



Minutes

Name of meeting	POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES, EDUCATION AND SKILLS
Date and Time	THURSDAY 4 MARCH 2021 COMMENCING AT 5.00 PM
Venue	VIRTUAL (MS TEAMS)
Present	Cllrs V Churchman (Chairman), G Cameron, R Downer, P Fuller, S Hendry, K Love, M Price and S Arnold
Officers Present	Peter Colnutt, Steve Crocker, Karina Large, Kathy Marriot, Debbie Price, Charlotte Sadler, Paul Thistlewood, Theresa Wall
Cabinet Members	Cllrs Paul Brading
Apologies	Stuart Ashley

8. Minutes

THAT the Minutes of the meeting held on 3 December 2020 be confirmed.

9. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Cameron advised that he is chairman of the Freshwater Early Years Centre.

10. Public Question Time - 15 Minutes Maximum

The IW Scrutiny Meeting Report on Elected Home Education (EHE) states that 3.1% of the total school-age population on the Isle of Wight (464 pupils) are EHE, a figure that's high compared to other local authorities. There's also a list of reasons why families have removed their children from the mainstream provision, choosing EHE (academic year 2019-20), reasons include Covid but also alarmingly:

- Behaviour/risk of exclusion, 24 children
- Bullying, 13 children
- Special Education Needs and Disabilities, 12 children

- Emotional and physical health, 60 children

My son who had undiagnosed ADHD would have been in the behaviour/risk of exclusion category. This would suggest the current education system on the Island does not cater fairly for all and this is reflected in the high number of children in EHE. What does the IWC intend to do to address this making education truly fit for all?

The chairman responded to the question. Whilst the number of parents choosing to home educate their children is proportionally low on the Island compared to those choosing to send their children to school, it is higher than the national average. Part of that difference can be attributed to better identification. There is no national registration scheme for children being home educated and therefore many authorities are challenged to accurately identify the children that are being home educated within their communities. Being an Island community, we are better sighted on families that are home educating and therefore our data is more reliable than elsewhere. In addition, we have an excellent contact rate with families that are home educating. We have confidence in our data.

Whilst education is compulsory in England, schooling is not and it is the right of parents to choose to electively home educate their children. Where parents choose to send their children to school, we would want all schools on the Island to be welcoming and inclusive. When parents report to us that they have had a negative experience with a school we do challenge the school's leadership although sometimes the school's narrative is different from that expressed by parents. We are also pleased that nationally Ofsted is now focusing on schools that are not fully inclusive and have been removing pupils from their rolls to elective home education.

Evidence from Ofsted reports clearly demonstrate that schools on the Island are improving both in terms of standards and the quality of provision. There has been a considerable focus on promoting inclusive practice with seminars jointly provided by Ofsted and the Local Authority. There is also a comprehensive training programme supporting inclusion on offer to all schools.

The home educating community is particularly strong on the Island. The Council's elective home educating team is also viewed as supportive to parents. The causation for relatively high numbers of electively home educating pupils is complex and does not necessarily equate to schools being any less inclusive on the Island than elsewhere.

11. **COVID-19 Update**

The Deputy Director for Education and Inclusion gave a COVID-19 update from an education perspective. The committee heard how schools were open to the children of critical workers and vulnerable groups. These figures were in line with national figures.

- 25 % of primary aged pupils were in attendance.
- 7 % of secondary aged pupils in attendance.
- 30% of special school pupils in attendance.

The committee heard how part of the response to COVID-19 was the joint working around vulnerable children between social care, education services and schools ensuring as many vulnerable children are in school education as possible. Social workers when visiting have been discussing attendance with families. Risk assessments for every vulnerable child not attending school have been made. 56 % of children open to social care had been attending school, including 68 % of children in care. These numbers were high in comparison to the national figures.

Schools were focussing implementing the public health guidance to reduce transmission risk. Focus around hygiene, creating separate bubbles, one-way systems, face coverings, ventilation, social distancing where possible, staggered starts, finishes and breaks would be used to keep the spread of the virus to a minimum when children return to school. Induction activities were prepared focusing on welcoming children back to school, assessment of current learning progress and getting back into routines and learning readiness.

Primary school staff have been tested twice per week using at home lateral flow tests. Secondary school testing for staff and students has been slightly different as they have been tested three times per week, under supervision. Training students how to use the lateral flow test properly ahead of the testing being moved to at home lateral flow tests. Lateral flow tests that show a positive result will be subject to a confirmatory Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) test.

The committee was told how GCSE and A-Level grades will be determined by schools and colleges instead of an algorithm. Grades would be based upon course work, mock examinations and optional tests set up by exam boards. No fixed number of students were set to be able to attain each grade. Schools showing 'interesting results' for example much higher grades than in previous years then they would be investigated by examination boards. Exam boards are also setting up optional mini tests which are offered and can be taken into account when grading students. Result day was brought forward to allow more time for the appeals process. A Level results were August 10th 2021 and GCSE results on August 12th. Schools have been asked to engage students of where they are predicted to end up to prevent it being a surprise, this would also mitigate against the number of appeals.

