

**MINUTES** of the meeting of the **CHILDREN, FAMILIES, LIFELONG LEARNING & CULTURE SELECT COMMITTEE** held at 10.00 am on 12 June 2023 at Woodhatch Place, 11 Cockshot Hill, Reigate, RH2 8EF.

These minutes are subject to confirmation by the Committee at its meeting on Thursday, 20 July 2023.

**Elected Members:**

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

**Co-opted Members:**

- Mr Simon Parr, Diocesan Representative for the Catholic Church
- r Mrs Tanya Quddus, Parent Governor Representative
- Mr Alex Tear, Diocesan Representative for the Anglican Church, Diocese of Guildford

\*present

r = Remote Attendance

**12/23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS [Item 1]**

Apologies were received from Simon Parr.

Tanya Quddus attended remotely and had no voting rights.

**13/23 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING: 20 MARCH 2023 [Item 2]**

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

**14/23 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST [Item 3]**

None were received.

## **15/23 QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS [Item 4]**

There were three public questions, one Member question and no petitions. The questions and responses were published as a supplement to the 12 June agenda.

The Scrutiny Officer read a supplementary question on behalf of Roisin Kennedy, asking when the Council would stop offering only two sessions of speech therapy as standard when many children needed more. The Cabinet Member for Education and Learning agreed to provide a written response.

A second questioner, Charles Hepburn, did not attend the meeting.

Anna Sutherland attended the meeting and asked for an answer to her original question which she felt had not been provided by the response. The Cabinet Member for Education and Learning offered to have a discussion with Mrs Sutherland outside the meeting.

*Adjournment for 7 minutes while building works noise resolved. Meeting resumed at 10:18 am.*

As a supplementary to his written question, Jonathan Essex asked what would be done to address the shortfall in play and youth activities. He said this had not been bridged by DfE funding, which had created an expectation for something additional that might not be funded in the future. The Cabinet Member for Children and Families said she had committed to review the budget position for 2024/25. In the meantime, outcomes would be measured and evaluated, and feedback from carers and young people accessing the service would be harnessed through Family Voice.

### **Actions/requests for further information:**

1. Cabinet Member for Education and Learning to reach out for discussion with Anna Sutherland regarding her Public Question and share notes of the conversation with the Select Committee.
2. Cabinet Member for Education and Learning to send a written response to Roisin Kennedy's supplementary question and share it with the Select Committee.

## **16/23 CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS [Item 5]**

The Chairman paid tribute to her predecessor, Liz Bowes, for creating a spirit of collaboration. She declared her intention to limit public meetings to three hours, continue Member visits to front line operations and engage with education providers.

## **17/23 ACTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS TRACKER AND FORWARD WORK PLAN [Item 6]**

A forward work programming session will be held for all Committee Members on 10 July.

## **18/23 CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES AND SHORT BREAKS [Item 7]**

Witnesses:

Sinead Mooney, Cabinet Member for Children and Families

Rachael Wardell, Executive Director – Children, Families & Learning

Jenny Brickell, Assistant Director – Children with Disabilities

Eamonn Gilbert, Assistant Director – Commissioning

Chris Tisdall, Service Manager, Commissioning – Corporate Parenting

Kate Goode, Family Voice Surrey Participation Manager

### **Key points made in the discussion – Children with Disabilities:**

1. Mandatory additional safeguarding training for social workers in the children with disabilities service was introduced following Ofsted's 2021 visit, after the service took over case management responsibility for safeguarding cases, which previously had been transferred to family safeguarding teams. A Member asked how their understanding of safeguarding issues was being checked. The Assistant Director for Children with Disabilities said training had a safeguarding focus every three months, and one month ago a quarterly report to management from the Academy was introduced to check social workers' attendance at training, including agency staff. She informed the Committee the internal audit of the whole service in February 2023 did not identify any safeguarding concerns. A second audit was to be carried out later in 2023.
2. A Member asked how often children placed in specialist independent schools around the country were visited by Surrey staff. The Assistant Director for Children with Disabilities clarified the statutory requirement is for the child to be visited within the first week of a new placement, then at least once every six weeks, reduced to every three months if the placement is made permanent. Compliance was monitored monthly.
3. Regarding the 2023 dip sample, the Assistant Director for Children with Disabilities was asked what was being done to address the fact most of the child and family assessments were out-of-date. It was being considered whether these yearly assessments were proportionate and necessary in addition to the statutory child in need visits. A Member queried why in most of the audits there was no consent for information sharing. The Assistant Director said it was mainly due to the consent obtained not being evidenced, and parents understood information needed to be shared with schools and health partners. In order to improve the quality of reports, an exemplar assessment had been developed and shown to staff in practice improvement sessions.
4. Regarding timeliness of child in need visits, 87% of children were currently being seen within timescale, compared with 77% when Ofsted expressed concern in their January 2022 visit.

