



Minutes

Name of meeting	<u>POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES, EDUCATION AND SKILLS</u>
Date and time	THURSDAY 3 SEPTEMBER 2020
Venue	MICROSOFT TEAMS MEETING – ONLINE (*)
Present	Cllrs Vanessa Churchman (Chairman), Debbie Andre, George Cameron, Rodney Downer, , Stephen Hendry, Karl Love, Matthew Price
Co-opted Members (voting)	Shaun Arnold (Parent Governor), Catherine Hobbs, Rob Sanders (Dioceses Representative)
Officers Present	Stuart Ashley, Rob Brindley, Steve Crocker, Kathy Marriott, Brian Pope, Deborah Price, Suzanne Smith, Charlotte Sadler, Paul Thistlewood

6. Minutes

RESOLVED :

THAT the Minutes of the meeting held on 23 July 2020 be confirmed.

7. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Debbie Andre declared an interest in as she was a governor for the Cornerstone Federation.

8. Covid – 19 Response and Recovery

The Assistant Director for Children and Family Services began the update on Covid-19 response and recovery. A reminder of the ‘phased’ approach was given to the Committee. It was explained that throughout lockdown we remained in phase 1 which meant business as usual but doing things differently. Data shown to the Committee showed that through June and July 2020 3,464 visits were completed and as lockdown eased social care teams had carried out up to 95 % of visits in person. There was a 15% to 20% increase on referrals to social care and it was explained the reason for this was the fact that during lockdown family’s experienced highly stressful situations and did not have access to the services they usually would. The forecast was for the demand to remain high for at least 12 months and contingency plans and additional resource such as additional staff have been planned for.

The Deputy Director for Education and Inclusion gave an education focused update on the Covid-19 response and recovery. Measures schools had to prevent the spread of the virus were explained such as students having access to wash their hands regularly, children being encouraged to sneeze and cough into their elbows not their hands, creating 'bubbles' within year groups and creating one way systems. Staggered starts, finishes, breaks and lunchtimes were also implemented to prevent the spread of the virus within schools. It was explained how there had also been a focus towards the wellbeing of the children since returning to school post lockdown. This was the focus of the initial few lessons and information on the children's wellbeing and where they were at with their learning was gathered. Normalising education and getting the children back to where they were had also been one of the initial focuses post lockdown.

The Committee was given attendance figures that had been reported directly from headteachers at schools currently open. It was explained that there had been an overall full return of the workforce and the majority of children were also back attending school. These figures were high, and it was reported that most families have wanted their child to return to full time education however the data in weeks to come would be more accurate. The Committee heard how grades would now be given with a more 'teacher assessment' based approach rather than an algorithm.

It was noted that the next steps to be taken were:

- Regular contact with Public Health
- Focus on vulnerable students – persistent absence
- Promotion of evidence based, catch up strategies
- Preparing to switch to remote learning when local outbreaks occur
- Promotion of evidence based, remote learning strategies
- Department for Education (DfE) laptops within two days
- Roll out of a well being programme

Members questioned the Youth Trusts school's mental health charter being used as one of the tools used by schools to support children post lockdown.

The Deputy Director for Education and Inclusion reassured the Committee that there were a range of tools that would be used to support children returning to education after lockdown. The Isle of Wight also secured funding for two mental health teams. £23,000 in funding for the short term – between now and March 2021.

The Assistant Director of Children and Family Services updated the Committee on home to school transport and early years. Members were informed that there were now 16 mainstream buses going to secondary schools across the Island and 8 Special Educational Needs (SEN) buses contracted through Southern

Vectis. 160 children had bus passes for the public network and just over 20 children used public train passes. Approximately 100 taxis of various sizes were going to the Isle of Wight College, specialist provision and mainstream schools. 53 parental mileage allowances were also in place. Southern Vectis were running several scholars' routes as part of the public service network that were working in the gaps where previously the home to school contract provided spare 'privilege' seats. A small number of public service vehicles would run as school and college contracts by mimicking the service route to abide by social distancing measures and ensured capacity for all travellers. There had been funding from central government to fund the additional transport and these extra costs were being closely monitored and there would be a submission made to the DfE in due course to recover the costs.

