

MINUTES of the meeting of the **CHILDREN, FAMILIES, LIFELONG LEARNING & CULTURE SELECT COMMITTEE** held at 10.00 am on 4 October 2022 at Woodhatch Place, 11 Cockshot Hill, Reigate, RH2 8EF.

These minutes are subject to confirmation by the Committee at its meeting on Thursday, 15 December 2022.

Elected Members:

- Liz Bowes (Chairman)
- * Fiona Davidson
- * Jonathan Essex
- * Rebecca Jennings-Evans
- * Rachael Lake
- * Michaela Martin
- Lesley Steeds
- * 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

(* = present at the meeting)

34/22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS [Item 1]

Apologies were received from Cllr Liz Bowes, Cllr Fiona White, and Mr Simon Parr. Mrs Tanya Quddus attended the meeting remotely.

Cllr Chris Townsend chaired the meeting.

35/22 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING: 6 JULY 2022 [Item 2]

The minutes were agreed.

36/22 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST [Item 3]

None received.

37/22 QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS [Item 4]

Witnesses:

Clare Curran, Cabinet Member for Education and Learning

Tina Benjamin, Director – Corporate Parenting

Liz Mills, Director – Education and Lifelong Learning

Hayley Connor, Director – Commissioning (CFL)

1. Four questions were received from Fiona Davidson. The Member asked a supplementary question about the reason for the net decrease of mainstream foster carers and why the service was struggling to retain and recruit them. The Director for Corporate Parenting gave reasons that included retirement, standards of care, and personal circumstances. The service was working with the Foster Care Association to rectify any issues foster carers had. Difficulties to recruit and retain foster carers was a nationwide issue, as well as the impact of the pandemic regarding lifestyle changes.
2. As a supplementary question, the Member queried whether it was possible to change the process regarding the deadline for submitting transport requests to consider the timeframe of appealing a school place. The Director for Education and Lifelong Learning explained that this was being looked into. Once the initial phase had passed, there would be an analysis of the cohort to understand the sequence and to inform changes. The Director for Commissioning added that the analysis of staffing requirements had started, and they had introduced some levels of automation. A Member asked whether this work should come to the Select Committee. The Cabinet Member reassured Members that they would be closely involved in the review.
3. Five questions were received from Catherine Powell. No supplementary questions were asked.
4. Five questions were received from Mark Sugden. The Member suggested for a further report on home to school transport to come as an item to a future public meeting. It was agreed that the Committee would receive an interim report to the meeting in December 2022 and a full report in 2023.

38/22 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES STRATEGY [Item 5]

Witnesses:

Clare Curran, Cabinet Member for Education and Learning

Liz Mills, Director – Education and Lifelong Learning

Hayley Connor, Director – Commissioning

Julia Katherine, Assistant Director - Inclusion and Additional Needs

Claire Poole, Interim Chief Executive of Family Voice Surrey

Benedicte Symcox, Former Chief Executive of Family Voice Surrey

Key points raised in the discussion:

1. The Assistant Director introduced the item, noting that the new strategy would be in place from the beginning of 2023, building on a partnership that has been completed. The strategy aims to improve outcomes for children and young people and the experiences of families. The work of the strategy was overseen by the Surrey Additional Needs and Disabilities Partnership Board, which included a range of stakeholders. The former Chief Executive of Family Voice Surrey added that the Board was a collaborative space, and the self-evaluation was an example of co-produced work between partners.
2. The Chairman asked about the options provided to respondents of the parent/carer satisfaction survey. The Assistant Director explained that the survey included a standard five-point scale from 'very unsatisfied' to 'very satisfied'. Parents and carers who had a child with an Educational Health and Care Plan (EHCP) were asked how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with the support their child receives from professionals to support them with their additional needs and/or disability: 46% responded 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' (14% very dissatisfied). A higher proportion of parents and carers who had a child receiving special educational need (SEN) support were satisfied with the support their child receives from their school to support them with their additional needs and/or disability: 52% responded 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' (11% very dissatisfied).
3. The Chairman asked why the appeal rate was higher in Surrey than the national average and what proportion of those were successful. The Assistant Director explained that the number of statutory assessments had increased, which impacted the number of appealable decisions. One potential reason for an appeal was a lack of specialist provision, which was being addressed by the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) capital programme. The Director for Education and Lifelong Learning added that of the 578 appeals made up to the end of the last academic year, 265 were ongoing at the time of recording and 233 of those did not end up being heard by the tribunal or were resolved. The reasons for this were carefully monitored. Of those that were heard (79), approximately 50% were awarded in favour of the family. Service managers were