5. A Member asked if once a child had been classified as having lower needs and placed accordingly, there were subsequent reviews to check if their needs had changed. The Assistant Director for Children with Disabilities clarified a review took place every six months by a team that included an advanced social worker. Although this was an issue identified in the Ofsted report of March 2021, it was now an area of strong performance within a stable team.
6. A Member asked what had been done since the January 2022 Ofsted inspection to ensure a child's wider needs are met, not just those relating to their disability. The Assistant Director for Children with Disabilities said there was a focus on what the child can do and they recognised the importance of thinking about the child in the round.
7. The Family Voice Surrey Participation Manager acknowledged there had been improvement in the Service. She said they would like to be involved in how assessment training is put together and stressed the importance of viewing the child as a whole and looking positively at their abilities.
8. The Executive Director said they did not anticipate having a 100% fully staffed permanent workforce and were aiming for 85% permanent, 10% agency and 5% vacancies as a realistic goal by the time of the next full Ofsted inspection, expected early 2025. Within the CWD Service, the proportion of permanent social workers had increased to 77%, from 50% in March 2021.

#### **Key points made in the discussion – Short Breaks**

9. A Member asked why the short breaks budget had not been increased in 2023/24 despite a rise in inflation and demand. The Assistant Director for Commissioning emphasised the difficult economic climate and said it had been challenging to retain the same budget. A Member pointed out that although the budget remained stable it represented a real-term reduction in what could be delivered and suggested this could have been made more explicit. The Cabinet Member for Children and Families said she would listen to the feedback and any shortage of supply would be taken into account when setting future budgets.
10. The Chairman noted this funding, to pilot new initiatives, did not plug the deficit in play and leisure provision. A Member worried this would raise expectations and then be withdrawn. Asked if the £900,000 from the Short Breaks Innovation Fund would be repeated, the Service Manager for Commissioning confirmed it was for one year initially and the prospect of continuity was in discussion with the Department for Education (DfE). The Assistant Director for Commissioning observed the fund was for innovation and the idea was to bring it into the mainstream if the pilot was successful.

11. The Family Voice Surrey Participation Manager noted the importance of short breaks to the short and long-term wellbeing of families including siblings. The respite holds families together and the breaks allows the child to flourish, but only with regular access. Parents were expressing frustration at having services cut, sometimes on the day, and newly eligible families were on long waiting lists and did not believe it was being given the importance it warrants. The Chairman added that this echoed what councillors were being told.
12. Asked for the supply and demand ratio, the Assistant Director for Commissioning explained that, historically, providers had managed their own waiting lists, but steps were being taken to give the Commissioners a better idea of demand. The Member expressed concern at the gap in information where services are commissioned. The Service Manager informed they were currently surveying providers on waiting list levels.
13. A Member asked if tendering could be made less bureaucratic as some providers had been discouraged from applying, particularly smaller charities who were asked for a great deal of information for very small sums. The Service Manager welcomed detail on providers' specific issues so they could be followed up directly. He explained the new way of commissioning involved the Dynamic Purchasing System that had a light touch process for changes once due diligence had been done. The Assistant Director for Commissioning noted a need to reflect on the procedure for smaller awards though they did have to go through a competitive process.

