

Minutes of the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 6 September 2016 at 10:00 am in the Elisabeth Room, Endeavour House, Ipswich.

Present: Councillors Graham Newman (Chairman), Sonia Barker (Vice Chairman), Helen Armitage, Peter Beer, Mary Evans, Julian Flood, Mandy Gaylard, Penny Otton, David Ritchie, Joanna Spicer and Andrew Stringer.

Statutory Co-opted members present: Mark Dunn

Also present: Councillors Stephen Burroughes, Member with responsibility for children in care, Gordon Jones, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills and Len Jacklin

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

## 1. Election of Vice Chairman

On the proposition of Councillor Helen Armitage, seconded by Councillor Andrew Stringer it was:

**RESOLVED** that Councillor Sonia Barker be elected as Vice-Chairman of the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee for the municipal year 2016/17.

## 2. Public Participation Session

The Committee heard representation from one Public Speaker as follows:

### Howard Needham - Governor at The Bridge School

Mr Needham advised the Committee that from September 2016, there would be 126 FTE pupils on the roll at The Bridge School (16 FTE above the planned place number) without the Local Authority providing the school with the additional funding required to meet their needs. As a consequence of this the school would exhaust its current reserves during the 2016/17 school year. Without staff redundancies that would compromise the safety and wellbeing of pupils, the school would incur an increasing significant deficit.

Mr Needham asked about the council's moral obligation, as well as a legal responsibility and a duty of care, to provide the school with sufficient funding to meet pupils' needs and asked whether it would provide the necessary funding to

meet the legislative requirements introduced specifically to protect the welfare of this vulnerable minority of children for whom special education is essential.

In response, Gavin Bultitude, Assistant Director for Children and Young People, advised that he was confident the council was legally compliant and explained that funding arrangements were determined nationally coming from the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools' Grant. He reminded the Committee of the £3m overspend to be reported to the Cabinet on 13 September. He advised that due to demand pressures the council could not make this kind of funding commitment to one school as it would reduce the funding made to other areas.

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills advised that with the delay in the Government's White Paper, which may propose significant changes in special education needs and also changes in funding, together with fairer funding being delayed for a year it would be wrong for the council to produce a strategy at this time as some certainty was required. He stressed that he had visited the Bridge School and was very aware of the pressures on the high needs block.

The Assistant Director agreed to circulate information on the timetable for the High Needs Strategy to the Committee after the meeting.

### **3. Apologies for Absence and Substitutions**

Apologies were received from Councillor Nick Barber, Councillor James Crossley (substituted by Councillor Julian Flood) and Rachel Gooch, Paul McIntee and Jane Sheet (Statutory Co-opted Members).

### **4. Declarations of Interest and Dispensations**

There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.

### **5. Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 9 June 2016 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### **6. CYP Budget/Cost Savings Impacts**

The objective of the Scrutiny was for the Committee to understand, and make any recommendations in relation to, the cost savings and budget for the Children and Young people (CYP) directorate services: a review at this stage could inform pre-budget Scrutiny in November 2016.

The following witnesses were in attendance for this item:

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

Councillor Stephen Burroughes, Member with responsibility for children in care

Allan Cadzow, Service Director, Children and Young People's Services

Gavin Bultitude, Assistant Director, Children and Young People's Services

Graham Beamish, Head of Programmes, Children and Young People's Services

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

- a) Commend the sincere, effective and efficient efforts of the Council's officers in keeping Suffolk children safe, and the associated Good Ofsted rating, in the face of increasing demands and the challenge of the budget deficit, for which solutions other than fairer funding for Suffolk were not clear;
- b) Request an information briefing on the numbers, costs, pros and cons of Special Guardianship Orders (SGO);
- c) Request a map and additional information to show the geographical breakdown of the Looked After Children (LAC) statistics, including for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC), and the likely causes and trends underlying the numbers, including moves from other local authorities' areas of responsibility; and
- d) Request an information briefing in a few months on any shared learning arising from the 'edge of care' intervention methods used in Essex.

**Reason for recommendation:**

- a) The Committee admired the honesty of officers and was extremely confident that officers were putting the welfare of children above financial considerations which was reflected by the Good Ofsted rating, whilst looking at every means possible to try and manage the current financial overspend. The Committee, recognised the absolute need for fairer funding for Suffolk and was grateful for the genuine way that officers had informed them of the ongoing issues facing the service and for the quality of the report they had produced for the Committee.
- b) The Committee raised concern about the rise in the number of SGOs issued by the courts as the children would not then receive the same package of support from the council. Officers advised that the Adoption Support Fund had been extended to SGOs and that some children on SGOs would require further help. Suffolk had a good track record with children on SGOs with very few breakdowns.
- c) The Committee noted the increasing numbers and cost of adolescents going into care and wanted to receive a breakdown in geographical areas to see if there was any correlation with areas of deprivation and pressures in education. Officers advised that most secondary schools had excellent pastoral care and confirmed that there was a close alignment with deprivation. The Committee was advised that more robust action in Lowestoft with some families had resulted in an increase in the numbers of adolescents in care in that area.

A member of the Committee referred to work being undertaken by the Local Government Association on high cost care cases being moved from one authority to another and agreed to discuss this further with the Service Director outside of the meeting.

