



Minutes

Name of meeting	POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES, EDUCATION AND SKILLS
Date and Time	THURSDAY 9 JUNE 2022 COMMENCING AT 5.00 PM
Venue	COUNCIL CHAMBER, COUNTY HALL, NEWPORT, ISLE OF WIGHT
Present	Cllrs R Quigley (Chairman), J Lever (Vice-Chairman), D Adams, R Downer, S Ellis, S Hendry, T Outlaw and D Andre
Also Present	Kim Goode, Diane Hiscock, Brian Pope, Paul Thistlewood and Sarah Philipsborn
Apologies	Stuart Ashley, Steve Crocker and Rob Sanders

1. **Minutes**

RESOLVED:

THAT the minutes of the meeting held on 3 March 2022 be approved.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Hendry declared that he was a School Governor for Holy Cross and Queensgate Primary Schools.

Councillor Quigley stated he had been a foster carer in the past.

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

No Public questions were received.

4. **Progress on outcomes and recommendations from previous meetings**

RESOLVED:

THAT the report be noted.

THAT all Councillors be offered the opportunity to visit the Multi Agency Service Hub (MASH).

5. **School Governor Recruitment and Retention**

The Governor Support Officer presented a report regarding school governor recruitment and retention on the Island.

It was explained that being a school governor was a voluntary role that was both rewarding and time consuming. Regarding maintained schools, it was stated that there were currently 91 school governor vacancies which was a 21% vacancy rate, though this had come down from 25%. It was hoped that this downward trend would continue with the increase in virtual training and the ability to carry out responsibilities and duties remotely.

It was pointed out that the Local Authority did not hold data for Academy Schools and although there was communication between the two, the Council took no part in their recruitment of school governors. The Local Authority did not appoint school governors, as that fell under the remit of the individual schools, but the Local Authority did monitor the situation.

It was deemed highly important to encourage and promote the opportunities of school governorship as school governance was not widely known in the community. Induction training, workshops and annual development were said to be measures to help the retention of school governors.

Given the number of school governor posts to fill, it was felt it was important to adopt and adapt to the situation by making links with national organisations, as well as encouraging elected members to support the recruitment drive. It was stated that all school governors had access to the school governor hub and the database, as well as access to the school governor website.

Questions were asked about whether the vacancies were evenly spread across all schools, and whether a single space existed where all vacancies could be seen. It was explained that the vacancies tended to fluctuate across all the Island schools, and that no single space existed at present where all school governor vacancies were displayed.

The Cabinet Member indicated that it was proposed to undertake a recruitment drive in the local media. Details were still being finalised and these would be circulated to the Committee in due course.

RESOLVED:

THAT the contents of the report on School Governor Recruitment be noted.

6. **UK Settlement Scheme for Refugees**

The Area Director for Children's Services presented a report on the UK Resettlement Scheme for Refugees with regards to the Isle of Wight Council.

It was stated that the UK's Homes for Ukraine Scheme was launched on 14 March 2022 and that there were 93 Ukrainian refugees on the Island to date.

It was explained that Children's Services were part of a cross-Council co-ordinated partnership with Community Action Isle of Wight and other organisations to deliver and support this scheme and these families.

After initial teething problems, it was claimed that the work across the Council concerning the Ukrainian refugees was going well and that Adult and Social Care had undertaken the host and household checks of those offering homes. ID checks and DBS checks, including all those who were 16+ residing at the property, had also been carried out by the relevant authorities. Second visits to the Ukrainian families took place after schools, GPs and other support services had been arranged. There had only been 1 family rematch so far.

The Area Director for Children's Services added a brief report on Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children with regards to the Isle of Wight

It was stated that the Isle of Wight Council was part of the mandated National Transfer Scheme and that a local authority did not need to accept unaccompanied asylum-seeking children where the cohort already makes up 0.07% of the general child population (which equates to 17 children for the Isle of Wight.)

The Isle of Wight Council had previously made the decision that the unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, allocated to the Isle of Wight, would be placed on the mainland so that their cultural needs could be met and that they could live with carers who share a similar ethnic and cultural background.

The 17 children that were looked after by the Isle of Wight Council had an allocated social worker. They all received the same statutory services and support as other looked after children including health assessments, dental and optician checks. The Children were placed mainly in Croydon, but the Isle of Wight Council retained full statutory responsibility for them and met up regularly with the children

A comment was made about the sustainability of such a policy given that the child refugee situation was becoming increasingly difficult.

RESOLVED:

THAT the contents of the reports be noted.

7. Fostering Annual Report

The Service Manager, Children in Care, presented the Fostering Annual Report 2021/2022.

The report provided an update on the Isle of Wight Council's fostering service in line with the fostering services statutory regulations and guidance.

It was stated that there were 98 registered and approved foster carer households on the Island as of end of March 2022 and that there was a target of recruiting a further 10 fostering households in 2022/23, as the number of foster carers needed to increase considerably. It was hoped that by increasing the allowances that foster carers received, it would help the recruitment of more foster carers along with the delivery of the Modernising Placements Programme.

It was explained that recruitment statistics were lower than in the previous year and this mirrored the national trend. The reasons for this were put down to the higher cost of living and life post lockdown.

It was hoped that continued marketing, local media, virtual drop-ins and face-to face events within the community would bring an upturn in foster carer numbers.