trained in restorative approaches and tried to work with families to prevent appeals from occurring. The service had published 'Ordinarily Available Provision' guidance to set clear expectations about the range of support that could be made without the need for a statutory plan.

4. A Member asked how the quality of EHCPs were monitored. The Assistant Director responded that there was a team of quality managers who co-ordinated a multi-agency audit process to monitor the results. An audit tool was used to audit a representative number of plans regularly and a deep dive was conducted on a termly basis. The Member queried the steps taken when a plan did not meet the required standards. The Assistant Director explained that it would be fed back to the professionals involved and addressed through training.
5. A Member asked how changes in practice were being made to reduce delays in assessments and annual reviews, as well as the causes for such delays. The Assistant Director explained that they would work closer with families to ensure that when delays occurred, families were kept informed. Delays were often due to the involvement of multiple agencies in the assessment. The Council was working with schools to ensure that the support provided in schools continued whilst a statutory plan was being finalised for a child.
6. In reply to a question on response times, the Director explained that there had been a high turnover of staff and these roles had since been filled. Therefore, response times would improve over the autumn period. The Learners' Single Point of Access captured data and produced reports on response times and a new system had been introduced which produced more advanced information in this area. There had been work with the customer relations team and contact centre to improve monitoring through this pathway.
7. A Member asked about the barriers to children receiving provision and the consequences for both schools and the Council if it was not provided. The Assistant Director explained that one reason was due to recruitment challenges. The Council had a statutory responsibility to ensure that the provision specified in the plan was delivered and this was monitored through annual reviews. In the past two years, appeals to tribunals could now consider issues related to health and care provision as well. The Council formally consulted with schools before placing a child to ensure the child's needs could be met.

The same process applied with academies and independent schools.

8. The Chairman asked Family Voice whether they feel that relationships with the Council had improved. The Interim Chief Executive of Family Voice explained that since she had joined the organisation in 2015, the relationship had significantly improved, especially from 2019 onwards. They had built a successful co-productive and collaborative relationship and were looking forward to the benefits of this filtering down to the families that they represented. The former Chief Executive added that the priorities were correct, and it was important that the NHS were involved in the partnership, as a lot of children primarily had health needs. A key determinant of success was how schools would fit into the partnership, as this would depend on the willingness and ability of each individual school.

9. A Member asked whether there was additional funding to manage the increase of EHCPs. The Assistant Director explained that statutory plans were only for approximately 3-4% of children who had the most complex needs. The key objective was that children's needs were met at the earliest opportunity. The Director added that all funding for children in this area came from the High Needs Funding Block and this had been constituted in the Safety Valve agreement with the Department for Education. There were contributions from partners and there were joint commissioning arrangements with health colleagues. Schools were directly funded to provide for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN). The former Chief Executive shared that historically, families saw an EHCP as a guarantee of support for their child. In response to a question on whether cuts in provision would be required as the Safety Valve Agreement was not a long-term solution, the Director explained that it was designed to put the Council back on a trajectory to meet need within the funding envelope provided. It would require both a change of culture and practice

10. In response to a question on the level of young people with SEN not in education, employment, or training (NEET), the Director explained that there was a preparation for adulthood plan, and they worked closely with Adult Social Care (ASC) colleagues, as only approximately 11% of children in receipt of an EHCP might go on to receive statutory ASC support. The cohort was changing and the number of individuals on vocational pathways was increasing, a shift from educational training. In January 2022, the total percentage of NEET for the cohort was 2.5%.