The Assistant Director of Children and Family Services also gave an Early Years update. It was explained that during lockdown there were small numbers of children attending childcare. Vulnerable children and the children of key workers attendance was monitored very closely. It was emphasised that there were no sufficiency issues over the summer months and every child that needed to attend childcare was able to do so. Parents were also supported in finding childcare however this service was not needed during the summer months. Funding for the Autumn term was confirmed, and the Committee was informed that the funding levels were determined by previous attendance therefore it was explained there was some nervousness around how Covid-19 would impact future funding however securing the funding for the coming term had now been fed back to Early Years settings. Currently there were 50% of Early Years settings open and the number was anticipated to rise to 100% when schools re-opened to all students. 300 children per week were now attending Early Years settings. The Assistant Director for Children and Family Services drew attention to the fact that in the medium and longer term there were financial concerns that required close monitoring.

The Cabinet Member gave thanks to the team rolling out the new school transport contract during unprecedented and challenging times and briefly explained the procurement process and how and why Southern Vectis were awarded the contract. The Committee were reassured that the service was now a flexible fit for purpose state.

RESOLVED:

THAT the Councils Response and Recovery to Covid-19 was noted.

9. Adult and Community Education – Ofsted inspection report and action plan

The Adult Community Learning Manager presented the Ofsted inspection report and updated members on progress with the related action plan. It was explained there were 5 key areas to the service:

- Adult skills – this focused mainly on employability and basic skill qualifications such as English and Maths. This was one of the areas prioritised during the Covid-19 lockdown. 75% of the people enrolled on this course in September achieved their qualification.

- Digital skills – this included very basic digital skills up to level 2 and the European computer driving licence. This is being prioritised to ensure access to education should we need to go into another lockdown.
- Family learning – This was to equip parents with the skills required to be able to support their children with learning from home including parenting support and communication skills with a focus around family resilience.
- Health and Social Wellbeing – Evening classes done for personal interest and creative stimulation.
- Working with bespoke disadvantaged groups – seven groups that provided skills such as nature therapy, cooking on a budget, equine therapy – people with mental and behavioural issues working with horses and more.

Ofsted inspected at the end of January 2019 and a grade 2 'good' was awarded. Key strengths of the service were identified. Three key areas were identified for improvement:

- Shorter courses – This was identified by Ofsted as they felt the distance travelled and the amount learnt was not sufficient.
- Impartial careers advice – traditionally Adult Community Learning had worked with the National Careers Service however over the last few years they have had to reduce capacity. As of September 2020, a very well qualified careers advisor had been employed that also worked with other education providers across the Island.
- Improvement on the monitoring of safeguarding incidents – Ofsted felt that the safeguarding issues were being dealt with correctly however the follow up required improvement such as documenting how an incident was followed up such as further welfare checks and other agency's referrals 2 to 4 weeks later and the resolution to the issue raised.

The Committee heard how lockdown gave the service an opportunity to focus on the areas requiring improvement and they felt confident these had been fixed ready for September 2020 start.

A member asked why the Ofsted report recommended improvement in the monitoring of safeguarding incidents and why this was not being done before. The Adult Community Learning Manager explained that the service was documenting and recording the incidents up to the point of resolution, in many cases it was pastoral support, or a referral made to the appropriate safeguarding teams or agencies. Once that referral was made the service was not necessarily entitled to further information. However what Ofsted felt was that, particularly in the pastoral cases, the tutors or the service should have followed up with the person that had a concern at two to four weeks intervals to check on wellbeing and welfare. There were emails to show the work had been done but not properly documented on safeguarding referral forms to show that the two- and four-week checks on welfare and wellbeing had been done.

A member asked how Covid-19 has effected the service and how the service was coping post Covid. The Committee heard how only 50% of the target learning numbers had been achieved that would be expected in a normal year.

Basic skills such as Maths and English were prioritised. Telephone support, What's-App groups, virtual learning groups, distance learning groups and more were offered during this period. Lack of access to IT equipment and WIFI did make it harder for some service users to regularly participate. At the end of the year 75% of learners achieved their qualifications. Ordinarily this figure would be closer to 85%.

Following on from a previous question regarding the safeguarding process a member asked how the Committee could be reassured that everyone knew what the procedures were. The Adult Community Learning Manager advised members that each student was given a 'learner handbook' and within that handbook were very clear safeguarding arrangements and information on who the safeguarding leads were. There was also a 'tutor handbook' which gave safeguarding advice from a staffing perspective. Tutors were also given online safeguarding training. The current safeguarding form and process was explained to members.

RESOLVED:

THAT progress with the delivery of the action plan following the Adult and Community Education – Ofsted inspection report be noted.

