

Minutes of the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 3 December 2015 at 10:00 am in the Elisabeth Room, Endeavour House, Ipswich.

Present: Councillors Graham Newman (Chairman), Sonia Barker (Vice Chairman), Helen Armitage, Nick Barber, Peter Beer, Mary Evans, Mandy Gaylard, Derek Hackett, Michael Gower and Penny Otton

Statutory Co-opted members present: Mark Dunn, Paul McIntee

Also present: Councillor Gordon Jones, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills

Supporting officers present: Paul Banjo (Scrutiny Officer) and Susan Cassedy (Democratic Services Officer).

21. Public Participation Session

The Committee heard representation from two Public Speakers as follows:

Ruth Coomber- Ms Coomber, was unable to attend the meeting in person and using his Chairman's discretion the Chairman agreed to read out her statement on her behalf. Ms Coomber's statement set out her concern regarding the difficulties faced by intelligent young people within the autism spectrum accessing appropriately supported post-16 education. Ms Ewart set out the difficulties her own son had faced before successfully gaining an Education, Health and Care Plan and a place at the Centre Academy. She expressed her anger and upset about the way her son had been treated the previous year but hoped that the Committee becoming aware of the situation would mean that future students in the same position would be properly supported.

Response to Ruth Coomber's statement:

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills asked to be given the details and advised that he would look in to it and report back. The Chairman noted that it was a possible item for future scrutiny.

Julia Ewart – Mrs Ewart expressed her concern about free school transport only being provided to the two senior schools in the Saxmundham catchment area, Alde Valley and Saxmundham Free School, which had both delivered disappointing GCSE A*- C results. She advised that the cost of private transport to the only 'Outstanding' school option which was not within the

catchment area, Thomas Mills High School, deterred the average working family from selecting the school. Mrs Ewart was of the opinion that this in turn was harming those children's attainment. Mrs Ewart proposed that the Council should offer a free bus service to all three schools until such time as another Saxmundham provider was deemed 'Outstanding'.

Response to Julia Ewart's statement:

The Chairman advised Mrs Ewart that the eligibility criteria for free home to school transport was set by central government and therefore the Council would be unable to implement such a proposal. A Councillor noted that if education was of good quality in the area then there would be no need for a bus. The Cabinet Member for children's Services, Education and Skills confirmed that education transport would be part of the Community Transport review.

22. Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor David Ritchie, Councillor Joanna Spicer (substituted by Councillor Michael Gower), Councillor Bryony Rudkin (substituted by Councillor Mandy Gaylard), Councillor James Crossley (substituted by Councillor Derek Hackett), Councillor Andrew Stringer, Rachel Gooch and Jane Sheat.

23. Declarations of Interest and Dispensations

Paul McGIntee declared a non-pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 6, "Schools Admission Planning and Appeals" by virtue of the fact that he looked after the admissions process at a school and was a customer of one of the witnesses.

Councillor Sonia Barker declared a non-pecuniary interest in Agenda Items 5 "Teaching and Leadership Workforce Management" and 6 "Schools Admission Planning and Appeals" by virtue of the fact that she was a school governor at Carlton Colville Primary School and a member of the National Union of Teachers.

24. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 September 2015 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

25. Teaching and Leadership Workforce Management

At Agenda Item 5 the Committee considered the issues and the current initiatives associated with ensuring that all schools in Suffolk had very good teachers and leaders.

The following witnesses were in attendance for this item:

Councillor Gordon Jones, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills;

Julia Dolan, Schools Choice, General Manager, Children and Young People;

Stella Day, Project Manager, Resource Management;

Carol Hitchman, Professional Development Adviser, Leadership Development/Success

Nigel Burgoyne, Headteacher, Kesgrave High School

Mark Krisson, Headteacher, Woodbridge High School

Beverley Derrett, Headteacher, Tattingstone Primary School

Recommendation: The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee recommended to Cabinet, the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills, and the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services, to:

- i) commend the positive and encouraging work being undertaken by the Council in partnership with schools across a range of initiatives towards attracting, recruiting and retaining the best teachers and leaders into Suffolk;
- ii) in partnership with all schools, endeavour to provide more background and statistical information regarding the expected outcomes, and ongoing progress, of the various teaching / leadership improvement initiatives, split by Academies and Maintained Schools, and including the 'wider picture' culture change;
- iii) work more effectively with the Media organisations and other stakeholders to communicate the 'good news' case studies and proactively seek to ensure timely awareness and information regarding any perceived 'bad news' stories;
- iv) provide schools with more information about the various initiatives for developing their leader;
- v) build on the work already started, including the Teach Suffolk website, and develop a robust 'Return to Teaching' programme (*similar to what the NHS has done for 'returning to nursing'*); and
- vi) increase the emphasis on training, support and wellbeing for classroom staff (teaching and non-teaching).

Reason for recommendation:

- i) In understanding the importance of attracting teachers into Suffolk and retaining those teachers, the Committee was pleased to see the range of initiatives underway to encourage and promote a teaching career in the county.
- ii) In recognising the importance of the various teaching / leadership improvement initiatives the Committee also recognised that in order to understand if they were successful across all schools there was a need to provide statistical information on the outcomes.
- iii) The Committee acknowledged that press releases from Ofsted went straight to the media without prior warning to the Council and as the media often focused on only the negative news stories, Suffolk schools were being perceived negatively. The Committee noted the many

positive things currently taking place in Suffolk and the need for these to be promoted whilst recognising the importance of managing any 'bad news' stories more effectively by working more closely with the media and other stakeholders.