This year was the first in a long time that 100% of children returned to their employment, education or training in September. In any year, there was also a small number of unknown children, which was reducing.

11. The Chairman asked what the Council was doing to attract staff with the appropriate skills. The Assistant Director shared that there had been significant turnover nationally with SEN teams. It was hoped that by the end of October 2022, the SEN teams would be fully staffed, following a period of recruitment. There were also national shortages with partners that they worked with, such as, educational psychologists. The Chairman asked about the additional school places. The Director explained that the 280 places from September 2022 were part of an additional 800 places through 35 schemes. This programme continued to be delivered over time.
12. Responding to a question on total number of specialist school places required, the Director explained that the intention was to have the majority of children's needs met in maintained specialist provision. This would require 6,000 specialist places over a ten-year period, but this would continue to be reviewed. The aim was to come in line with the national average of 6.5% (currently at 14% in Surrey) of children receiving provision outside of mainstream schools.
13. A Member asked about the consequences of the gap in its capital funding bid allocation. The Director explained that the service was trying to reduce the gap and they had placed two bids for two additional free schools. An analysis was completed which showed the shortfall of funding and the options to bridge the remaining gap.
14. In response to a question on measuring the success of the Team Around the School pilot, the Director explained that specific measures had been formulated, such as, placement stability. It was expected that a report would come to the Board on the pilot, and a view would be taken on whether to adapt the pilot or establish it in its current form.
15. The Chairman asked whether travelling distance was taken into consideration when planning the locations of new placements. The Assistant Director reassured the Members that this was taken into consideration and the aim was for children to be located as close to home as possible. The Director for Education and Lifelong Learning added that the average distance from

home for children with EHCPs was six miles, and exceptional cases of long distances brought the average up. The former Chief Executive of Family Voice Surrey shared that families and caseworkers were not well enough informed of the specificity of provision available in mainstream placements and therefore, strong parental preference affected placements of children.

16. The Chairman asked about the witnesses' confidence that the Council were well prepared for the new local area SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) inspection framework. The Assistant Director explained that the Council was ready, and they were awaiting the publication of the final inspection framework. The Council had planned a programme of inspection preparation activity, which was underway and would continue until the inspection takes place.

Actions/requests for further information:

1. The Director of Education and Lifelong Learning to share a breakdown of the results of the last academic year of tribunal cases, including ways they were resolved prior to a tribunal and the distinction between partial and non-agreement by the end of November 2022.
2. The Director of Education and Lifelong Learning to share a table showing the phases of the programme of additional places with start and end points by the end of November 2022.
3. The Director of Education and Lifelong Learning to provide data on what proportion of SEND children are educated locally (within 10 miles from home) by the end of November 2022.
4. The Committee asks to receive the final draft Inclusion and Additional Needs Strategy, and the Additional Needs and Disabilities Partnership Board's comments on this, in time for the Committee's December meeting ahead of the strategy going to Cabinet.

RESOLVED:

1. The Select Committee notes the progress that continues to be made, as well as the ongoing challenges and the work underway to co-produce a refreshed strategy for 2023 to 2026.

2. The Chairman and Vice-Chairmen and Director of Education and Lifelong Learning to agree on the format of SEND performance data to be shared with the Committee.