- d) Officers had advised the Committee that further research was required on how Essex County Council's Edge of Care Programme was working as caution was needed as it may not be suitable for Suffolk. The Committee

therefore wished to be provided with further information once this work had been completed.

**Alternative options:** None considered.

**Declarations of interest:** None declared.

**Dispensations:** None reported.

## 7. School Infrastructure and Capacity Planning

The objective of this scrutiny was for the committee to understand and make any recommendations in relation to the mechanisms for capacity planning and new infrastructure for Suffolk schools, with some emphasis on Early Years provision.

The following witnesses were in attendance for this item:

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

Councillor Stephen Burroughes, Member with responsibility for children in care

Allan Cadzow, Service Director, Children and Young People's Services

Gavin Bultitude, Assistant Director, Children and Young People's Services

Christina Lewis, Early Years and Childcare Quality and Access Lead Officer

Pete Mumford, Academies Project Lead, Children and Young People's Services

Laura Butters, Early Years and Childcare Quality and Access Coordinator

Tracey Ainge, Managing Director, A1 Fun Club (Early Learning)

Mike Crowhurst, Director of Education, New Schools Network

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

- a) Encourage greater publicity and awareness around the good news of 91% Good/Outstanding Ofsted ratings for the Early Years settings in Suffolk, in addition to the ongoing publicity about the greatly improved Primary and Secondary schools' Ofsted ratings.
- b) Include within the Education Learning and Infrastructure Plan (ELIP) an indication of which local authorities have in place a 5-year land supply of housing, and also information on asset disposals such as redundant Middle School buildings.
- c) Give due regard to Early Years provision needs when disposing of properties, such as redundant Middle School buildings.
- d) Request an information briefing item on the Cornerstone trial regarding Middle School asset disposal.
- e) Request sight of the Early Years Action Plan and more information on what the Early Years service was doing to develop, support and encourage new provision in the market for early years services, to address the government requirement for an increase from 15 to 30 hours/week of free childcare for 3-4 year-olds in 2017.

The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee resolved that the Chairman should write to the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) on behalf of the Committee, noting the good level of communication and engagement

between the RSC and Suffolk County Council, highlighting recent concerns about communication relating to new Free Schools, and referring to the RSC's comment in his written submission regarding sharing published information about the need for school places.

**Reason for recommendation:**

- a) Officers informed the Committee that 91% of Early Years provision had a Good or Outstanding Ofsted rating with only one being inadequate at which they were working hard to improve, this being above the national average.
- b) Officers agreed with comments made by the Committee that it would be helpful if ELIP provided information on those local authorities in Suffolk which had a 5-year land supply forecast to help the council in school infrastructure and capacity planning. The Committee also considered that asset disposal should also be included in the plan as it recognised this as quite a significant source of funding.
- c) The Committee was advised that most redundant middle school buildings had been reused however some had been disposed of on the open market. In recognising that there were not sufficient premises to accommodate the number of Early Years provision needed, the Committee suggested that these buildings should be considered for possible Early Years venues before disposing of them.
- d) The Committee was advised that the council was currently testing out working with Cornerstone when disposing of middle school assets under the national framework. The Committee wished to receive further information of this trial.
- e) The Committee acknowledged the challenges that the government's requirement for an increase from 15 to 30 hours/week of free childcare for 3-4 year-olds in 2017 would bring when there was already insufficient Early Years provision in the county. Officers advised that the Early Years Action Plan helped to predict the need for places in September 2017 with officers across Suffolk working on finding ways of expanding provision. Officers also highlighted future staffing issues.

**Alternative options:** None considered.

**Declarations of interest:** None declared.

**Dispensations:** None reported.

**8. Information Bulletin**

The Committee noted the information bulletin at Agenda Item 8.

**9. 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.

**Decision:** The Committee agreed:

- i) the items for the agenda as set out in the Forward Work Programme for the 1 December 2016 meeting.
- ii) to receive an information bulletin item on the Progress on Implementation of CAMHS Transformation Plans at its meeting in March 2017;
- iii) that, at its informal workshop in October, it would give consideration to the items as listed on page 84 of the report as items to be added to the Forward Work Programme together with:
  - a) Quality of apprenticeships; and
  - b) Sexual education in schools.

**Reason for decision:**

- i) In response to a councillor's concern that the figures for young people who were not in education, employment or training would not be ready in time for the 1 December 2016 meeting, the Scrutiny Officer confirmed that officers had indicated that they were very prepared to report the figures at that meeting.
- ii) The Committee noted that the outcomes from the Health Scrutiny Committee's consideration of the progress made with implementation of the CAMHS Transformation Plan would be available for the March 2017 meeting.
- iii) The Panel noted that there were currently no items listed for scrutiny at the Committee's meetings in March and June 2017 and agreed that consideration would be given on what should be scrutinised at its informal workshop taking into account the items suggested by the Committee at this and previous meetings.

**Alternative options:** None considered.

**Declarations of interest:** None declared.

**Dispensations:** None reported.

**10. Urgent Business**

There was no urgent business.

*The meeting closed at 2.55 pm.*

Chairman