**Actions/requests for further information:**

1. Service Manager, Commissioning – Corporate Parenting to answer if supply is meeting demand across the various Short Breaks services (overnight, play and leisure etc.), based on waiting list levels for both those services provided in-house and those commissioned once providers have responded to survey w/c 12/06/23.
2. Service Manager, Commissioning – Corporate Parenting to provide a breakdown of what short breaks the Council's core budget is providing versus what the DfE innovation funding is buying.
3. Cabinet Member for Children and Families to provide to Select Committee a clear timeline of what will be done to mitigate the impact of the reduction in play and youth activities this year, before the 2024/25 budget is set and before the 20 July Committee meeting.

**Resolved:**

**Children with Disabilities (CWD)**

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

1. When a dip sample audit report is employed as a tool to monitor performance, the recommendations should adhere to SMART criteria, and any subsequent report to Select Committee should document progress against these SMART recommendations.
2. The CWD Service continues to drive for improvements in the quality and consistency of assessments, as highlighted in the dip sample audit report.
3. As a result of the introduction of mandatory safeguarding training in the CWD Service, social workers should have their understanding of safeguarding issues checked annually. Should there be any further change to roles, all staff should be trained appropriately before this takes effect.

### **Short Breaks**

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

1. The Cabinet Member for Children and Families prioritises the restoration of funding for community-based play and youth schemes for children with disabilities to enable the FY 2022/23 capacity to be restored in FY 2024/25, given the widespread feedback that this change has been detrimental to the mental health of parents, carers, children and young people, as well as adversely impacting the Council's prevention strategy.
2. There is a determined focus on clear and timely communication both internally within Children's Services, and with parents and providers. This includes ensuring that, prior to any change in policy or process taking effect, the appropriate information is published on the Council's website and all parents using the services are informed of the change.
3. The short breaks commissioning/procurement process is reviewed to ensure that it is not overly onerous and does not deter smaller organisations from applying. As part of this review, Surrey Youth Focus should be asked to meet with providers (existing and those who have withdrawn) and to feedback anonymously to the Service.
4. The Cabinet Member for Children and Families responds to the findings of Family Voice Surrey's current survey on short breaks and communicates this response to the Select Committee, within one month of receipt.
5. Whilst additional government funding is very desirable, funding for pilots that may not deliver the outcomes desired, or for activities that are not financially sustainable without continued funding from the same source, should be carefully assessed. Where such pilots are introduced, the circumstances should be clearly identified in order to avoid setting expectations that cannot be realised in the longer term.

## **19/23 REPORT OF THE ADULT LEARNING AND SKILLS TASK GROUP [Item 8]**

Witnesses:

Chris Townsend, Chairman of the Task Group  
Clare Curran, Cabinet Member for Education and Learning  
Liz Mills, Director – Education and Lifelong Learning

### **Key points made in the discussion:**

1. The Chairman commended members of the task group for producing a comprehensive review of how the Council and its partners can respond to the challenges of adult learning.
2. The Chairman of the Task Group thanked all those who had participated in their research. He stressed the importance of having a centralised and publicly accessible database to make everyone aware of what adult learning is being provided and where in order to demonstrate where the gaps lie, for example in Mole Valley. He highlighted the imbalance between types of provision in the East and West of Surrey.
3. The Director of Education and Learning said she welcomed the report's breadth and thoroughness. It was an important staging post and they would take the recommendations to the Adult Learning Service's governing body.
4. A Member questioned the feasibility of every library in Surrey operating as an adult learning facility. The Chairman noted the recommendation had been modified accordingly.
5. A Member said recommendations were about residents' wellbeing, not just aiding economic growth, and urged that community learning and work-related skills should be equally valued and not subject to a postcode lottery.
6. A Member said the report identifies economically inactive communities in Surrey who were being left behind because the Council was not reaching them in terms of skills development.
7. The Cabinet Member for Education and Learning observed the level of detail in the report but was disappointed it did not highlight the work done to help people with additional needs into employment. She pointed out its interconnectedness with the Pathways to Employment model and Lifetime of Learning Strategy. She noted that the responsibility for skills sits with the Cabinet Member for Transport, Infrastructure and Growth. The Task Group Chairman informed her that the report had been shared with him.
8. The Chairman offered further discussion on the topic following the meeting.

