

MINUTES of the meeting of the **CHILDREN, FAMILIES, LIFELONG LEARNING & CULTURE SELECT COMMITTEE** held at 10.00 am on 14 December 2020 at REMOTE MEETING.

These minutes are subject to confirmation by the Committee at its meeting on Wednesday, 20 January 2021.

Elected Members:

- Amanda Boote
- * Mr Chris Botten (Vice-Chairman)
- * Mrs Liz Bowes
- * Mr Robert Evans
- * Mrs Kay Hammond (Chairman)
- Mrs Yvonna Lay
- * Mr Peter Martin
- Dr Andrew Povey
- * Mrs Lesley Steeds (Vice-Chairman)
- * Ms Barbara Thomson
- * Mr Chris Townsend
- * Mr Richard Walsh

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

Substitute Members:

Councillor Clare Curran

20 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS [Item 1]

Apologies were received from Dr Andrew Povey, Councillor Yvonna Lay and Mr Simon Parr. Councillor Clare Curran attended as a substitute for Dr Andrew Povey.

21 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING: MONDAY, 21 SEPTEMBER 2020 [Item 2]

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

22 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST [Item 3]

Councillor Peter Martin declared a personal interest in relation to Item 5. This interest did not prevent the Member from participating in the discussion.
Declaration: Grandchild is an EHCP recipient.

Councillor Clare Curran declared a personal interest during the discussion of Item 7.
Declaration: The Councillor is a non-executive Director of Surrey Choices.

23 QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS [Item 4]

None received.

24 UPDATE ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SEND TASK GROUP [Item 5]

Witnesses:

Julie Iles, Cabinet Member for All-Age Learning

Liz Mills, Director – Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture

Jane Winterbone, Assistant Director – Education

Mary Burguieres, Assistant Director – Systems and Transformation

Key points raised during the discussion:

1. The Chairman invited Cllr Chris Botten, Chairman of the former Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Task Group, to chair the discussion.
2. The Assistant Director – Systems and Transformation thanked the SEND Task Group for its report and stated that its recommendations helped guide improvement work around the support provided for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN). The Assistant Director stated that when the Task Group was established in October 2019, the Graduated Response (GR) approach, the Schools Alliance for Excellence (SAfE), and engagement with Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) were in their infancy; the Learner's Single Point of Access (L-SPA) and the Early Intervention Fund did not exist; contracting arrangements for independent schools were not yet robust; and the Service had only just agreed Phase 1 of its capital investment programme. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the Service had made progress on eight of the nine recommendations put forth by the Task Group. The ninth recommendation was to provide a progress update on actions that took place to implement each of the Task Group's recommendations, to the Select Committee.
3. The Cabinet Member for All Age Learning thanked all school leaders who worked tirelessly during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns. She commented that the school relationships team and area schools officers were fantastic in dealing with schools and ensuring that Public Health colleagues were providing sufficient advice and guidance.
4. A Member noted that school attendance of SEN learners during the first national lockdown in Surrey was higher than the national average and asked how this was achieved. The Assistant Director – Systems and Transformation informed the Select Committee that 23% of children in Surrey with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) attended school during the first lockdown in Spring 2020, compared to 16% nationally. A number of things were done to achieve this: the GR Advisers ascertained which children were capable of attending school and undertook risk assessments for all learners with EHCPs or those who were considered vulnerable; the Service worked closely with

schools, particularly specialist schools, to ensure they received priority access to personal protective equipment (PPE); the Service ensured director-level oversight of children attending school; and needs were responded to in a way that ensured parents' confidence that their children were safe in school.