- iv) The Committee was informed of the wide range of programmes for developing teachers/Middle Leaders into leaders such as the 'Ready for Headship Programme' which was a two year programme which strengthened skills and confidence in order to become headteachers.
- v) Officers referred to the 'Teach Suffolk' website <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/teach> pages of which were displayed at the meeting. Reference was specifically made to the page "my story teaching in Suffolk" and officers pointed out examples such as:
 - a) [Anna Ledger](#) who had decided to return to teaching after having her daughter and was now the Deputy Headteacher at Dale Hall Primary School.
 - b) [Sue Ricketts](#) who after having been inspired by volunteering at her son's school, obtained her Qualified Teacher Status and was now Acting Headteacher of New Cangle Primary School, Haverhill.

The Committee noted that the NHS had developed the 'returning to nursing' programme to encourage people to return to nursing after a career break and suggested that a similar programme for teachers might help to encourage ex teachers to return to the profession.

- vi) The Committee had been advised that newly qualified teachers were provided with good support during their first year of teaching and were most vulnerable between the 2nd and 4th year of teaching when the level of support dropped. The feedback from those choosing to leave teaching had shown that workload and lack of support were the two main reasons. The Committee recognised the importance of on-going training and support in order to improve retention rates.

Alternative options: None considered.

Declarations of interest: Councillor Sonia Barker declared a non-pecuniary interest by virtue of the fact that she was a school governor at Carlton Colville Primary School and a member of the National Union of Teachers.

Dispensations: None reported.

26. Schools Admission Planning and Appeals

The following witnesses were in attendance for this item:

At Agenda Item 6 the Committee considered the pupil planning and appeals processes for schools admissions and how well those processes were operating for all schools in Suffolk.

The following witnesses were in attendance for this item:

Councillor Gordon Jones, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills

Gavin Bultitude, Assistant Director for Children and Young People, Children and Young People

Julia Dolan, Schools Choice, General Manager, Children and Young People

Jan Scott, Senior Infrastructure Officer (Admissions & Transport), Children and Young People

Janice Lee, Strategic Lead, Resolution Education and Learning, Children and Young People

Chris Copplestone, Education Appeals Manager

Recommendation: The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee recommended to the Cabinet, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills, and the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services, to:

- i) Given the potential serious safeguarding implications, seek more statistical information regarding Suffolk children who do not have a school place, or are missing from school, or are being Elective Home Educated (EHE) and, noting that the Council has no direct legal powers to intervene, lobby Members of Parliament regarding any concerns in relation to these children;

[The Committee had previously made a recommendation in relation to EHE pupils at its meeting on 15 Dec 2014]

- ii) Collate an Information Pack for local Councillors that outlines, in easily understood terms, the appeals process and sources of information, including helping to set realistic expectations; and
- iii) In the case of paper based applications for a school place, check that sufficient emphasis is given to applicants ensuring that they have an audit trail and proof of application, noting that the online application mechanism is very robust.

Reason for recommendation:

- i) The Committee raised concern about the potential serious safeguarding implications surrounding this group of children and in recognising that the Council had no direct legal powers to intervene, considered that lobbying Members of Parliament regarding its concerns was the best option available to get the current legislation changed.
- ii) The Committee noted that local County Councillors were often asked to provide help and support to parents when appealing and raised concern that not all councillors understood the appeals process. In order to help Councillors provide appropriate and informed help to their constituents during the appeals process the Committee wanted officers to produce a Councillors' Information Pack.
- iii) The Committee received confirmation from officers that the online application mechanism was very safe and the best method of applying for school places. However, in cases where online applications were not possible the Committee wanted to ensure that parents applying by post

were informed of the necessity of sending the application by means whereby they could prove it had been received by the closing date.

Alternative options: None considered.

Declarations of interest: Paul McGIntee declared a non-pecuniary by virtue of the fact that he looked after the admissions process at a school and was a customer of one of the witnesses.

Councillor Sonia Barker declared a non-pecuniary interest by virtue of the fact that she was as she was a school governor at Carlton Colville Primary School and a member of the National Union of Teachers.

Dispensations: None received.

27. Information Bulletin

The Committee noted the information bulletin at Agenda Item 8.

The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee requested that the School Improvement Service Ofsted Action Plan status updates be provided regularly to the Committee, as had been requested from officers at the 8 Sep 2015 meeting, as this information had not been provided within the Information Bulletin.

28. Key Decision Forward Plan and Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered items appearing on the Key Decision Forward Plan which related to Education and Children's Services and its own Forward Work Programme.

Resolution: The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee resolved to give further consideration in the Forward Work Programme to pupils who were in the age range 16 to 25 with Education and Health Care (EHC) Plans (*previously Special Educational Needs and Disability Plans*).

Reason for Resolution: The Committee had noted the concerns highlighted to the Committee by a member of the public regarding Further Education colleges.

Alternative options: None considered.

Declarations of interest: None declared.

Dispensations: None reported.

29. Urgent Business

There was no urgent business.

The meeting closed at 1.33 pm.

Chairman