**Resolved:**

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

1. Endorses all recommendations of the Adult Learning and Skills Task Group. This includes the recommendation on using libraries, while noting this may be very challenging in some smaller libraries.
2. Asks the relevant officers to provide a progress report to this Select Committee on the progress being made in relation to the Task Group's recommendations at the first Select Committee meeting of 2024, to include an analysis of the funding implications.

**20/23 HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT ASSISTANCE UPDATE [Item 9]**

Witnesses:

Clare Curran, Cabinet Member for Education and Learning  
Rachael Wardell, Executive Director – Children, Families and Learning  
Michael Smith, Temporary Senior Responsible Officer for Home to School Transport Improvement  
Gerry Hughes, H2STA Service Manager  
Leanne Henderson, Family Voice Surrey Participation Manager

**Key points made in the discussion:**

1. Family Voice Surrey (FVS) noted the heartening progress made and said its impact would be felt after summer, when they would run another survey. They were pleased to have assurance families would not be forced to accept an Independent Travel Allowance (ITA) in lieu of transport being provided. They confirmed families in receipt of the ITA had been reimbursed for the other leg of a return journey, and considered this a great success. Key stage transfer letters were much improved this year with a clear flowchart showing how to apply. FVS had received much fewer emails from families having difficulties with outstanding payments. Not all parent carers felt communication had improved. FVS were disappointed the first payment could not be made before October; the Cabinet Member for Education and Learning explained it was a reimbursement scheme in case there had been any absences, but there was an emergency allowance scheme.
2. Asked to identify where problems lie, the Executive Director for Children, Families and Learning said that as a shortage occupation, special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) case workers had large caseloads, which in itself contributed to fluctuating retention. FVS said they would return to Committee to share their findings from a survey on the case officer role.
3. The Cabinet Member for Education and Learning said the Service was in a much better position to deal with peak activity this year. The Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) said the Service had been restructured and



additionally resourced, they had removed the need for 850 families to reapply, and had managed to reduce the year's overspend to £12million. He confirmed the potential cost of outstanding Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) awaiting assessment was reflected in this year's budget and said the £55 million budget looked sufficient.

4. A Member asked if there would be a recurrence of the spike in demand seen in May 2022 and if financial surprises may materialise. The SRO responded they were now resourced to deal with that level of demand, though May 2023 had seen 460 applications compared to over 900 12 months before. He explained that a +/- 1% difference in inflation or forecast EHCP numbers equated to about £300,000, but rigorous monitoring would enable a prompt response in such a scenario.
5. The Executive Director made the point that inclusive practice would enable children with SEND to attend the same school as their siblings and reduce H2STA costs.
6. A Member asked if the Service measured if there was an adverse impact on young people when solo taxi arrangements were withdrawn. The SRO said any change in mode of transport was made with full consultation with the family and all applicants had the right to appeal. A Member queried whether the service was designed around the needs of children or led by the budget. The Cabinet Member said it complied with statutory obligations; it was their duty to meet the child's needs and these were always considered, however they also had a duty to account for their use of public money.
7. Asked if school coaches were used efficiently, the SRO said all demand had been met and there was spare capacity to accommodate any new movers during the year, though vehicles could be downsized mid-year to reduce unit cost. The Member queried whether parents were made aware of the existence of concessionary seats and said these should be promoted.
8. A Member queried the need to wait for a new customer relationship management system (CRM) when the current architecture could support what they want to do. The H2STA team were working with digital discovery colleagues on the best solution.

*Tanya Quddus left at 2:42 pm.*

**Actions/requests for further information:**

1. Senior Responsible Officer for H2STA to provide to Select Committee the number of children and young people (and percentage) with solo taxi arrangements for the last 12 months, on a month-by-month basis.

**Resolved:**

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

1. A particular focus is placed on improving communications with parents and carers, as highlighted in the update from Family Voice, during the next few months to ensure that the reassuring trend in respect of feedback on Home to School Transport is not undermined.
2. Making an urgent priority the alignment of customer relationship management systems (CRMs) and telephony systems across the corporate contact centre, CFLL Customer Relations team and within the service teams involved in enquiry handling, and for IT to explore how this can be done under the current CRMs to avoid delay.
3. The Senior Responsible Officer provides a further update on the performance and progress of Home to School Transport as soon as possible after the start of the September 2023 new academic year, to include the results of the joint survey with Family Voice.

