

# Minutes

Name of meeting	<b>POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES, EDUCATION AND SKILLS</b>
Date and Time	<b>THURSDAY 6 JUNE 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, S Hendry and R Quigley
Also Present	Cllr J Bacon, Catherine Boulter, Naomi Carter, Kay Jones, Deborah Price, Theresa Wall, Melanie White and Ashley Whittaker
Also Present (Virtual)	Rob Sanders
Apologies	Cllrs R Downer, J Lever and J Medland

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

Cllrs Lever, Downer and Medland sent their apologies.

50. **Minutes**

RESOLVED:

THAT the minutes of the meeting held on 7 March 2024 be approved subject to the following amendments:

Item 43 – there would be two consultations to gather the required information (now one consultation with the change in timetable due to the General Election).

Item 44 – the ILACS action plan was a draft plan not the final plan.

Item 45 – improvements have been made in some areas of school attainment, not all.

51. **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations were received.

**52. Election of Vice-Chairman**

The committee were required to elect a Vice-Chairman following the annual meeting of the Full Council on 15 May 2024. Cllr Richard Quigley was nominated, it was duly accepted, seconded, and following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED:

THAT Cllr Quigley be elected as Vice-Chairman of the Policy and Scrutiny Committee for Children's Services, Education and Skills.

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

No public questions were received.

**54. Progress Update**

The chairman presented the report which provided an overview of the progress against actions and outcomes from previous meetings.

The Service Director for Children's Services advised that the list of events for Children in Care was currently being reviewed. It was agreed that the updated list would be presented to the Committee in September 2024.

RESOLVED:

THAT the progress report be noted.

**55. Performance, Budget and Children's Services Transition**

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

A number of areas were highlighted to the committee including work that had taken place around the end of current Service Level Agreements (SLAs) in January 2025, and towards the priorities that were identified by the new Directorate which included:

- the 2030 Education Strategy;
- the transformation around Special Educational Needs and Disabilities;
- school place planning;
- improvements in the Youth Justice System;
- the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) inspection action plan; and
- Corporate Parenting.

Members were advised that the needs of children on the island continued to be high and included those coming forward for Education and Healthcare Plans (EHCPs) and those within all areas across the Social Care system. It was highlighted that workloads across all teams remained very high at a time when there was also significant transformation taking place within the Directorate.

The Strategic Director shared that the team were working closely with other departments within the Council including Adult Social Care, Housing and IT and had also accessed the expertise and resources of external partners.

Discussion took place about how the committee could best support with the transformation process as well as the future of two SLAs – the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and the Educational Psychology service. It was advised that a new MASH service would not be in place by the end of January 2025 and Hampshire had agreed to extend the current MASH support though terms had not yet been agreed. Questions were also raised about EHCPs, the recruitment and retention of Social Workers and the ILACS action plan.

RESOLVED:

THAT the report and recommendations be noted.

**56. Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2024-25**

The Early Years & SEND Senior Lead Officer presented the recent Cabinet report for Childcare Sufficiency on the Isle of Wight.

The report covered January to December 2023 and showed that parental demand on the Isle of Wight was met and the Council had fulfilled its statutory duty.

The officer shared updates on the following:

- number of children in Early Years settings with EHCPs;
- new national entitlement schemes;
- school place planning and how this could impact Early Years settings;
- and planning how to meet the future needs of parents on the island.

The committee was told about the success of the delivery of Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme during the Christmas, Easter and Summer holidays and that the number of children that had accessed this had increased.

Further discussion was held around potential barriers which included the waiting list for families needing a Special Education Needs (SEN) worker and the recruitment and retention of Early Years practitioners and childminders.

RESOLVED:

THAT the report be noted.

**57. Children with Special Education Needs and Disabilities**

The Service Director of Education, Inclusion and Access gave a verbal update on the plans to expand the education services on the Island for children with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

The committee was informed that 201 additional special educational needs places had been identified at primary and secondary settings across the Island that can be delivered within the next 18 months. It was shared that these places aimed to reduce the number of Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS) packages and children in mainland placements. It was felt that this would benefit the children themselves and families as well as reducing the associated costs to the Council. It was advised that the focus would initially be on secondary placements and then primary placements.

Further discussion was had around matching the needs of children and families with future provisions.

RESOLVED:

THAT the verbal update be noted.

**58. Fostering Annual Report 2023-24**

The Service Manager for Children in Care presented the annual report for the Fostering service on the Isle of Wight.

Feedback from the recent Ofsted inspection was positive, although much of it was not contained in the Ofsted report.

Members were advised that recruitment of foster carers included staff attending events, digital marketing and social media being very important for spreading the word. The Service Manager shared that the biggest challenge was that the website was not easy for people to navigate compared to competing private agency websites and this impacted on numbers of enquiries. Work was being undertaken with other Council teams to overcome this issue. It was however noted that although recruitment numbers were down, the service had converted more enquiries to foster carers than before and that unlike other local authorities, the Isle of Wight had not lost as many foster carers.

Further positive information was shared with the committee that placement stability had improved along with compliance and the quality of visits and assessments, but it was agreed that it would be good to have foster carers with more confidence to support children through challenging periods and it was important for all committee members to speak whenever they could about our corporate parenting responsibilities and encourage people to think about fostering.

RESOLVED:

THAT the report be noted.

**59. Adoption Annual Report 2023-24**

The Service Manager for Children in Care presented the annual report for the Adoption service on the Isle of Wight.

The committee were advised that there had been a number of good outcomes from the partnership with Adopt South. It was noted that the agency was good at matching children and families and included finding families for children with more complicated needs and finding families for sibling groups. Recruitment for adopters was done across the area including working specifically with island media outlets.

The Service Manager drew attention to the fact that there was a 133% increase in adoption orders due to the courts catching up and that parents were more confident in applying for adoption orders due to the quality of matching taking place.

Overall, it was agreed that the partnership with Adopt South was working really well and the Service Manager was pleased to continue working with them.

RESOLVED:

THAT the report be noted.

60. **Workplan**

Due to the number of apologies received at this stage, the meeting was no longer quorate, therefore the remaining formal business did not proceed.

61. **Members' Question Time**

No written member's questions were received.

CHAIRMAN