10. Isle of Wight Annual Report Adoption Service April 2019 – March 2020

The Service Manager for Children in Care presented the annual report and took the Committee through key points. As of April 2019 the service started to work with Adopt South, who had taken over some of the key parts of adoption work such as marketing activity, enquiries, and support to some adopters. Attention was drawn to the good performance throughout the report such as complaints, no disruptions, and good performance with timescales. Live story work and later in life letters were also raised as good points.

Nine children were adopted within the year and the period between them entering care and them being placed with their adopted family was 395 days which was within the Government threshold of 426 days. The average time for the nine children adopted between placement order and a match was 225 days. It was explained that although this did exceed the Government threshold it was a very positive situation for the children that families were found. Eight of the nine children adopted in the year waited less than 14 months between entering care and moving in with an adoptive family. There had been an increase in referrals for access to birth records. This year there were 11 as opposed to just 5 the previous year. This showed that people now knew who to contact in order to access their birth records should they wish to do so. 15 successful applications had been made to the adoption support fund.

At this point an interest was declared by Councillor Andre as she used to sit on the adoption panel until it had been taken over by Adopt South.

Following on from the report being presented a question was raised asking if the Service Manager for Children in Care felt the service benefitted from working with Adopt South. The Service Manager for Children Services assured members that working with Adopt South had been a very positive change for

the service as it gave an opportunity for our social workers, who knew and have good rapport with the children, to work closely with a team of people who knew the adopters coming through to ensure the right matches were being made. It was emphasised that The Service Manager for Children in Care was very impressed with the work being done by Adopt South.

Members questioned the forecasted challenges in the coming year with the current situation of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Service Manager for Children in Care expressed that so far there hadn't been a great deal of change. Discussion took place around how lockdown had made some people re-evaluate their lives, priorities and what was important to them and for many people family had been at the forefront of these evaluations. In response to questions raised officers assured members that both the Children Services team and Adopt South were focusing on moving with the times and different avenues such as virtual panels had been explored. During the lockdown period children had safely been placed with families which had been proof that the service was able to move through challenging times and as time goes on the service was getting better at coping with the challenges. The Director of Children Services echoed the Service Manager from Children in Care's thoughts regarding the pandemic and lockdown encouraging people to reassess their life balances and this could open up opportunity for adoption and fostering in some families. Attention was drawn to the need for families to understand the permanency of adoption and the changes it made on both the lives of the adoptive family and also the child. It was explained this might increase the time it took for the service to ensure that families understood that they were not able to go back on their decision to adopt.

RESOLVED:

THAT the Isle of Wight Annual Report Adoption Service be noted.

11. Isle of Wight Annual Report Fostering Report April 2019 – March 2020

The Committee heard from The Service Manager for Children in Care that the fostering team were not in the same place as the adoption team on the Island but that was being worked towards. At the end of March 2020 there were 85 fostering households on the Island. The marketing strategy for 2021 had a target of 15 new fostering households. Attention was drawn to fact that last year there were a lot of enquiries however there was less conversions. Recruitment was also lower than usually expected but retention of current Foster Carers was good. Last year there was a focus towards building towards the future. The conversion rate last year was 2.5 percent which was much lower than expected. The Committee heard how there were 79 enquiries but only 2 approvals and these were the figures to focus on and improve. Feedback from foster carers showed a lack of engagement. Attention was drawn to the survey sent to foster carers last year. The Committee heard how 22 foster carers responded to the survey at all which was evidence of the lack of engagement. The feedback from the surveys showed that foster carers concerns were:

- a lack of support,
- the length of assessment,
- finances and

- more work with the children's social workers.

Throughout the year a number of steps had been taken to improve this such as a re-structure of the service, social workers now either did assessments or support foster families. This was so they were now able to focus on one of these instead of doing both which allows them time to give foster carers the support that they required in assessment or in the home. The Committee heard how there had already been an improvement on last years figures and this year six foster carers had been approved .

Areas of improvement being focused on were:

- Improving reputation of the service across the Island.
- Improved engagement with foster carers.
- Improving marketing.

27 concerns and complaints were submitted but none upheld.

12. Workplan

The Committees work plan was considered. A Covid-19 update was agreed to be added to the plan. A member suggested there was an update on Autism Provision as there has been significant changes in this area. Home education was another area which members were interested to look at to see if there had been any increase in numbers. Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) was also suggested so an update could be bought on progress since the Ofsted report.

RESOLVED:

THAT items on a Covid-19 update, Autism Provision, Home Education and an update on SEND would be added to the workplan for March 4 2021.

CHAIRMAN