*Adjournment for 16 minutes while technical issue resolved. Meeting resumed at 3:08 pm.*

*Fiona White left at 2:53 pm. Rebecca Jennings-Evans left at 2:56 pm.*

**21/23 ADDITIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES MONITORING [Item 10]**

**Key points made in the discussion:**

1. A Member enquired if communications would be included in the KPIs shared with Committee. The Chairman indicated that was her intention.

**Resolved:**

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

1. That from the October 2023 committee meeting, key performance indicators measuring performance in additional needs and disabilities, to be agreed between the Director of Education and the Chairman, are added to the data provided in the performance overview standing item.
2. Given the committee's recommendations from December 2022 are all considered to be complete, that additional needs monitoring is removed as a standing item once recommendation 1 is implemented.

## **22/23 CHILDREN'S HOMES – OFSTED REPORTS PUBLISHED SINCE THE LAST MEETING OF THE SELECT COMMITTEE [Item 11]**

Witnesses:

Sinead Mooney, Cabinet Member for Children and Families

Rachael Wardell, Executive Director – Children, Families and Learning

### **Key points made in the discussion:**

1. The Chairman remarked that the five latest Ofsted reports overall demonstrated progress and there looked to be more management oversight.
2. A Member asked how Ofsted heard the voice of the child and how young people were able to speak freely. The Executive Director for Children, Families and Learning stated Ofsted would not give a good judgement if a home were to appear obstructive in securing the child's voice in the inspection. Although young people are entitled to withhold consent, staff try to give them the confidence to speak.

*Ashley Tilling left at 3:17 pm.*

### **Actions/requests for further information:**

1. Scrutiny Officer to feedback to the Service, on behalf of the Select Committee, progress noted in the management oversight of children's homes.

## **23/23 PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW [Item 12]**

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

Chris Tisdall, Service Manager, Commissioning – Corporate Parenting

### **Key points made in the discussion:**

1. The Chairman enquired what the plan was to recruit foster carers as the Big Fostering Partnership (BFP) had not delivered. The Service Manager for Commissioning - Corporate Parenting confirmed that since entering the partnership in April 2022, they had not met the goal of enabling 22 children to step down from children's homes to fostering. The ambition had been revised to four children by the end of January 2024 when the partnership ends. BFP had however helped them to improve practice.
2. The Executive Director for Children, Families and Learning explained deregistered households included those who had not accommodated a child for a long time, which freed up resources to encourage active carers to take

more children. They were looking into applying to be part of the Department for Education's Fostering Recruitment and Retention Programme.

3. A Member asked why only 35 of the 204 children taken through a Section 47 investigation in March 2023 resulted in a Child Protection (CP) Conference. 17% of S47 enquiries had that outcome in April, which fell short of the 39% target. The Director of Children's Quality Assurance and Performance explained that in some cases the process itself had resulted in an improvement meaning a child in need plan became more appropriate than a child protection plan. Under the Family Safeguarding model, rather than a traditional social work model, they were working more outside of the Section 47 process; the target was set before the relaunch of the model and would be revised. The Executive Director for Children, Families and Learning elaborated that the model leans towards using child in need plans when safe to do so, if the family is engaging. She believed it was not appropriate for conversions to CP conferences to be target-driven. In general terms, however, KPI targets were being made more ambitious.

*Rachael Lake left at 3:38 pm.*

4. A Member requested a task and finish group on increasing Surrey's supply of foster carers.

**Actions/requests for further information:**

1. Democratic Services Assistant to set up a meeting with the Executive Director of CFL and Committee Members to discuss how performance is measured, raising KPI targets and where targets may not be needed.

**24/23 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING [Item 13]**

The Committee noted its next meeting would be held on Thursday 20 July 2023.

Meeting ended at: 3:45 pm

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**Chairman**