39/22 FAMILY CENTRES [Item 6]

Witnesses:

Sinead Mooney, Cabinet Member for Children and Families

Clare Curran, Cabinet Member for Education and Learning

Matt Ansell, Director – Safeguarding and Family Resilience

Hayley Connor, Director – Commissioning

Jackie Clementson, Assistant Director – Children’s Single Point of Access (C-SPA), Early Help & Youth Justice

Key points raised in the discussion:

1. A Member asked how the service was targeting families of greatest need and asked whether there was a reduction in child protection plans because of the work of family centres. The Director explained that the Council’s figures per 10,000 for child protection plans and children looked after were in line with the national figures. There had not been a reduction yet, but they were hoping to see one over time. The Member also asked about the types of families who were self-referring for services. The Assistant Director responded that they were not able to get that data currently, however, noted that early help needed to be accessible to all families.
2. A Member noted the lack of information included in the report regarding the work happening on the ground and raised concern over a family centre in Upper Hale that had significant issues. The Director for Safeguarding and Family Resilience explained that he was doing direct work with that family centre, however, they had experienced positive and engaging practices at other family centres he had visited. The service had commissioned a specialist research team to ensure that the right offer was being provided, as they wanted to reduce the support on statutory services.
3. In response to a question on the family support programmes, the Assistant Director explained that the programmes were delivered through five district and borough councils but the services were delivered countywide. The programmes supported families with

complex needs that did not reach the threshold to receive statutory services.

4. The Chairman asked whether family centres were located in areas of greatest need. The Cabinet Member for Education and Learning explained that the locations were chosen using the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI), to ensure that they would have the easiest outreach to areas of high deprivation. A Member asked how often the areas were reviewed. The Director for Commissioning explained that the IDACI was a national piece of work, however, the Health and Wellbeing Board were reviewing areas of deprivation.
5. In response to a question on the comparison of the new provision to the previous Children's Centres, the Director for Commissioning explained that talking to families about their experiences was part of this work and this could be brought back to the Committee. In terms of the data, the model was significantly different to the previous model, therefore, it was difficult to obtain comparative data. There was data from the consultation prior to the decision on the new model. Family centres were one important element of the overall early help offer. The Director offered to work with the Member to find a way to produce comparative data, whilst recognising the difficulties.
6. A Member asked about the reasons why Surrey's referral rates to children's social care increased, whereas the national trend was continued decreasing rates. The Director for Safeguarding and Family Resilience explained that there was history of encouraging partners to refer to children's social care. There was ongoing work to build resilience within the system so that there was not a need to refer. The Children's Single Point of Access had been reviewed and the service was becoming more outward looking.

Mrs Tanya Quddus joined the meeting remotely at 12:25pm.

Actions/requests for further information:

1. The Director for Commissioning to provide data and explain how the Council keeps track of families in need and their geographical distribution in relation to family centres and early help provision by the end of November 2022.

2. The Cabinet Member for Children and Families to provide further information regarding the work on the ground of the family support programmes in the next report on Family Centres in March 2023.
3. The Cabinet Member for Children and Families to provide a written answer to whether Sure Start closures played a part in the rising demand for EHCPs, with reference to the Bercow Report by the end of November 2022.

RESOLVED:

1. The Select Committee reviewed and noted the updates outlined in the report and the progress made to deliver these important changes aligned to the Early Help Continuous Improvement programme.
2. The Committee agreed to receive in 2023 a further update on the Family Centres programme, including a comparison of data with the previous regime, and the development and implementation of the Early Help Continuous Improvement programme.

40/22 CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE WORKFORCE STRATEGY / RECRUITMENT & RETENTION UPDATE [Item 7]

Witnesses:

Sinead Mooney, Cabinet Member for Children and Families

Clare Curran, Cabinet Member for Education and Learning

Matt Ansell, Director – Safeguarding and Family Resilience

Key points raised in the discussion:

1. The Chairman asked about the support in place for female employees, as they made up 86% of the workforce. The Cabinet Member for Children and Families explained that she would provide a written response to this, as it required a broader discussion with partners in health and ASC. The Cabinet Member for Education Learning noted that it was also important to support men who may not feel represented in the workforce and questioned whether the proportion of women was also reflected in leadership roles.
2. In response to questions on social workers leaving with less than two years service and responses in exit interviews, the Director

explained that it was a national trend for social workers to move on around after a year to two years. The Council supported an assessed and supported year in employment (ASYE) two-year programme for newly qualified social workers. The Council had been involved in working with the Department for Education (DfE) on developing the early career framework, especially for social workers. The exit interview process had been refined to gain the granular detail for why people were leaving. The Member asked whether people were leaving the profession or pursuing it elsewhere. The Director confirmed that people were usually leaving the profession. The makeup of the social work workforce had changed, as the entry requirements were different.