5. A Member asked what percentage of SEN learners were attending school currently. The Assistant Director – Systems and Transformation stated that attendance was approximately 85% because some children with SEN were required to stay at home to self-isolate. For that reason, this figure was lower than that for the proportion of children without an EHCP who were attending school.
6. A Member asked what extra challenges schools might face with providing support for children with SEND in 2021. The Assistant Director – Systems and Transformation stated that mental wellbeing issues resulting from 'Long Covid' and bereavement were expected, and the Service had undertaken significant work to provide emotional wellbeing and mental health support and frequently wrote to all parents to highlight the support available for them and their children. The Cabinet Member for All Age Learning explained that children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) were significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic due to their need for routine and certainty. There had been some placement breakdowns for ASD children during the pandemic. There was a new contract for ASD outreach support for the learning, language needs, and social, emotional wellbeing and mental health of children with ASD and the Cabinet Member was confident that the Service had adequate foresight of what it needed to provide in 2021.
7. A Member asked how the availability of Early Intervention Funding was promoted to education settings. The Assistant Director – Systems and Transformation responded that since its April 2020 launch, the fund was actively promoted to early years settings through the weekly schools' bulletin and SENCO network. The fund had been accessed by over 250 settings in a variety of ways. Promotion of the fund was to be expanded so that other professionals could understand how the fund could be used to support children. The Cabinet Member informed the Select Committee that over 620 children had benefited from the Early Intervention Fund since April 2020.
8. A Vice-Chairman asked how future demand for local-area specialist provision had been modelled and whether the SEND Capital Programme would deliver a sufficient number of additional places. The Cabinet Member for All-Age Learning stated that the demand forecast for September 2021 was based on previous transition rates of children with an EHCP plan who moved from mainstream to specialist placements at Key Stage levels. There were plans to create 485 places in the council's own provision, both in special schools and special resource units, to prevent a reliance on placements in the non-maintained and independent sector. The Service was also consulting on the bandings across special schools to ensure the practice of care was consistent and well known. The Service also contracted a specific

forecasting provider which undertook more rigorous demand modelling than was possible in previous years. The Assistant Director – Systems and Transformations stated that undertaking the Schedule 2 agreements for 1,143 children in independent schools concluded that their needs could be met in maintained specialist schools. Thus, the council was confident that it could commission and invest in its own maintained specialist provision to expand its capacity and reduce reliance on the independent sector.

9. The Vice-Chairman asked how work undertaken with London Southbank University had improved understandings of service demand. The Assistant Director – Systems and Transformation stated that the joint work had improved the understanding of autism and enabled the council to ensure that its maintained provision was meeting the needs of ASD children in Surrey. The Cabinet Member informed the Select Committee that the work with Southbank University was also informing the All-Age Autism Strategy.
10. A Vice-Chairman noted that the council was consulting on changes to the way in which SEND support was funded and asked why the Select Committee was not invited to participate in or contribute to the framing of this consultation. The Cabinet Member stated that the consultation was regarding a small element of special needs funding. The total amount of net funding in the Dedicated Schools Grant was just under £500m: the schools directly received £271m; central services retained approximately £6m; early years received approximately £75m; and there was £144m funding within the High Needs Block. The funding in respect of which the council was consulting with the Schools Forum related to additional discretionary funding received by schools, which comprised less than 1% of overall funding. This discretionary element was currently used along with independent personal support budgets (the second element of the consultation with the Schools Forum). It was proposed that this funding be used by clusters of schools to support children with EHCPs. It was to give clusters flexibility in respect of the support they provided, for example by enabling them to employ speech and language therapists. The current formula had received agreement from the Schools Forum and responding to the consultation on the proposed changes was described as business as usual for the Schools Forum. The consultation was published online, and the council was asking headteachers and governing bodies to examine it prior to discussion at the Schools Forum in January 2021. Any decisions would be made after that with input from the Schools Forum. A paper went to Cabinet on the 24 November 2020 and the Select Committee had the ability to call-in decisions within its remit.
11. The Vice-Chairman requested that the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Directorate apprise the Select Committee of all consultations prior to their occurrence.
12. A Member requested that a progress update be reported to the Select Committee within 6 to 12 months.

Recommendations:

- I. The Select Committee notes the significant work underway to implement the SEND transformation programme and the recommendations of the SEND Task Group; and the Cabinet Member for All-Age Learning report with a progress update to the Select Committee in September 2021.
- II. That the Director – Education, Learning and Culture share the re-designed outreach offer, once it is complete, with the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee.
- III. That the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Directorate apprise the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee of all consultations as soon as practicable.

