

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday, 16 December 2020 at 6.00 pm via Remote Meeting

Present: Councillors M Boylan, I T W Fletcher, E J Greenaway, J Jones, A D McClements (Chair) and K T Tomlinson.
Co-optees: L Fowler

Also Present: Councillor S A W Reynolds

In Attendance: J Britton (Executive Director for Children's Safeguarding & Family Support), A Harris (Director: Children's Safeguarding & Family Support), D Knibbs (Strategic Lead: Practice Development and Innovation), A Lowe (Associate Director for Policy and Governance), K Robinson (Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer), S Wellman (Director: Education and Skills)

Apologies: Councillors V J Holt and H Rhodes

7 Declarations of Interest

None.

8 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting held on 3 September be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

9 COVID-19 Update

The Committee received an update presentation from the Director: Education and Skills on the Authority's response to COVID-19 in schools.

Members were briefed that there had been two clear phases of the pandemic, from March 2020 through to September 2020 and then September onwards. Throughout the pandemic, there had been a number of key priorities, which included:

- Protection and support for the vulnerable;
- Attendance;
- Emotion wellbeing of pupils and staff;
- Recovery curriculum;
- Response and support for Track and Trace;
- Remote Learning; and
- Free school meals.

During the March to September period, there had been a good level of attendance from the cohorts the authority wanted in schools the most. In June, further year groups returned in all schools in the Borough.

In regards to remote learning, the response required had been immediate. In terms of the national picture, a large amount of information became available at once and it required numerous surveys for the Council to develop an accurate picture of the situation. Most schools had had focused on English and Maths to ensure that children continued to receive instruction in the core subjects. Ofsted were seconded to the Authority and completed work on best practice guides for remote learning. Schools contacted pupils who appeared not to be engaging.

There were barriers to remote learning, with access to IT being of serious concern. Families across the Borough were in different positions. Schools had loaned out equipment, provided non-IT dependent activities, and learning challenges for families to combat accessibility issues. There had also been a national scheme to provide laptops to vulnerable students. To combat language barrier issues, schools had utilised bilingual staff to support children and parents with English as an additional language.

It had been critical for the Authority to have clear and regular communication with schools. There had been keep in touch calls with Head teachers, questionnaires on specific issues, and weekly meetings with the Primary Heads Executive, Special Heads Forum, and trade unions.

From September onwards, it was expected that all students would return to school and a significant amount of work had been done to promote attendance and develop risk assessments for the schools. To facilitate the return of all year groups, it had been necessary to find additional capacity on school transport; the Authority had secured grant funding for this and worked with parents to ensure safe transport to and from school. Remote learning had continued after the summer holiday due to periods of required self-isolation. There had been minimal school closures since September, both full and partial closures.

Schools had given significant support to Track and Trace and had to remain ready to respond as the situation was changing on a daily basis. In addition to this work to keep pupils safe, the Council had worked on a communications campaign around staying safe at the school gates for parents.

Discussions were ongoing around end of term closures and rapid testing in schools, an issue that the Council was attempting to discover further details.

A debate ensued and members asked questions:

What had the Council done to support groups that struggled to access remote learning?

There had been rapid progress in remote learning and there was a legal expectation that remote learning would happen. Access to IT was a national issue and non-IT access remote learning was needed alongside IT based

learning. The Development team had developed support and guidance for schools on the matter.

How well engaged were children with an EHCP?

There was a legal duty for reasonable endeavours for these children, there was an understanding that not everything in EHCPs could be carried out due to the restrictions. To ensure that children were engaged and received support, in spite of the restrictions, schools worked with families to develop plans. The schools worked with families to ensure that some form of learning continued. There would be knock on effects in terms of gaps in education and this would be picked up by schools. There was also additional funding to aid children in catching up.

10 Family Safeguarding Model (Hertfordshire Model) Briefing

The Committee received a presentation from officers on the Family Safeguarding Model, also referred to as the Hertfordshire Model.

It was anticipated that the model would be implemented in May 2021 but the Council was awaiting confirmation of funding from the Department for Education. The model looked at how the Authority could support parents to make changes that would have the best outcomes for children. It would introduce a new workbook for all practitioners to record on a child's file. There would be monthly supervision and providers would be able to challenge each other, giving a more holistic approach for families. There would also be a strong focus on work directly with children. The four authorities that had already implemented the model had managed to reduce the number of children under 12 being taken into care.

A discussion followed:

Has COVID affected the model?

There had been an increase in reports of domestic abuse and the Council was aware of the impact lockdown had had on the emotional wellbeing of all members of society. The model was for supporting children and their families and would be the right model for the Authority given the impact of COVID.

Members expressed support for the interconnected nature of the model and the manner in which it would allow children to stay with their families. The Committee looked forward to reviewing the model's implementation later in 2021.

11 Referred Council Motion

Members received the referred School Streets Initiative Motion, moved at Full Council on 26 November 2020.

The Committee agreed to scrutinise the initiative as referred from Full Council. Members agreed that it was an important issue to investigate and that due to the overlap in remits between all of the scrutiny committees, the issue be scrutinised by a joint workshop. Members agreed that in addition to the Chair

of the Children's & Young People Scrutiny Committee, having one member from each committee would be the optimum arrangement. A call for interested parties would be sent to members of the Scrutiny Assembly.

12 Work Programme Review

There were updates to the expected dates of scrutiny for a number of items on the Committee's work programme.

13 Chair's Update

The Chair updated the Committee on the activity of the Joint Health Overview Scrutiny Committee (JHOSC). The Chair had attended several meetings of the Committee on behalf of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee whilst JHOSC was scrutinising mental health provision in the region. The Chair hoped to bring more information to a later meeting of the Committee.

The meeting ended at 7.20 pm

Chairman:

Date: Wednesday, 17 March 2021