

# Minutes

Name of meeting	<b>POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES, EDUCATION AND SKILLS</b>
Date and Time	<b>TUESDAY 23 JULY 2024 COMMENCING AT 5.00 PM</b>
Venue	<b>COUNCIL CHAMBER, COUNTY HALL, NEWPORT, ISLE OF WIGHT</b>
Present	Cllrs P Brading (Chairman), V Churchman, R Downer, S Hendry, J Lever and J Medland
Also Present	Cllr J Bacon, Cllr P Spink, Catherine Boulter, Naomi Carter, Jade Kennett, Heather Morris, Melanie White and Ashley Whittaker
Also Present (Virtual)	Emily Rufian, Rob Sanders, Matthew Searle
Apologies	None

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

No apologies or changes in membership were received.

63. **Minutes**

RESOLVED:

THAT the minutes of the meeting held on 6 June 2024 be approved.

64. **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations were received.

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

Giles Aldred of Shorwell asked an oral question in relation to what he perceived to be negative language used in some past Council publications about small schools and if this demonstrated a pre-determined negativity. He also noted that such language was not used in recent published documents, and this was welcomed. It was confirmed that all schools are being considered in the current process, and that historic documents and statements would be reviewed.

A supplementary question was asked, seeking assurance that the list of criteria, weightings, data, and evidence that inform the eventual officer decision would be published alongside the lists of affected schools in September. The committee was

advised that when papers are published, there will be an explanation of how and why the decisions were reached in each case.

## 66. **School Place Planning**

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Corporate Functions introduced the topic of School Place Planning after it was acknowledged by the committee that the officers had done very well to complete the new draft Education Strategy in such a short time and that School Place Planning was a key strand.

The Cabinet Member recognised that the process of School Place Planning caused anxiety amongst children, families, staff at schools and communities, but that it was clear that standards and outcomes in education on the Isle of Wight needed to be improved and that schools needed to be properly resourced to achieve this.

The Strategic Director of Children's Services assured the committee that School Place Planning was a critical part of the wider draft Education Strategy to drive up education outcomes for all children and young people across the Island. Members were informed that there is also an opportunity for schools to be more inclusive and better equipped to support children with Special Education Needs and Disabilities within mainstream settings. The committee were advised that the announcement on 4 September would provide a named list of proposed schools for expansion, amendment or closure and then the wider public consultation would take place.

Further discussion took place around:

- the sources and accuracy of data used in the report – including housing developments and birth rates;
- the capacity of officers to deliver the required changes;
- the concerns around the cost and safety of transport options. It was noted that the impact on transport costs would not be known until the proposals were finalised;
- children with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND);
- children currently Electively Home Educated (EHE);
- the current and forecast budget deficits of maintained schools;
- staff retention, retraining and redundancies;
- the planned communication of decisions to schools and families;
- the perceived reduction in parental choice;
- the preparation of school staff, children, and families for the upcoming transitions; and,
- the future possible use of school estates.

The board agreed the recommendations to be sent to Cabinet for further discussion.

**RESOLVED:**

**THAT** the following recommendations be sent to Cabinet:

- i) communication of decisions needs to be very clear and timely;
- ii) the perceived reduction in parental choice needs to be properly considered;

- iii) transport costs and safety elements are properly considered in all decisions;
- iv) concerns regarding the capacity and resource involved in closing schools, and in trying to do too much too quickly, are taken on board;
- v) data relating to planning applications and housing developments would be revisited, for example in the The Bay area;
- vi) consideration is given in supporting parents, in the short term, with the impacts of funding school uniform.

**67. Workplan**

Consideration was given to the committee's workplan.

It was requested that the topic of Elective Home Education alongside the Child Safeguarding Practice Review panel paper (published in May 2024) would be discussed at a future informal meeting.

RESOLVED:

- i) THAT the workplan be noted.

THAT the topic of Elective Home Education and associated safeguarding concerns be discussed at a future informal Policy and Scrutiny Committee for Children's Services, Education and Skills meeting.

**68. Members' Question Time**

Cllr Churchman asked the Strategic Director of Children's Services for an update on a constituent in her area. It was confirmed that a response had been emailed to her.

CHAIRMAN