25 CABINET RESPONSE TO THE REPORT OF THE NO WRONG DOOR TASK GROUP [Item 6]

Witnesses:

Mary Lewis, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families

Tina Benjamin, Director – Corporate Parenting

Key points raised during the discussion:

1. The Chairman invited Councillor Lesley Steeds, Chairman of the former No Wrong Door (NWD) Task Group, to introduce the Report. The Chairman of the Task Group was pleased to report that the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families had accepted six of the Task Group recommendations outright and accepted the essence of the remaining three. The Chairman of the Task Group supported the Cabinet Member's decision to maintain the name No Wrong Door for the Service. The Chairman of the Task Group was assured by the Cabinet Member's representation that the accreditation of Surrey's NWD by North Yorkshire County Council would not prevent further development of the service to meet local need. The Chairman of the Task Group recommended that the Select Committee agree that the assurances provided satisfactorily addressed the concerns underlying recommendations 1, 2 and 8.
2. A Member asked for an update on the progress of the NWD project. The Director – Corporate Parenting informed the Select Committee that the Service was scheduling key training which was crucial for the rollout of the NWD and ensuring that staff understood the model and engaged with partners. An operational group of staff members was established, and roles and job descriptions were being developed. The Service was also considering what the NWD would look like for foster carers who wanted to work within the model, identifying the eligibility and pathways for young people, and exploring the future working relationship with colleagues in social care and other agencies. The

NWD was on course to commence in shadow form in late January/February 2021.

3. A Member asked if there were any risks of implementing the NWD Service. The Cabinet Member stated that failing to introduce a new service for teenagers at risk of becoming looked after was the greatest risk and thanked the Task Group for its work and supporting the introduction of the NWD policy.
4. A Member asked whether the locations for future NWD hubs were confirmed and for the reasons behind any decisions made. The Director informed the Select Committee that the first confirmed location was Walton-on-Thames, in Northeast Surrey. This site fulfilled much of the criteria for children's development and hub work. The Service had looked at where in Surrey most teenagers entered into care to help decide in which quadrant the hubs were best located. The Director hoped that the hubs would be spread across the county as much as possible and commented that, ideally, the second hub would be in the southeast of the county, but this was not yet confirmed. The service was deliverable without dedicated NWD hubs, by using the council's existing residential estate.
5. The Chairman noted that Cabinet agreed a refreshed Organisational Strategy on 29 September 2020 and asked how the NWD supported the council's new priorities. The Cabinet Member explained that outcomes for teenagers who entered care were generally poor thus the NWD supported the priority that nobody is left behind, by reducing care episodes and improving outcomes for service users. Children from ethnic minority backgrounds were more likely to be referred to children's social care but would be supported differently and more effectively with the NWD approach, thus supporting the council's priority to tackle inequality. The NWD model also prevented young people from being placed out of county, and resilient and connected communities were built when communities supported their young people.
6. A Member asked if, hypothetically, North Yorkshire County Council did not hold the intellectual property rights in respect of the name 'No Wrong Door' and the model's ten distinguishing features, but had still offered to accredit the council's No Wrong Door service, the council would have still opted for accreditation and, if so, why. The Director stated that the council would have still wanted to work with North Yorkshire County Council if there was no accreditation, as learning from a well-established system is helpful when introducing a new policy. The Director added that the name 'No Wrong Door' was widely understood by social workers but would not necessarily be known to service users – the hubs could be given any name, and young people would be consulted in this respect.
7. The Cabinet Member for Children stated that the number of families living in poverty in Surrey was projected to increase over the following years due to COVID-19 and suggested that the Select Committee look at how families were being supported through economic pressures at a future meeting.

Recommendations:

- I. The assurances provided by the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families in respect of recommendations 1, 2 and 8 of the Report of the No Wrong Door Task Group satisfactorily address the concerns underlying those recommendations.
- II. The Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee endorses the decisions of the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families to proceed with the accreditation of Surrey County Council's No Wrong Door service by North Yorkshire County Council and to maintain the name 'No Wrong Door' for the service.

26 SCRUTINY OF 2021/22 DRAFT BUDGET AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY TO 2025/26 [Item 7]

Witnesses:

Julie Iles, Cabinet Member for All-Age Learning
Mary Lewis, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families

Liz Mills, Director – Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture
Jacquie Burke, Director – Family Resilience and Safeguarding
Rachel Wigley, Director – Financial Insights
Mark Hak-Sanders, Strategic Finance Business Partner – Corporate Finance

Key points raised during the discussion:

1. The Strategic Finance Business Partner gave an overview of the corporate budgetary position and strategy, focussing on the 2021/22 budget gap and a view of the funding position from 2021/22 to 2025/26.
2. The core planning assumptions that informed the draft Budget were established using the PESTLE Framework for considering political, economic, social, technological, legal, environmental and climate factors. Future demand, inflation and funding were also considered. Thus, the draft Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy were based on an assessment of the likely operating environment for the county council in 2021/22 and over the medium term. The draft Budget was developed in an integrated way across the organisation and was linked with the council's four new priority objectives and the community vision 2030. The immediate priority for 2021 was to stabilise the council's finances following the COVID-19 crisis.
3. The Strategic Finance Business Partner stated that the draft Budget contained an £18.3m funding gap for 2021/22. The main areas of the funding gap were £5m in Adult Social Care, £5.9m in Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture, and £5.9m in Environment, Transport and Infrastructure. Funding estimates were to be iterated

with the further clarity that was expected before Christmas in the local government finance settlement following a government spending review in November 2020; there was relative confidence that the £18.3m gap would be closed without further directorate efficiencies. Fulfilling the council's statutory duty of setting a balanced budget for each financial year was to be achieved by refining core planning and funding assumptions, reviewing directorate gaps, and finalising efficiency and transformation proposals. The 2021/22-2025/26 capital programme also needed to be finalised. A final budget was to be presented to Cabinet in January 2021, following the conclusion of a public consultation in December 2020 and equality impact assessments for proposed efficiencies, and approved by Council in February 2021.

4. The medium-term estimates assumed that the Government Fair Funding Review would reduce the council's funding – estimates suggested that the funding gap would rise to £170.1m over the 5-year period to 2025/26.
5. The Director – Financial Insights gave an overview of the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Draft Budget. There were seven strategic priorities for 2020/21, alongside ongoing business-as-usual responsibilities within the Directorate. The Directorate budget, excluding the Dedicated Schools Grant, was £251m, the largest part of that being allocated to Corporate Parenting, followed by Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture.
6. The Medium-Term Financial Strategy for 2021-26 (MTFS) was focused on the key areas of transformation and financial pressures within the Directorate. The Ofsted rating of children's services continued to be a priority, but there were other financial issues such as expenditure on placements, including Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, and changes within integrated commissioning to deliver and develop the Integrated Care System.
7. Pressures for 2021-22 were £61.6m and efficiencies proposed amounted to £55.7m. Reductions that still needed to be found over the 2021-26 MTFS period totalled £22.6m and this figure assumed that there would be a spike in Looked After Children referrals caused by COVID-19, which were then expected to reduce from 2022/23.
8. The High Needs Block was a key area of financial risk for the Directorate. For 20/21, there was a grant of £160m, an approved overspend of £24m. This was the budgeted contribution to an offsetting reserve, equivalent to the cumulative deficit to provide resilience in the balance sheet, and an unapproved overspend of £8m. The Directorate's Capital Programme totalled £3m over five years, for schemes directly delivered by the Service. There were also Directorate schemes of £270.4m over five years included in the Property Capital Budget.
9. The Chairman asked what the key risks and financial challenges faced by the Directorate were in the short and medium terms. The Director – Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture explained that the main risks were caused by rising demand and the cost of meeting that

demand, particularly unit cost. Across the system there were discernible impacts of COVID-19 - such as increased levels of anxiety in children and changes in young people's needs - all of which impacted unit cost. The best approach to meet challenges was to strengthen the systems already in place: family resilience; the Learner's Single Point of Access; the SEN strategy; the work on reducing absence and exclusions; and the community family resilience network.

10. A Member questioned how the Directorate could continue to find efficiencies in the same areas over consecutive years. The Cabinet Member for All-Age Learning stated that 90% of Local Authorities were in a comparable position to Surrey with regard to overspends and required efficiencies. The Director – Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture explained that the Directorate was building on the strategies introduced in recent years, e.g. family resilience and the Graduated Response. The Director – Family Resilience and Safeguarding emphasised that the efficiencies to keep within the budget envelope were in line with what the service believed was best for children and what was set out in the initial strategic vision, i.e. children should be helped at the lowest level of need and those who became looked after should be cared for within the county. The Service was attempting to increase the proportion of permanent staff to improve the experience of looked-after children and contribute to efficiency savings. The Director – Corporate Parenting stated that securing more foster carers was also key to providing service efficiencies. Recruitment had slowed during the pandemic, however there was an aim to return to pre-COVID-19 levels, and this would reduce costs and improve the situation for young people. The Cabinet Member added that there were restrictions on how the Dedicated Schools Grant could be used, however the council was continuing to lobby the Government for increased SEN funding. The average unit cost in the non-maintained and independent sector was £52k per placement and did not necessarily generate better outcomes for young people. The Service was seeking to increase the capacity of its own specialist settings, which had placement costs of, on average, £16k - £23k, and were therefore more financially efficient. The Cabinet Member emphasised that, as a demand-led service, the Service needed to reduce unit cost whilst guaranteeing outcomes.
11. A Member asked how confident the Directorate felt that the planned savings were achievable, given the repeat need for savings in the same areas of pressure and overspends of the High Needs Block, transport, and family resilience. The Director – Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture stated that a detailed planning stage for the delivery of each of those savings was underway, and each saving was to have a robust plan sitting underneath it.
12. A Member was concerned about the high value of planned efficiencies in the High Needs Block. The Director – Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture stated that the Directorate was reliant upon a systemic response to ensure savings were achieved. The RAG (red, amber or green) ratings reflected the complexity of the task, however it was anticipated that the ratings would start to improve. A group formed from the school community was working with the Service around

