

Minutes

Name of meeting	POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES, EDUCATION AND SKILLS
Date and Time	THURSDAY 7 MARCH 2024 COMMENCING AT 5.00 PM
Venue	COUNCIL CHAMBER, COUNTY HALL, NEWPORT, ISLE OF WIGHT
Present	Cllrs R Quigley (Chairman), V Churchman (Vice-Chairman), D Adams, R Downer, J Lever and T Outlaw
Also Present	Catherine Boulter, Matthew Searle, Naomi Carter, Dionne Thomas and Ashley Whittaker
Also Present (Virtual)	Rob Sanders and Emily Rufian
Apologies	Cllr S Hendry

38. **Apologies and Changes in Membership (If Any)**

Cllr S Hendry sent his apologies.

39. **Minutes**

RESOLVED:

THAT the minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2023 be approved.

40. **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations were made.

41. **Public Question Time - 15 Minutes Maximum**

No public questions were received.

42. **Progress Update**

The chairman gave a verbal update on the progress against actions and outcomes from previous meetings. It was noted that the list of Children in Care events had not been received as requested by the Committee.

RESOLVED:

THAT the progress report be noted.

THAT the Committee is provided with a list of upcoming Children in Care events.

43. Children's Services Transition

The Strategic Director of Children's Services gave a verbal update alongside the report about the progress of the transition of Children's Services from Hampshire to Isle of Wight control from 1 February 2024.

The new staffing structure of the senior management team was discussed and it was confirmed that the permanent Service Director for Children's Social Care would be in post in two weeks' time.

The Committee was updated on what priorities had been identified by the new team, and what strategies were going to be put in place in order to improve the social care and education outcomes for children and young people on the island.

A discussion was had around school place planning and the proposed timeline. It was agreed that the process needed to be transparent and honest. The Strategic Director explained to the Committee the reasons why some schools would need to be closed and when it needed to happen. He confirmed that many factors would be considered before closing any school and that there would be multiple consultations to gather the required information.

The Committee further discussed which Service Level Agreements (SLA) were in place with Hampshire to provide services for the 12 months and that the Strategic Director was anticipating a Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) inspection which would look at all provision on the Island and not just the Isle of Wight Council.

The Strategic Director was asked what the biggest challenges ahead were, and he shared that it would be having the financial and physical resources available to ensure that the identified priorities could be delivered on.

A question was asked if the predicted cost of bringing Children's Services back to the Isle of Wight control had been the same as the contribution paid to Hampshire? The Cabinet member and Strategic Director were unable to answer the question and agreed to provide a written response.

RESOLVED:

THAT the transition report be noted.

THAT the Strategic Director provide a written answer to the supplementary question.

44. Children's Services Ofsted Inspection

The interim Service Director for Children's Social Care shared details of the Ofsted inspection completed between 30 October – 3 November 2023 with the Committee. The service maintained its "Good" rating and the inspection highlighted a number of strengths as well as areas for improvement. An action plan was drawn up to address areas of concern and this would be shared with Ofsted at the end of March 2024. It was reported that Ofsted expected an update on progress in July. A further discussion was held around the challenges to implement the action plan.

RESOLVED:

THAT the OFSTED report and action plan be noted.

45. School Attainment

The Strategic Manager for Education, Inclusion and Access gave a verbal update on the School Attainment report. It was discussed how results for the Isle of Wight were below the national average in most measures but also that improvements have already been made in all areas and improving future results was part of the new education strategy.

The Strategic Manager shared that she had been analysing past results and had met with school leaders and governors and identified areas for improvement, it was also important to celebrate what schools had done well.

The Strategic Director informed the Committee that results and outcomes would not immediately improve but they would be stabilised whilst the place planning was undertaken, and new strategies were put in place, this process was causing anxiety in school leaders..

RESOLVED:

THAT the School Attainment report be noted.

46. Safety Valve

The Strategic Manager for Education, Inclusion and Access explained to the Committee what the Safety Valve Agreement between the Isle of Wight Council and the Department for Education (DfE) was.

It was explained that the deficit currently accruing was due to the increased number of children requiring specialised placements, those in Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS) and providing some children with bespoke education packages. It was shared that the expected deficit of £12million was currently being reviewed with DfE as more was expected to be spent than forecast due to the increasing numbers of children with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP), the increase of costs of providing placements and the number of children requiring them.

The Committee was informed that strategies were being developed and put in place to support children to remain in or return to mainstream schools and to expand the number of specialist placements on the island as way of better managing the available resources.

It was confirmed that when the partnership ended with Hampshire, the Safety Valve Agreement was transferred to the Isle of Wight and the Strategic Director of Children's Services and the Section 151 Officer had oversight of it.

RESOLVED:

THAT the Safety Valve report be noted.

47. **Workplan 2024-2025**

Consideration was given to the Committee's workplan.

RESOLVED:

THAT the workplan be noted.

48. **Members' Question Time**

No member's questions were received.

CHAIRMAN