

**MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING
HELD AT 7.00PM, ON
WEDNESDAY 8 MARCH 2023
BOURGES/VIERSEN ROOMS, TOWN HALL, PETERBOROUGH**

Committee Members Present: Councillors L Robinson (Chair), M Farooq, S Farooq, C Fenner, S Hemraj (Vice Chair), S Lane, R Ray, B Rush, A Shaheed, H Skibsted and Statutory Education Co-opted Member Peter Cantley.

Also in attendance: Kira Balogh Youth Council Representative and Eva Woods Youth MP

Officers Present: Jonathan Lewis, Director of Education
Amanda Fitton, Religious Education (RE) Advisor
Ricky Cooper, Assistant Director Fostering, Regional Adoption & Specialist Young People's Services
Charlotte Cameron, Democratic Services Officer

Also Present: Councillor Ray Bisby, Cabinet Advisor to Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education, Skills, and University

47. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Over, Parish Councillor Michael Samways and Statutory Education Co-opted Member Dr Andy Stone.

Apologies were also received from Cabinet Member Councillor Ayres and Elaine Redding, Executive Director for Children's Services.

48. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING DECLARATIONS

There were no declarations of interest or whipping declarations.

49. MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 12 JANUARY 2023

The minutes of the Children and Education Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 12 January 2023 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

50. CALL IN OF ANY CABINET, CABINET MEMBER OR KEY OFFICER DECISIONS

No call-ins were received.

51. **LOCALLY AGREED SYLLABUS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (RE) 2023-2028**

The Children and Education Scrutiny Committee received a report in relation to the work of the Locally Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education.

The purpose of the report was to seek approval from the Committee for the statutory syllabus for all schools.

The Director of Education and the RE Advisor accompanied by the Cabinet Advisor for Children's Services, Education, Skills and the University introduced the report and highlighted key points including:

The RE Advisor had been invited to the meeting to support questioning as they had supported the work around the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) syllabus.

SACRE and RE was a requirement for schools to deliver however there was no nationally set curriculum for RE and the government's expectation was that local authorities engage with various partners to deliver a solid local offer.

The report detailed an updated version of the curriculum with the intent for it to be implemented in the summer of 2023. There had been a lot of hard work from various volunteers who had come together to deliver the syllabus. There had been some national changes within this area and Ofsted had a different focus so the document had evolved to reflect that.

The Children and Education Scrutiny Committee debated the report and in summary, key points raised and responses to questions included:

- Members queried how the SACRE Committee could ensure that there was sufficient exposure to this subject throughout all faith, state and academy run schools. Members were advised that SACRE monitored the curriculum taught in schools, but their remit was limited.
- The RE Advisor advised Members that SACRE reviewed school websites and GCSE results to monitor what had been offered to students and to ensure they were getting what they were entitled to.
- The Director of Education further advised that Ofsted had a role as part of their reviews to encourage a RE subject-led focus and the Diocese also had mechanisms to oversee this.
- Members thanked the Officers and the volunteers who had worked on the syllabus.
- Members were pleased to see inclusion of the 2013 affirmation from the Religious Education Council of England and Wales (RECEW) on page 18 of the syllabus.
- Members asked how the work had drawn from best practice from other locally agreed syllabuses. Members were advised that various syllabuses from across the country had been reviewed and had influenced the final report.
- Members noted the little to no RE training that primary school teachers receive before their first teaching post and referred to the cost of the development and launch of the syllabus.
- Members therefore sought clarification on the long-term commitment to developing high quality RE through local authority staffing appointments. The Officers acknowledged that the financial commitment was relatively small but that the processes and networks were well established across the three local authorities involved.

- Members were advised that there was a commitment to train and include RE within the schoolteacher training provision offer to ensure the syllabus had impact. The RE Advisor followed up and advised that the training programme for the following year would be reviewed.
- Members referred to some incomplete information on pages 24/25 and the limited list of key texts. Members were advised that this was a draft syllabus and the statutory information had been prioritised. There would be further developments before formal publication.
- Members noted that they would have liked to have seen some statistical analysis of non-religious/religious representation across the local authorities to justify its content.
- Members questioned Officers views on whether there should be a national syllabus which was properly resourced. The Officers advised that they did support a national RE curriculum to ensure consistency across schools as it would strengthen the importance of the subject.
- Members queried if the syllabus was adapted across all schools and if students were equally exposed to RE. Members were advised that if the school had followed the recommended hours within the agreed syllabus that they should be providing the same level of education.
- Members noted that each school had been encouraged to think about their curriculum as they would have different priorities so the delivery may differ across cohorts.

AGREED ACTIONS

The Children and Education Scrutiny Committee considered the report and **RESOLVED** to approve the Locally Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education (RE) 2023 - 2028.

52. REVIEW OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY ARRANGEMENTS

The Children and Education Scrutiny Committee received a report in relation to the Regional Adoption Agency Arrangements.