inclusion and was aiming to ensure that in September 2021 every child could have their need met within a mainstream or maintained school environment. The Director assured Members that there were large-scale delivery plans sitting behind planned efficiencies.

13. Members asked how confident officers were that the Directorate would find the efficiencies required of it and whether earlier expressions of confidence that the council would close the remaining £18.3m funding gap assumed that the further £5.9m of efficiencies would be achieved by the Directorate or if the gap could otherwise be closed. The Director – Financial Insights stated that there was a government spending review at the end of November 2020 that provided a high-level provisional overview of likely local government funding. The Director, however, expressed confidence that sufficient funding to close the gap would be provided and thus directorates would not have to find further efficiencies for 2021/22.

Barbara Thomson left the meeting at 11:38.

14. A Member asked what “additional management action” meant and for officers to provide an example of this. The Director – Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture, explained that wider ongoing work was focusing on meeting needs earlier and reducing the need for statutory plans; a fall in requests for statutory plans over the previous 9-12 months indicated that management actions were effective in resolving issues. Further examples were emotional literacy support systems that were being put into schools and the expansion of pathways to employment for post-16 students (the Service was anticipating a 100% increase in the number of placements in those schemes by September 2021).
15. A Member asked how the UK’s future relationship with the European Union (EU) was expected to impact the draft Budget and MTFS. The Strategic Finance Business Partner stated that the impact of leaving the EU was one of the legislative and economic factors that was considered in core planning assumptions. Clarity on the future relationship would be a guiding impact and thus this may need to be revisited. The Director – Family Resilience and Safeguarding stated that staffing was the biggest concern for children’s social care. The Service had engaged with the existing workforce earlier in the year to ensure that staff from the EU had the correct paperwork in place to continue working for the service. In terms of children’s homes and receiving supplies, there was contingency planning in place. Work was underway to ensure that families had the right paperwork in place going forward.
16. Councillor Clare Curran declared a non-pecuniary interest as non-executive director of Surrey Choices.

Recommendations:

- I. That, subsequent to this meeting, the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee will agree wording for inclusion in the report regarding the draft Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy which is to be prepared jointly by the council's four select committees.

Meeting suspended at 11:55

Meeting recommenced at 12:00

27 CHILDREN'S IMPROVEMENT UPDATE [Item 8]

Witnesses:

Mary Lewis, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families

Jacquie Burke, Director – Family Resilience and Safeguarding

Tina Benjamin, Director – Corporate Parenting

Mark Mapstone, Assistant Director – Performance, Intelligence and System

Key points raised during the discussion:

1. The Chairman thanked officers, social workers, the management team and Cabinet Members for their hard work during the COVID-19 pandemic and praised them for continuing to launch the initiatives within the Family Resilience improvement programme.
2. The Director – Family Resilience and Safeguarding introduced the report and provided the Select Committee with a summary of the improvement work that was taking place in Surrey's children's services and the impact that COVID-19 was having on the improvement programme and the delivery of frontline services. Overall, the service performance data showed that the Service was coping well during the pandemic, responding effectively to increased demand, ensuring that children and families were provided with the support they needed during that period, and continuing to deliver its improvement programme. The area of greatest concern was children with disabilities and the Service was endeavouring to continue progressing in this area to fulfil its aim of providing a consistently high-quality service for all children.
3. The Vice-Chairman asked whether Children's Services were adequately resourced to meet the increased demand and whether there were any risks of which the Select Committee should be aware. The Director – Family Resilience and Safeguarding stated that sophisticated modelling of capacity examined cases coming through the children's services front door and the subsequent trickle down into the rest of the system and informed the Service how best to meet that demand. The Director emphasised that it was not desirable to continue

