



Minutes

Name of meeting	POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES, EDUCATION AND SKILLS
Date and Time	THURSDAY 17 JUNE 2021 COMMENCING AT 5.00 PM
Venue	COUNCIL CHAMBER, COUNTY HALL, NEWPORT, ISLE OF WIGHT
Present	Cllrs R Quigley (Chairman), D Adams, V Churchman, R Downer, S Hendry, K Lucioni, P Spink and R Sanders
Officers Present	S Ashley, S Crocker, B Farmer, M Johnson, K Marriott, D Price, R Reynolds, C Sadler, P Thistlewood
Cabinet Members	Cllr D Andre

1. **Minutes**

THAT the Minutes of the meeting held on 4 March 2021 be confirmed.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

No new declarations were received at this stage.

3. **Public Question Time**

No public questions were received.

4. **Introduction, Covid update and update on Holiday Activities**

The Director of Children's Services gave an introduction to the committee and explained the purpose of the committee. Ordinarily the meeting follows the pattern of alternating between a children's social care focus and an education focus.

The Assistant Director for Access, Recourses and Development introduced herself to new members of the committee and presented the presentation on Holiday Activities and a Covid-19 update. The first point raised was regarding Covid-19 winter grants and this was to sight councillors of the impact on the Covid-19 winter grants. The grants were given to vulnerable households with children. £615,666 in funding from DWP to be spent between December 2020 and 16 April 2021. At least 80% of the total funding must be ring-fenced to provide support with food, energy and water bills. With up to 20% of the total funding allocated for other types of households, including individuals. Furthermore, at least 80% of the total must be

ring-fenced to provide support with food, energy and water bills. Up to 20% could be made available for other essential items. The grants were distributed through 40 schools and colleges and 60 early years settings. 4,8171 were provided with vouchers for five weeks of the holidays. 17,967 vulnerable households were supported across the Isle of Wight. Financial support provided to 23 households through Citizens Advice. 104 young carers supported and 110 care leavers.

31 Community Grants ranging from £320 to £14,990 were awarded to 23 providers. The providers consisted of voluntary sectors and charities across the Island, care was taken to ensure every town to have provision to support the local community. Provisions ranged from food parcels, meal deliveries and support with utility bills. 10,662 children, families and individuals were beneficiaries of the grants.

Whilst the funding spent was under the total allocated it was important to note that this was due to additional support that the Citizens Advice Bureau was able to put in place for families. £97,000 of debt being resolved through debt relief orders and other mechanisms across the various families being supported.

The Connect4Communities programme was included in the presentation explaining to members the programme was publicised extensively across the councils communication systems including Instagram, Twitter and Facebook.

RESOLVED:

THAT the report was noted.

5. **Performance and Budget Update**

The item was presented by both The Deputy Director for Childrens Services, Childrens and Families branch and The Head of Strategy and Operations for the Children's and Families branch on the Isle of Wight. An overview of the local context was given to members, 27,000 children and young people 0-19 on the Isle of Wight making up 19.3% of the population in the area. 20.4% of the local authorities' children are living in poverty. 18% of Primary School age children are entitled to free school meals, this was in line with the national average. 13% of children of secondary school age were entitled to free school meals, this was lower than the national average of 15%. 8.7% of all school children compared with 34.6% across the country. School children with social, emotional and mental health needs make up 3.2 % which is higher than the England average of 2.7%.

The statistics and data was shown and explained to the committee. Including rates per 10,000 of referrals to Children's Social Services, contacts and referrals, timely responses, children subject to child protection planning, children in need rates per 10,000, looked after children per 10,000 aged under 18, age profile of looked after children and caseloads. Performance of the workforce figures were also given. Vacancy rate was maintained at 12% below the national average of 16%. Agency worker rate was also maintained at 12% below the England average of 16.4%.

The transformation programmes that children's services would be implementing were also put to the committee:

- The Hampshire and Isle of Wight Approach – strengths based, family focused way to empower families and support resilience.
- Multi-disciplinary team (RAFT) – delivering targeted support and interventions to enable more children to stay safely at home and to support reunification.
- New case management system – to reduce bureaucracy and maximise the time social workers can spend supporting children and families.
- Modernising placements – to improve choice for children, quality of care, the cost and stability for parents.
- Improving access to performance and quality data – to ensure to deliver more effective and efficient services.

Through a self-assessment a number of key areas were identified for continued improvement and these included:

- Further embed the Hampshire approach and Isle of Wight Approach to produce plans that are strength based and co-produced with families.
- Support families to enable to children to stay safely at home and ensure that if children do become looked after, where appropriate reunification is a consideration.
- Ensure enhanced partnership working with schools to promote attendance and attainment for the most vulnerable children.
- Ensure that supervision frequency is met and supervision of social workers is of high quality, including reflection of practice.
- Further increase the number of in house foster carers and placements
- Further develop pathways to independence for care experienced young people, including deposit schemes

The Chairman asked what were the two main points of improvements moving forward ? The Assistant Director of Children Services said the two main areas were implementing The Hampshire and Isle of Wight approach and modernising placements programme.