Foster carers were supported by the fostering support hub as well as numerous support groups, training and activities which had been welcomed by foster carers.

It was stated that the Council had a Complaints and Allegations against Foster Carers procedure as required by the Fostering Service Regulations 2011, and that there had been 7 allegations. A review of the policy was to be undertaken with staff and foster carers and this would make use of case studies.

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 only exception being, unannounced visits, which would be made a priority for the next year.

RESOLVED:

THAT the Annual Fostering report be noted.

8. **Adoption Annual Report**

The Service Manager, Children in Care, presented the Isle of Wight Annual Adoption report which set out the progress of the IW adoption team 2021-2022.

The report tracked recruitment activity, interagency activity, complaints and allegations statistics, regarding number of children placed and Adoption Orders.

The Service Manager highlighted the topic of score cards and explained that this was the average time between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family. The scorecard figures were deemed as good with 449 days compared to the government threshold of 426 days, and although there were some children who took longer to find an adopted family, there had been no disruptions for a long period of time. The slightly longer timeframe for the assessments was counterbalanced by the fact that there was a much better permanency outcome rate.

The Head of Adopt South contributed to the presentation with a Summary Report from Adopt South with Isle of Wight highlights.

RESOLVED:

THAT the Annual Adoption report be noted.

9. **Performance and Budget Update**

The Assistant Director, Education and Inclusion and the Area Director, Children's Services presented a report on Children's Services Performance Quarter Four 2021/2022.

It was stated that demand across social care and early help remained high and that the social care services sustained a good performance. This was highlighted by the fact that a written letter following an Ofsted focused visit in July 2021 stated that the senior leadership team had continued at a pace with their transformation project since the previous inspection in November 2018, when they were judged as good.

The challenge remained the recruitment of social workers which was not only hampered by the trend of a national shortage of social workers, but also by the 'Island factor' and the difficulties to recruit new staff due to poor transport links with the mainland and a shortage of housing.

It was explained that the Council relied on agency staff, but it needed to also recruit more social workers. A new marketing and recruitment strategy was being introduced and pay scales were being reviewed to make jobs in social care more attractive. This was being done with adult social care where similar problems were being experienced. It was hoped that a further campaign to cite the Island as an attractive place to live and work would reap benefits of more people wanting to seek employment with the Council.

The impact of Covid, successive lockdowns, rising fuel and energy prices, as well as an increase in food prices, had led to a spike in referrals and the trend was continuing. There was a greater reliance on food banks and community pantries as the cost-of-living crisis continued to effect families.

The Council had been consistently strong in its assessment of children but there were many more new families coming into the system.

It was deemed essential that the integral work with the schools continue.

When looking at education and inclusion, it was pointed out that the Isle of Wight had a higher proportion of 16 and 17year olds given an offer of education, employment and training (98.2% compared with the national average of 94.3%.)

It was stated that 29% of Education, Health and Care Plans were produced within 20 weeks for the last quarter, though the national average was around 55%. It was felt that recent new appointments and staff changes were now resulting in a much higher number of plans being produced within 20 weeks and April 2022 had seen 75% of plans being produced within the recommended time frame.

The number of children being electively home educated was 531 which was higher than the same point last year (508 children), of which the local authority had contact with 80% of the families.

Permanent exclusions in 2021/22 were 5, after 2 terms, compared to 17 in total for 20/2021. It was hoped that this trend would continue and that there would be a much lower number of exclusions in total for 2021/22.

The number of fixed period exclusions in 2021/22 was 869 after two terms (1092 in total in 2020/21). It was surmised that one of the reasons for this high figure was likely to be the fact that children who might have previously been permanently excluded were now in this bracket.

Attendance statistics which had been recently produced for the 2020/21 academic year showed that the attendance rate on the Isle of Wight was 95.3% which mirrored the national average of 95.4%.

RESOLVED:

THAT the contents of the report be noted

10. **Workplan 2022-25**

The current workplan was noted and it was highlighted that a date had yet to be set for consideration of the Carers Strategy.

11. **Members' Question Time**

Questions were asked about the trend of fixed period exclusions and it was stated in response that some fixed period exclusions were the same students. It was added that maturity levels in some children had dropped during Covid and the lockdown, and that some children didn't know the boundaries as previously.

Questions were asked about the definition of a 'suitable education' regarding home educated children, as it was brought to the committee's attention that all local authorities would soon have to register home educated children and assess the suitability of the education provided. It was suggested that the easier way of dealing with this point was to reverse the question as to what was unsuitable.

The decision to keep Rookley and Chillerton Primary school open was highlighted with respect to there having been no uplift in the pupil numbers for September 2022, and the intake remained at 15. An update was asked for regarding the policy used for place planning in the decision-making process. In response it was stated that this would be discussed in the autumn as there was currently a government White Paper on the issue.

Questions were asked about the distribution and duration of food vouchers and how could the distress to families be avoided in terms of the duration of the scheme and accessibility of the vouchers.

It was explained that the funding came from the government and the Council was told that this was only for the short term. The Local Authority had received a set amount with a set criteria. The Council had not known if more funding would become available. It was stated that further funding did subsequently become available, but that the criteria had changed. It was pointed out that there then was another review of criteria, and that pensioners needed to receive a 1/3. In order to deal with situation, the Council had other schemes in place for the summer and in particular the summer holidays.

It was reiterated that Poverty was a top priority for the Administration.

CHAIRMAN