to provide the current level of statutory support for families because issues were best resolved when identified and addressed early. The Helping Families Early Strategy aimed to bring families out of statutory services in a supported manner to help them capitalise on changes made. Resourcing and staffing continued to be one of the Service's greatest challenges and was the motivation behind a bespoke recruitment workstream. The results of the new recruitment and retention package would hopefully be seen in January/February 2021. The Cabinet Member stated that her greatest concern was the pressure that increased caseloads placed on staff. Members were actively engaging with Surrey Members of Parliament to lobby the Government to take action to make social work a more attractive career option.

4. The Vice-Chairman noted the increased caseloads to which social work staff were subject and asked what wellbeing support was available to staff and how this was provided and funded. The Director - Family Resilience and Safeguarding informed the Select Committee that there was a significant wellbeing offer which was accompanied by mindfulness training and coaching, team trips to Surrey Outdoor Learning, corporate coaching teams, and bereavement and domestic abuse support. Service leaders were vocal about staff wellbeing and internal communications emphasised the support available and the importance of staff taking time for themselves away from work.
5. A Member stated that there was a high number of agency workers in Surrey and asked whether neighbouring counties experienced the same ongoing issue with the recruitment of social workers. The Director – Family Resilience and Safeguarding assured the Select Committee that the recruitment of social workers was a top priority for the Service. Benchmarking with other Local Authorities showed that there was a discernible correlation between turnover and agency rates and inadequate authorities and achieving a more stable staff group was a big focus of the Service's transformation programme. The Service was grateful to Members for approving an enhanced salary offer for the recruitment and retention of social workers. There was a programme within the transformation programme that looked at workforce and employer experiences, staff focus groups, career pathways etc. The Service had published its refreshed recruitment offer, which could be found on the council's website.
6. A Member asked whether the appointment of 40 newly qualified social workers (NQSWs) was sufficient to satisfy the Service's social work requirement. The Director – Family Resilience and Safeguarding stated that in their first year of practice, NQSWs were permitted to work with significantly less children than experienced social workers thus teams needed to have a balance between the former and the

latter. Due to COVID-19, it was also taking longer to bring NQSWs up to speed and thus the Service was measured in its employment of 40, 10 for each Quadrant. The Director stated that the real issue was the duration for which social workers remained in frontline practice and the ways in which the Service could create conditions that encouraged social workers to stay in post for longer than the average 5-7-years. The Executive Director emphasised that it was vital that the council offered excellent working environments and good career progression so that social workers were inspired to enjoy longer careers.

7. A Member noted that Essex County Council (ECC) and Surrey County Council (SCC) were improvement partners and asked whether the two Local Authorities used the same practice models for their children's services. The Director – Family Resilience and Safeguarding explained that the Department for Education gave SCC the opportunity to work with ECC as a partner in practice following the passing of Dave Hill, to support the service during the recruitment period for the new Executive Director of Children's Services. The Director stated that this had been an effective relationship and it was very helpful to see ECC's performance-management practice. A discussion needed to take place about what the relationship between the two Local Authorities would look like going forward.
8. A Member queried why re-referrals to children's social care were increasing and asked whether the upward trend indicated anything regarding the quality of frontline practice. The Director – Family Resilience and Safeguarding stated that often those families supported by the service tended to be the least resilient thus some level of re-referral was always expected. During the COVID-19 pandemic, families were unable to access their own support networks of families and friends, thus there were some pandemic-related referrals. The Service was increasing the use of family network meetings and the assessment service to ensure social workers were inviting people into the family network to help support the family.
9. A Member noted that much of the inadequate practice pertained to older children and adolescents (youth offending, missing young people, young people at risk of being referred to children's social care) and asked whether this cohort was a specific priority area for improvement. The Director – Family Resilience and Safeguarding confirmed that work with adolescents was a priority area for the Service and the Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership and was supported by a targeted inhouse youth support team and a safeguarding adolescents team. The Surrey Youth Offending Service was rated inadequate in 2019 and thenceforth a significant amount of work was undertaken to improve the Service, culminating in increased confidence in the skills of the practitioners and the outcomes for

adolescents. The Service was committed to improving the outcomes for adolescents and the Youth Justice Board had expressed a high degree of confidence that the Service was making the necessary improvements.