3. A Member questioned whether the workload was manageable and asked whether the high cost of living in Surrey was a deterrent to employment stability. The Director explained that caseloads fluctuated and currently some social workers had higher caseloads than they would want. The early intervention work was trying to reduce the casework coming from children of certain cohorts, as the balance of children contributed to the workload as well as the numbers of children. The Cabinet Member for Children and Families added that affordability of housing was a significant issue, and the Council was looking into the possibility of key worker housing and/or housing with care and support.
4. Responding to a question on the day-to-day pressures for social workers, the Director explained that there had been difficulties in recruiting agency staff which was impacting on the workload and pressures of permanent staff. In the longer term, the ambition was to improve the proportion of agency to permanent staff. There had been meetings with agency staff to discuss how their package with their agency compared to the Council's employment package. The Care Review suggested considering utilising alternative qualified professionals alongside social workers.
5. A Member enquired about the timescale to improve the workforce position for social workers. The Director explained that they were bringing in a higher number of newly qualified social workers on the ASYE programme. There was work to improve the Council's online presence regarding recruitment of experienced social workers. There had been discussions about offering work experience to students in their final year at local universities. By increasing the number of agency social workers again, then the permanent social workers would be more likely

to stay as well. The Executive Director for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning sat on the national panel for recruitment and retention of ASYEs.

6. In response to a question on the pathways into social work, the Director explained that there were several channels, such as step up to social work which was a three-year programme, and the Council was taking an additional cohort in September. The Council had also agreed some apprenticeships, although these came at a financial cost. There was a working group looking at the effectiveness of retention bonuses and exploring other payment options.

Actions/requests for further information:

1. The Cabinet Member for Children and Families to provide a written response regarding the support provided to female social workers specifically by the end of November 2022.
2. The Director for Safeguarding and Family Resilience to provide the current average number of caseloads per social worker by the end of November 2022.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Service reviews its appointment procedures for internal candidates, to consider how promotion opportunities can be enhanced in order to retain staff with expertise.
2. That the Service offers its support in arranging for CFLLC Select Committee Members to have informal meetings with social care staff, so that a) the Committee has a better understanding of their roles and b) social care staff have an opportunity to talk frankly about their work and what they require from their managers in order to ease the pressures in the roles they carry out.
3. That the Committee agrees to receive updates on Recommendations 1 and 2 plus a further general update on the Recruitment, Retention & Culture programme and the development and implementation of the Children's Social Care Workforce Strategy at a meeting in 2023.

41/22 SURREY HOMES FOR SURREY CHILDREN: A STRATEGIC APPROACH TO GROWING CAPACITY IN CHILDREN'S HOMES IN SURREY [Item 8]

Witnesses:

Sinead Mooney, Cabinet Member for Children and Families

Tina Benjamin, Director – Corporate Parenting

Chris Tisdall, Head of Commissioning – Corporate Parenting

Key points raised in the discussion:

