performance sub-group to check progress towards 60 per cent of new EHCPs completed in time, at their meeting on 11 May 2023.

**Recommendations**

1. That Members of CFLLC Select Committee monitor the capital expenditure related to the Safety Valve Agreement via the Budget Task Group.

(Owners: Liz Bowes and Jeremy Webster)

**8/23 CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE WORKFORCE [Item 7]**

**Witnesses:**

Sinead Mooney, Cabinet Member for Children and Families

Rachael Wardell, Executive Director – Children, Families and Learning

Catherine Watkins, Assistant Director for South East Quadrant

Anasia Teete, HR People Business Partner

**Key points made in the discussion:**

1. The Department for Education (DfE) annual workforce census showed that nationally, social workers quitting their posts annually had risen by 40 per cent in five years. The number of leavers was greater than starters for the first time since the census began in 2017. The Assistant Director observed the Council had benchmarked salaries against neighbouring authorities and found although its base salary was reasonably competitive, its retention package was lower than elsewhere.
2. The complexity of cases since Covid had worsened retention. Workers moving to agencies was an issue, but people were also leaving the profession, both of which resulted in an increase of caseloads for those remaining. The cost of housing in Surrey had a significant impact and a comprehensive key worker housing scheme was not being offered, meaning many workers commute and have high petrol costs. A Member thought that if the Government made agency working difficult it could lead to more leaving the profession.
3. A Member remarked on the importance of competitive salaries amid a national staff shortage, when one third of the Council's social workers were not permanent. A review of foster care pay had resulted in it being aligned with neighbouring authorities, enabled by extra money in the budget, agreed at January 2023 Cabinet. It was suggested the equivalent was required for Surrey's social workers, a quarter of whom were leaving each year.
4. It was noted the 2023/24 budget includes £1.6m funding for a retention payment scheme, an apprenticeship scheme and ASYE (Assessed and Supported Year in Employment) training. A Member asked how much was needed for the proposals outlined in the report to Committee. A business case was due to be presented to the CFL Assurance and Performance Board in April 2023.
5. The Executive Director remarked that a sufficiency programme was delivering children's homes in county and the family safeguarding model emphasised keeping children with their birth families whenever safe; these policies contributed to reducing social workers' workload.
6. The Executive Director recognised the importance of creating a non-discriminatory environment and better supporting social workers who encounter discrimination. Many had experienced direct and indirect racism from both colleagues and families

they work with. A Council-wide bullying and harassment policy had been approved by the People, Performance and Development Committee.

7. A Member remarked that the £0.1m budgeted for the apprenticeship scheme funded four apprentices and should be expanded. The HR People Business Manager said there were budgetary constraints.
8. A Member repeated that children's social care should be a budgetary priority for the Council as a whole and should allow for virements rather than being constrained to a budget envelope. The Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning stated the budget had already been set for 2023/24 and had allocated Children's Services a £28m increase on the previous year.
9. A Member highlighted the absence of a key worker housing scheme. A paper on housing due at Cabinet in March 2023 identified key worker housing as deficient in Surrey. A Member professed support for using the Council's former care home in Caterham for this purpose.
10. The Council did not have a structured exit survey process before Children's Services introduced one. The Assistant Director acknowledged that face-to-face exit interviews would be more beneficial than the current practice of sending a link to an online survey, and agreed this may be better conducted by a colleague of the leaver rather than their line manager.
11. A Member relayed that the process of recruiting locums was held up by Connect2Surrey's slow pace. The Assistant Director stated she was aware of challenges but reported more success with Connect2Surrey than the previous provider. They were aware of a low conversion rate from CVs to appointments and would seek to analyse it. Job adverts could be refined according to area and recruitment events were being localised to quadrants. A 'return to social work' scheme was being put together.
12. Asked what would make social workers' work lives easier, the Assistant Director responded with some examples: parking, a defined desk space, increased access to pool cars, more administrative support and reduced duplication of forms.
13. Social worker assistants and admin support embedded in local teams were both being considered. A Member suggested administrators who have developed experience of the sector could then be encouraged to do the *Step Up to Social Work* programme (for graduates without a social work degree).
14. A Member asked if, as espoused by MacAlister's *Independent Review of Children's Social Care*, there should be a greater

focus on family support workers, the number of which was reduced in a former restructure. The Assistant Director indicated social workers in family safeguarding had the support of a multidisciplinary team.

15. A Member enquired if amalgamating children in need and child protection work had made the job too difficult. The Executive Director explained they would be very unlikely to separate the roles because the level of support needed by families fluctuated as they went in and out of crisis and continuity was needed.