A question was raised asking why mock results were not used last year instead of the algorithm and why mock exams results were not being used to grade students this year. The Deputy Director for Education and Inclusion advised that some children were not in attendance at school due to outbreaks in schools so did not take the mock exam therefore their grade could not be used to produce a result. However, it was explained that mock tests grades that has been completed were taken into account by teachers grading students. The algorithm approach was discussed, and it was said that it was a particularly flawed system. A member went on to ask if it is the school's choice to take the optional mini exams and would these be used for primary school children on secondary school children or both. It was explained that the choice was with the school and the mini exam would only cover a

small part of the curriculum that has been taught and would be offered to students of GCSE age.

The Director for Children's Services presented the Children and Families Branch COVID-19 response. The committee heard how in the context 'demand' was when a member of the public calls and reports concern. A 15% increase in demand was seen over autumn. The complexity of the cases was also increasing. The demand over lockdown also increased nationally. Face to face visits by social care staff have continued to be done in person for the most vulnerable children, these visits are on a rotational basis so that eyes can be kept on all children requiring it. Contact between children in care and their families is being reviewed.

12. **Early Years**

The committee heard that Early Years provision covers children aged 0 to 5 years old. It was explained that although compulsory around 95 to 96 percent of children do use Early Years providers. Three key areas make up the Early Years support. Sufficiency, Learning and Development and Inclusion. The Isle of Wight was said to be a good place to be both a young child and a parent of a young child and also a young child with SEN needs.

National outcomes show that the Isle of Wight is either in line or slightly better than the national averages. The committee were reminded that seven to eight years ago the Isle of Wight was at the bottom of the pile when it came to Early Years so big improvements have been made, maintained and sustained. 96% of schools and Early Years settings on the Isle of Wight were rated good or better by Ofsted, this is also in line or better than national average. Sufficiency wise there was said to be enough childcare places on the Island to provide every child with childcare.

It was asked who picks up Childrens additional needs at the young Early Years stage. It was advised that it is a mix of people including: Health Visitors, Staff in Early Years settings, parents, Paediatricians and also pre-natal scanning. 2 year old statutory checks also check Childrens key development and this can also help identify additional needs. Another member asked if there were any areas of concern that could arise in the next few years. It was said there are always challenges ahead and one successful year does not necessarily mean the next year would be the same as it would be different group of children.

RESOLVED:

THAT the Early Years report is noted.

13. **Elective Home Education**

Inclusion Support Service Manager presented the report to the committee. It was said that the Isle of Wights elective home education figures were high in comparison to other local authorities 4.7% of secondary children and 1.8% of primary children. The Isle of Wight was said to have a string tradition of home education. A contact

rate of 97% was said to be high in comparison to other authorities. Prior to COVID-19 numbers has stabilised to around 450 children per year being electively home educated. COVID-19 has seen approximately an extra 80 children now being electively home educated however it was expected a large number of these children will return to school when the COVID-19 crisis calmed down. The yearly breakdown was given, and it was raised that through the COVID-19 crisis more children of primary age have been electively home educated than in other years and less in secondary. A common theme in elective home education ss for children to be leave school, be educated at home and return to a different school. The reason for this was said to be due to adults relationships deteriorating with the school rather than the child itself having an issue.

Parental reasons for electively home education their children were, in order :

- COVID-19
- Emotional and physical health
- Cultural, religious and philosophical reasons
- Other
- Preferred school unavailable
- Behaviour and exclusion risk
- Bullying
- Special educational needs (SEN)
- Attendance

The chairman asked if emotional health and bullying could be separated. It was asked are all children being educated at home bullied or do other factors play a role? It was explained the statistics are provided by parents and other reasons included anxiety and fragility. A Member then asked if there was concerns over the number of children returning to full time education once lockdown has eased? Inclusion Support Service Manager responded by advising parents and children would be supported in returning to school.

RESOLVED:

THAT the Elective Home Education report is noted.

14. **Urgent Cabinet Member Delegated Decision - Connect4Communities - Covid Winter Grants**

The Director for children services briefly explained to the committee why the decision needed to be urgently. It was explained that the grants needed to be provided at great pace in order to get the money to the organisations within the time frame required.

RESOLVED:

THAT the Urgent Cabinet Member Delegated Decision- Connect4Communities – Covid Winter Grants is noted.

15. **Workplan 2021-21**

The Workplan was briefly discussed and it was agreed that with the upcoming elections nothing would be changed as it was not certain who would be on the committee post election period. The Director of Children Services suggested that the SEND item would fit better on the subsequent agenda due to it being a broadly educational matter and therefore would be better suited to the lighter September agenda that has a focus of education rather than social care.

RESOLVED:

THAT the Workplan 2021-22 is noted.

16. **Members' Question Time**

There were no members questions received. The Chairman used this time to thank all committee members, both Hampshire and Isle of Wight officers and the Childrens Social Care Team. It was said that there had been vast improvements made since the chairman had been on the committee and working relationships had improved. The Director of Children Services also passed on the thanks to officers and the committee.

CHAIRMAN