RESOLVED:

- I. THAT arrangements be circulated to members of the Committee regarding a visit to the Multi Agency Service Hub (Mash).
- II. THAT the performance and budget data for quarter 3 and quarter 4 2020/21 was noted.

6. **Young Carers Support**

The Head of Strategy and Operations presented the committee with the report on Young Carers. The report was requested to come to the committee by the previous chairman. It provided a summary of the Isle of Wight Council's commissioned young carers programme.

Currently the YMCA was supporting 300 young carers across the Isle of Wight. The programme of support included 1 to 1 support and that was for those with higher levels of need. This support can be provided at home or at school. Social opportunities are also part of the programme however during the COVID-19 pandemic this had been harder, although there was an opportunity for virtual meetings. Advisory staff were available to support and listen to the young people and a helpline was also available. Activities were provided and they acted as respite for the young people, every summer there is a young carers festival put on and this was involved a residential trip to the mainland.

Through the winter grants scheme the young carers of the Island and their families were supported. £ 8,400 was paid to the YMCA in grants and was distributed to 104 families requiring additional support. This provided food vouchers, essential items and support towards gas and electricity bills. 10 families were also supported in having a holiday this year with the Get Away Foundation. 305 young carers engaged with the project in the last quarter alone.

A Councillor asked if the strategy due for review would come to this committee and It was agreed that it would be useful for this to come to the committee before it was adopted.

RESOLVED:

THAT the report, the progress made, and the further services planned as outlined in 2021-22, be noted.

THAT the draft Isle of Wight Carers Strategy following a review be submitted to the Committee for comment before formal approval is given by the Cabinet.

7. **Annual Fostering Report**

The Children in Care Service Manager presented the annual fostering report to the committee. It was noted that in the year 2020/21 9 new general fostering households and 25 connected households had been recruited a target to recruit 10 new fostering households for this year was the aim.

Highlights of the report included:

- Marketing had continued where possible,
- Restructure of the fostering team on 1 April 2020 was managed and had performed well, the service had been split into three hubs to improve efficiency,
- Fostering provided virtual training to foster carers,
- Fostering survey completed,
- Careful matching maintained throughout lockdown to ensure placement stability was maintained.
- There had been an increase in fostering households since March 2020.

The Committee asked about the timeframe for the review of foster carers allowances. It was advised that it was part of the modernising placements

programme to ensure foster carers in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight were looked at in the same way. It was work in progress and hoped to be completed in 12 months.

It was noted that the Chairman of the Policy and Scrutiny Committee for Health and Social Care was aware of issues with face to face health care appointments and any difficulties encountered by foster carers accessing face to face health assessments would be passed on.

RESOLVED:

- I. THAT progress on the Modernising Placement project be reported to the Committee.
- II. THAT the Chairman of the Policy and Scrutiny Committee for Health and Social Care should be advised of any difficulties encountered by foster carers in accessing face to face health assessments with their general practitioners.

8. **Annual Adoption Report**

The Director of Children's Services advised that the Department for Education required sub regional groupings of adoption services and the Isle of Wight was now in partnership with Portsmouth and Southampton (Adopt South).

The Head of Adopt South, Rachel Reynolds, advised that they launched in April 2019. The Government required the partnership for three main reasons which were:

1. Increase in pool of adopters,
2. Join together for adoption support,
3. Make efficiencies.

She highlighted the achievements since they started in 2019:

- 298 children had families identified
- 106 of these children had been hard to place
- 238 families approved
- Adoption support team had dealt with nearly 4000 enquiries

Adoption support – can now present larger therapeutic parenting programmes, made good use of money provided by DfE for families who suffered challenges during the pandemic. Virtual services were offered, making it more accessible for families on the Isle of Wight. A consultation was being undertaken from 30 June 2021 to engage with adopters over the future of the service and bringing things back to face to face or keeping it virtual.

In discussing the impact on children and families when making staff changes in the team the Committee was advised that there was an allocated member of staff on the Island for adoption support. It was extremely important that families who needed support were provided with the right support in a timely manner.

RESOLVED:

THAT The annual adoption report, including the Adopt South summary report for year 2020/21 was noted.

9. **Committee's Work Plan**

It was noted that the Corporate Scrutiny Committee had requested the Committee look at the recent Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman cases when dealing with the annual complaints report. They also requested a report regarding the future of school places across the Island at the next meeting in September 2021.

RESOLVED:

- I. THAT the Committee would meet informally before the next meeting to discuss possible items for inclusion in the future workplan.
- II. THAT the findings of the recent Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's cases would be reflected in the report on the annual complaints report to the 2 September meeting 2021 meeting.
- III. THAT a report be requested on the process involved in the planning for future school places for the 2 September 2021 meeting.

10. **Members' Question Time**

There were no members questions.

CHAIRMAN