### **Recommendations:**

The Select Committee welcomes the Children, Families and Lifelong Learning directorate's aim of having 85 per cent permanent social workers. To reach this position, the Committee proposes the following:

1. The Committee fully supports the proposal of a market rate supplement of £5,000 per annum for all social workers in Family Safeguarding teams and Independent Reviewing Officer roles. It recommends that the Council matches the salary package for children's social workers offered by neighbouring local authorities, and undertakes annual salary benchmarking to ensure this package, both monetary and non-monetary, remains competitive (Lead Member: Cabinet Member for Children and Families);
2. An action plan with SMART criteria to achieve the aforementioned 85 per cent is developed and shared with the Committee, including a timeline and target date by which to achieve this goal (Lead Member: Cabinet Member for Children and Families);
3. Key worker housing is included as a deliverable in the Cabinet report *A Housing, Accommodation and Homes Strategy for Surrey* for decision in March 2023 (Lead Member: Cabinet Member for Children and Families);
4. The Cabinet Member(s) and Directorate Leadership make immediate efforts to investigate the scope of issues of discrimination and bullying in Children's Services reported in exit interviews and to the Select Committee, and take action to address these issues;
5. The Cabinet Member for Children and Families, Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources and the CFLL Assurance and Performance Board give consideration to the following initiatives, outwith the 2023/24 budget envelope where necessary, to help recruit and retain social work staff:
  - (a) Ensure a face-to-face exit interview is offered to every single leaver. These could be with a colleague of the leaver's choice;
  - (b) Look at ways to make Connect2Surrey more efficient and communicate with managers more swiftly;
  - (c) Provide administrative support to social workers;

- (d) Create a clear route for family support workers and administrators to step up to social work, with training suggested at their annual performance review;
- (e) The Committee supports the plan to reinstate the annual car user lump sum for upkeep of cars assigned to business use, and recommends also investing in more pool cars for visits to families out of county, exploring the use of electric vehicles to reduce the Council's carbon footprint;
- (f) On taking control of on street parking enforcement in April 2023, provide front line and peripatetic social workers with parking permits for use on Council business;
- (g) Take action to ease parking constraints experienced by social workers at Surrey County Council offices;
- (h) Assign sufficient desk space to social workers in Surrey County Council offices;
- (i) Create an assistant team manager role to help supervise extended teams;
- (j) Offer support to international employees to help adjust to cultural differences;
- (k) Encourage local universities to make a statutory service placement a mandatory part of the social work degree;
- (l) Review if it would be beneficial to ASYEs to bring back the former practice of rotating them between teams for a variety of experiences before they choose where to settle;
- (m) Work with East Surrey College to give placements to their Level 3 course in Access to Social Work students.

6. The Committee continues to engage with the Recruitment, Retention and Culture Board.

**Actions/requests for further information:**

1. The Cabinet Member for Children and Families to provide details of the business case presented to the CFLL Assurance and Performance Board in April 2023 and the decision of the Board.
2. The HR People Business Partner to provide the proportion of Surrey's social workers leaving the role who leave to become a locum.
3. The Assistant Director for South East Quadrant to provide a 'carte blanche' list of what she would like to be done in a bid to increase and retain the number of permanent social workers.



**9/23 CHILDREN'S HOMES - OFSTED REPORTS PUBLISHED SINCE THE LAST MEETING OF THE SELECT COMMITTEE [Item 9]**

**Witnesses:**

Sinead Mooney, Cabinet Member for Children and Families

Tina Benjamin, Director – Corporate Parenting

**Key points made in the discussion:**

1. The Director informed that all children's homes were inspected every year and two homes had yet to be inspected this year. The home rated inadequate in December 2022 had a monitoring visit in January 2023, when it was judged to have met the two compliance notices issued. A further visit was expected in March.
2. A Member pointed out the Ofsted ratings had deteriorated since 2021, when 70 per cent of in-house children's homes were rated Good or Outstanding, compared with 56 per cent currently. This also compared with 92 per cent of non-Council run children's homes housing Surrey children. The Director explained the Council's policy was not to use independent homes rated lower than Good or Outstanding. Furthermore, independent homes would only accept children whom they believed would support a positive Ofsted outcome, so children with the most complex needs were housed in Surrey.
3. A Member queried why in two of the inspections the managers had not been registered. Once appointed they must then be registered with Ofsted. The Committee was assured applications had been submitted on time, but Ofsted had a significant backlog causing a delay of months.
4. A Member questioned the level of quality assurance and was informed that in the last year a second deputy manager had been recruited for each home, and a new electronic system had enabled remote viewing of records. Following Covid, the number of agency staff was higher than ideal, and they did not always access the training available.

**10/23 PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW [Item 10]**

**Witnesses:**

Sinead Mooney, Cabinet Member for Children and Families

Clare Curran, Cabinet Member for Education and Learning

Patricia Denney, Director of Children's Quality Assurance and Performance

**Key points made in the discussion:**

1. A Member requested Public Law Outline data.

**Actions/requests for further information:**

1. Data sent to ASHC on Mindworks, including waiting times and outcomes, should also be shared with the CFLLC Select Committee.
2. The Director of Children's Quality Assurance and Performance to share Public Law Outline data.

**11/23 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING [Item 11]**

The Committee noted its next meeting would be held on Thursday 25 May 2023.

Meeting ended at: 3.17 pm

---

**Chairman**