10. The Chairman noted that the Youth Offending Service review highlighted that 43% of children were receiving an inadequate service and suggested that the Directorate report on the improvement of the Youth Offending Service to the Select Committee at its July 2021 meeting. The Director – Family Resilience and Safeguarding stated the report found an overall positive trajectory of improvements made since the Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Prisons inspection in 2019, however, the rate of improvements was variable. The Director informed Members that some of the children who were audited were from the cohort of children who were previously audited as part of the inadequate inspection. In terms of quality assurance, the Targeted Youth Support service, where the majority of the youth offending work happens, had not been included in the audit cycle. They were now included and all of their performance data was on Tableau. The Director agreed that the Directorate should report the improvements made in the Youth Offending Service to the Select Committee.

11. A Member asked whether officers expected frontline social work practice to be of satisfactory standard by the time Ofsted next visited or inspected the council’s children’s services. The Director – Family Resilience and Safeguarding stated that the last Ofsted inspection (2018) showed that staff in the system did not know what good practice looked like, because the majority of audits were moderated down. There was now a tolerance rate of 10% moderation. In November 2020, moderation was just under 10%, showing that the managers had an improved understanding of what good practice looked like. There was significant improvement in the system and practitioners were working hard to meet their commitment of providing families with timely responses. Now, the Service was targeting its efforts on pockets of inadequacy. The monthly case audit for November highlighted 12 ‘inadequate’ cases out of 70. Of those 12, 8 were in the children with disabilities service. Recognising this, the Service had made a commitment to reviewing 402 cases of children with disabilities; since August 2020, the Service had reviewed 227. The Service was working with leaders and had undertaken a rigorous self-assessment, looking back to 2018 and at what was needed to get to ‘good’, resulting in a detailed 12-month plan. The Cabinet Member added that the former Commissioner for Surrey’s Children’s Services had declared that the Service had made significant and sustainable progress at the level of required improvement. The audits showed the vast majority of practice was deemed to be ‘good’ or ‘requires

improvement' (7% of cases audited in September 2020 were 'inadequate').

12. The Director – Corporate Parenting informed Members that Ofsted paused its inspection regime in March 2020. Feedback from the council's four monitoring visits that took place between 2018 and January 2020 was positive about the work being done and reassured the Service that improvements were being made. The Director – Family Resilience and Safeguarding informed the Select Committee that Ofsted considered the Service's Quality Assurance Team and performance monitoring to be exemplary.
13. The Chairman referred to areas needing improvement in front line practice and asked how the Service was improving communication. The Director – Family Resilience and Safeguarding agreed that effective communication was critical to achieving very good practice and the importance of good relationships and communications was emphasised within the improvement work planned for the following six months.
14. A Member noted that their local youth centre had been used to deliver alternate provision during the national lockdown of November 2020 and asked why some education, training and childcare was permitted in youth centre buildings during the national lockdown. The Director – Family Resilience and Safeguarding stated that the normal universal youth service was not able to run during the lockdown period hence the buildings were offered to other frontline services. The Service worked with the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) to establish priority services and conversations needed to take place to discuss how these centres were to be used going forward. The Director agreed to provide a written response to Members regarding the delivery of additional learning provision from youth centres and related costs.

Recommendations:

- I. That the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Directorate provide a further update on the Children's Improvement Programme to the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee in July 2021; and that update include the findings of any Ofsted monitoring and future thematic audits, with audit findings broken down by quadrant.
- II. That the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Directorate report on the Youth Offending Service to the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee in July 2021.

Actions:

- i. The Director – Family Resilience and Safeguarding to provide the Select Committee with a written response detailing the use of youth centres during the national lockdown in November 2020 and the associated costs.

28 RECOMMENDATIONS TRACKER AND FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME [Item 9]

Key points raised during the discussion:

1. The Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families suggested that the Select Committee scrutinise the progress of work being undertaken with disadvantaged children.

29 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING: WEDNESDAY, 20 JANUARY 2021 [Item 10]

The Committee noted its next meeting would be held on 20 January 2021.

Meeting ended at: 12:57pm_____Chairman