



Minutes

Name of meeting	POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES, EDUCATION AND SKILLS
Date and Time	THURSDAY 15 JUNE 2023 COMMENCING AT 5.00 PM
Venue	COUNCIL CHAMBER, COUNTY HALL, NEWPORT, ISLE OF WIGHT
Present	Cllrs R Quigley (Chairman), D Adams, R Downer, S Hendry, T Outlaw, N Stuart and D Andre
Also Present	Deborah Price, Sarah Philipsborn and Melanie White
Also Present (Virtual)	Stuart Ashley, Stephanie How and Natalie Smith
Apologies	Cllrs J Lever

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

Apologies given by Cllr Lever and Cllr Ellis. Cllr Ellis to be substituted by Cllr Outlaw.

12. **Minutes**

RESOLVED:

THAT the minutes of the meeting held on 2 March 2023 be approved.

13. **Declarations of Interest**

Cllr Hendry declared he was a School Governor for Holy Cross and Queensgate Primary Schools

Cllr Stuart declared he was employed as a coach at various schools.

Cllr Quigley declared that he had a child in the EHCP process.

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

A written question was submitted in relation to school place planning by Simon Richards, Chair of Governors of Haylands Primary School (PQ32/23)

Sam Pickard asked a verbal question in relation to the proposals to consult on school closures and sought clarity around the process. He asked to know what process was followed and how this was handled, including how did the Hampshire

Officers advise and how did the council make its decision on the proposal, the timing and the subsequent U-Turn.

The chair confirmed that a written response would be given to both questions.

Further to the written responses the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills added reassurance that the next steps were going forward, and an update would be provided shortly to all interested parties.

Following the public question, the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Lifelong Skills gave an acknowledgment of there not being enough information on the process and assured this would be included in the update due shortly that would explain the process that was followed.

15. Progress on outcomes and recommendations from previous meetings

The Chairman reported on progress with actions agreed at previous meetings.

16. Performance and Budget

A report on the performance of Children's Services for Quarter Four 2022/23 was presented to the committee which highlighted the demand and actions across children's social care and early help.

Information was provided on recruitment and retention, caseloads, shortage of skilled foster carers, education health care plans (EHCPs) and school attendance figures.

Questions were raised regarding the proportion of schools on the Island that were rated good compared to the national average.

A further discussion took place around the numbers of home educated children who were in fact 'voluntary' exclusions and had been encouraged by the school to be home educated. The Assistant Director for Education and Inclusion said the local authority stated that exclusions of that nature were unacceptable, and that any such situations were taken very seriously. A request for comparative data for elective home education (EHE) children was put forward and the Assistant Director for Education and Inclusion explained that there was no national EHE register so it was not a straightforward task and would take a little time to obtain.

Questions were also focused on the Isle of Wight attendance figures. It was highlighted that the Island had managed to get above the national attendance figures just before covid, but unfortunately, as a result of the pandemic, they had dropped back. To address the situation, a pilot scheme of sending parents of Y11 pupils a letter on the importance of school attendance was undertaken during the Christmas break, as getting pupils back in during the first week of term was crucial. This strategy saw significant increases in attendance rates and would be repeated with other year groups.

Ofsted was discussed as were EHCPs. It was explained that many more parents put in for EHCPs than did teachers. It was felt that the number of plans was nowhere near the threshold, and of those instigated by parents and refused, 97% got accepted on appeal.

RESOLVED:

THAT the Performance and Budget report be noted.

17. **Fostering Annual Report 2022-2023**

The Service Manager presented the Fostering Annual Report 2022/23
The report provided an update on the Isle of Wight Council's fostering service in line with the fostering services statutory regulations and guidance.

The report explained the marketing drives and actions that the council had undertaken to recruit more foster carers and there was a target to recruit 10 new fostering households in 2023/24. Targets, however, for the recruitment of foster carers had fallen short and not been met in previous years, though this was a trend mirrored in other local authorities and was influenced by higher costs of living, the war in Ukraine and adjustments to life post lockdown.

The committee was shown statistics regarding foster carer and timelines of household reviews, supervised visits and unannounced visits.

It was concluded that the fostering team had continued to work well and had been able to demonstrate a greater level of compliance across all areas of work, the exception being unannounced visits and household reviews. Strategies had already been put in place to address performance in these areas over the coming year.

Questions were asked regarding the challenges facing staffing and the recruitment of foster carers.

RESOLVED:

THAT the Annual Fostering Report be noted

18. **Adoption Annual Report 2022-23**

The Service Manager, Children in Care presented Adopt South Annual Report 2022/23 with reference to the Isle of Wight Council Highlights. Adopt South is a regional adoption agency which includes the Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton local authorities.

The report gave an executive summary of the performance of Adopt South for the financial year looking at comparisons on activities since the launch in April 2019.

There were no questions fielded regarding this report.

RESOLVED:

THAT the Adopt South Annual Report be noted.

19. **Children's Social Care Review**

The Area Director Children's Services (Children and Families) presented a report on transforming social care for children and families with a special focus on family help.

The publication of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care (IRCSC) report in May marked a significant point in time, as it sought to create generational change across children's social care.

The Government's response 'Stable Homes, Built on Love' encompassed 6 key pillars for areas of change was shared with the committee.

It was explained to the committee how the role of family practitioners had been developed within the context of statutory and legal requirements, but also with the desire to lead in new and innovative ways of working.

The early help available on the Isle of Wight was highlighted with options of how the new and existing roles could knit together.

Questions were asked about outcomes with regards to caseloads and performance, and what could be quantitatively and qualitatively measured over the period of a year.

It was explained that the family practitioners had a positive impact on monitoring caseloads and that lower caseloads had a cost benefit.

Questions were also raised around recruitment and retention against the cost of agency staff. The committee were advised that once staff were settled and had lower caseloads there would be a cost benefit resulting from a reduction in agency workers.

RESOLVED:

THAT the Children's Social Care Review report on Family Help be noted.

20. **SACRE Annual Report 2021-2022**

The Advisor to the Isle of Wight SACRE presented the SACRE annual report 2021/22 to the committee.

It was stated that the law required religious education to be taught in schools, though RE was not part of the National Curriculum but a local responsibility. Every local educational authority was required to have a Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education to support the effective provision of religious education and collective worship in schools.

The actions and training of the SACRE were explained to the committee with a focus on the adoption and implementation of the locally agreed syllabus – Living Difference IV.

The Professional Advisor to the SACRE highlighted the advice and the support given to schools regarding the delivery of a quality religious education provision and a quality collective worship experience.

Questions were raised about how much time was spent on the teaching of the different religions in schools and the content of the syllabus. The committee were advised that each school would decide the amount of time dedicated to each religion.

Discussion also took place on the resources available to teachers.

RESOLVED:

THAT the SACRE Annual Report be noted.

21. **Committee's Work Plan**

The Committees work plan was shared for comment.

22. **Members' Question Time**

Cllr Stuart asked a question regarding school place planning. It was suggested that the school places didn't match with what the Island needed and that a working party was needed to consider place planning in depth.

Cllr Downer asked about the works at Wroxall Primary School and why was it undertaken 5 years after the works were agreed. The Director of Children's Services advised that the short answer was that Officers were unable to action anything without permission from Cabinet, but a more detailed response would be provided.

The Chairman concluded that the subject of school place planning needed immediate action and that he was expecting to see something more concrete at the next meeting in September.

CHAIRMAN