1. A Member questioned why the ambition was not for 100% of children to be placed in Surrey. The Director explained that it was felt that 80% was a realistic target based on forecasting. Some children were placed outside of Surrey and that was the most appropriate placement for them.
2. A Member questioned when it was known that extra capacity for children's homes was needed. The Director explained that it was about the type of children that were coming into care, as some of the expansion was for children with disabilities. The Head of Commissioning explained that there was a growth in the numbers of children and young people and therefore, they needed to grow the infrastructure. Surrey had 17 Council-run children's homes, whereas Hampshire and Kent had around 70-80 each. The Cabinet Member added that there had been an awareness for some time, which was why the strategy was developed.
3. Responding to a query on the number of beds required, the Director explained that 50-60 beds were considered realistic in a three-year strategy. The Head of Commissioning added that 50-60 should be right, but would double check the numbers. The strategy also included reducing the number of teenagers requiring residential places and increasing their position in the external market. It was not necessarily about having children in homes long term.
4. The Chairman asked about the risks to the children and the Council of using un-regulated placements. The Director reassured Members that the service tried to avoid such placements as much as possible. Due to a national shortage of places, it meant that sometimes they could not be avoided. There were mitigations in place to ensure children were as safe as possible and during their placement, the service would try to find an alternative placement. Each local authority had a small cohort of these children and the Council talked to Ofsted monthly about this cohort.
5. A Member asked why the need for care leaver accommodation had reduced. The Director explained that young adults made their own choices about where to live. There was a successful piece of work around recommissioning the supported

accommodation framework for care leavers. It was about re-focusing on the area of greatest need which was children looked after.

6. The Chairman queried whether the Council was anticipating issues with planning permission. The Director explained that they would be building large family homes with three to four children per home, and they had been successful with the two homes they were currently building. It was not just about the planning, as the Council wanted the children to join in with their local social environment. The current homes worked closely with their neighbours to ensure positive relationships.
7. A Member enquired into the plans to support children to return to home with their families. The Director explained that there was care planning which was about achieving permanency for children. When a child was in care, there would be a review on a sixth monthly basis where reunification of a child and their family would be considered. There was a reunification programme which supported families when a child returned home. The Council's long-term stability figures were above the national average.

Mr Alex Tear left the meeting at 2:35pm.

Actions/requests for further information:

1. The Head of Commissioning (Corporate Parenting) to confirm the target number of children's beds and explain how this figure was arrived at with regard to current shortages.
2. The Head of Commissioning (Corporate Parenting) to confirm a date by which the intention is for 80% of Surrey's looked after children to be living in Surrey.

RESOLVED:

1. The Select Committee endorsed the overall long-term sufficiency ambition that every Surrey looked after child has the choice to remain in Surrey, where this is appropriate to their needs, accepting the current working hypothesis that this means planning for 80% of looked after children living in Surrey by a date to be agreed.
2. The Select Committee endorsed the proposed recommendations set out in this report that are planned to come to Cabinet on 29 November 2022, to support the implementation of the Council's Looked After Children and Care Leaver Sufficiency Strategy 2020-25.

42/22 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC [Item 9]

The Select Committee Members agreed to exclude the public during consideration of item 10 on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information under paragraphs 1 and 2 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972

43/22 LEARNINGS FROM THE REVIEW INTO THE EVENTS LEADING TO THE CLOSURE OF A CHILDREN'S HOME: IMPROVEMENT PLAN [Item 10]

Witnesses:

Clare Curran, Cabinet Member for Education and Learning

Tina Benjamin, Director – Corporate Parenting

Key points raised in the discussion:

1. The Director introduced a Part 2 report containing information which was exempt from Access to Information requirements by virtue of paragraphs 1 – Information relating to any individual and 2 – Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual.
2. The Select Committee discussed the exempt report and asked questions of the witnesses under part two conditions.

RESOLVED:

1. The Select Committee noted the Action Plan.

44/22 PUBLICITY OF PART TWO ITEMS [Item 11]

It was agreed that the information in relation to the Part 2 item discussed at the meeting would remain exempt.

45/22 ACTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS TRACKER AND FORWARD WORK PLAN [Item 12]

Key points raised in the discussion:

1. It was agreed that the report of the Adult Learning and Skills Task Group, Youth Work and Children with Disabilities would be pushed back to 2023. An interim update report on Home to School Transport and the compendium overview would come to the meeting in December 2022, with a full Home to School Transport report in 2023.

2. A Member requested for the report on Youth Work to compare the current and previous provision.

46/22 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING [Item 13]

The Select Committee noted that its next meeting would be held on Thursday, 15 December 2022.

Meeting ended at: 2.55 pm

Chairman

This page is intentionally left blank