The purpose of the report was to provide an update on the overall progress and achievements of the Regional Adoption Agency for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

The Assistant Director Fostering, Regional Adoption & Specialist Young People's Services accompanied by the Cabinet Advisor for Children's Services, Education, Skills and the University introduced the report and key points raised included:

Members had sight of the report prior to the meeting and the Officers were happy to go straight to questions.

The Children and Education Scrutiny Committee debated the report and in summary, key points raised and responses to questions included:

- Members sought clarification on whether the Council had worked with partner organisations to recruit adopters. Members were advised that the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) took this issue seriously as there were more children with adoption plans than adopters. Options to increase this had been explored with NHS, public health and public service colleagues, through targeted recruitment campaigns and a dedicated marketing officer.
- Members were advised that there was a national push as part of the Care Review but that it was a difficult process and could take two years from an enquiry to a formal assessment.
- Members noted the move to the regional approach and queried if the region was big enough. The Officer advised that the RAA were able to tap into adopters that were recruited and approved across the country.
- The neighbouring authorities were now part of an RAA and relationships had been built to share resources. The performance in placing children with neighbouring authorities was good and the national trend was that adoption was becoming less favourable but in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough we were seeing the opposite because of good practice.
- Members noted the need for improvements in the support provided to avoid breakdowns in adoption placements and queried what the support would look like. The Officer advised that the Adoption Support Fund had been confirmed until March 2025 and the team had taken steps to implement a contingency plan to meet demand.
- The RAA were innovative in relation to adoption support funding and were upskilling their workforce to deliver intervention support themselves.
- Members noted that the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) was a central government fund that identified children and adults that had been affected or touched by adoption, which provided therapeutic support.
- Members queried if the use of the ASF would include the recruitment of specialist and therapeutic staff. The Officer advised that the team had to grow to meet demand which would be done incrementally.
- Members noted that the team also had access to the clinical service that provided specific therapeutic care and a dedicated clinician allocated to the RAA.
- Members were advised that part of the service plan included focus on how to increase therapeutic support and would look to employ another specialist attached to the RAA in the future.
- Members questioned if there was an IT system that matched potential adopters with adoptees and were advised that adopters and children with a care plan are matched through a national platform called Linkmaker.
- The Officer further advised that it was an old-fashioned platform that had to be subscribed too but are innovative and looking at forms of technology to improve.
- Members referred to the number of inquiries and questioned whether those who did not end up applying were recontacted. Members were advised that conversion numbers were low and there were lots of factors that may deter someone from applying. The Officer advised that teams were keeping in touch in various ways.
- Members were concerned about what stage the best interest of the child was considered if there was a prospect of moving them out of area and away from the wider family.
- The Officer advised that a care plan of adoption meant that the court had decided that it was not in the best interest of the child to remain close to their birth family.

Children are only matched with adopters if it met the needs of the child through a vigorous process, which an independent panel would review.

- Members noted that if an adoption order was made it essentially severed the link between the child and their birth family.
- Members were advised that adoption was an extreme and a permanence plan for children which was why various case laws would need to be satisfied before an adoption plan could be enacted.
- Members referred to the retirement of judges in family law within the area and queried if there had been an effect on finalising adoption orders. Members were advised that there had not been a decline in court time for adoption as courts had prioritised it.
- Members thanked Officers for the report and the valuable work they had been doing.
- Members referred to the improvements and the need to reduce placement breakdown and queried whether there was a need for better initial training to support potential adoptive parents deal with complex needs and whether there are benefits in engaging with wider family to support adoptive parents.
- The Officer advised that there would always be room for improvements and that it was not just the adoptive parents that would be involved.
- The Officer further advised that the team constantly reviewed the offer with adopters and that the RAA were audited in May 2022 and the findings were satisfactory. The RAA was governed by a board with an adopted adult and parent that sat on that board so that it can influence the delivery and design of the service.

AGREED ACTIONS

The Children and Education Scrutiny Committee considered the report and **RESOLVED** to:

1. Note the contents of the report.
2. Raise any queries with officers.

53. DIRECTORS BRIEFING REPORT ON TARGETED SUPPORT, CHILDRENS SOCIAL CARE AND OFSTED UPDATE

The Children and Education Scrutiny Committee received a report in relation to the work on targeted support, children's social care and an Ofsted update.

The purpose of this report was to provide the committee with an overview of Council services, including an update on the expected Ofsted inspection.

The Assistant Director Fostering, Regional Adoption & Specialist Young People's Services accompanied by Cabinet Advisor for Children's Services, Education, Skills and the University introduced the report and highlighted key items including:

Members were advised that the Assistant Director would cover for the Executive Director of Children's services and would answer questions where he could.

The Children and Education Scrutiny Committee debated the report and in summary, key points raised and responses to questions included:

- Members asked what the results of the integrated front door Ofsted visit were and if there were any plans in place to meet their recommendations. Members were advised that the visit had taken place and that the publication of the report was due in May.

- The Officer could not provide detail on the outcomes of the visit as that was subject to the Council receiving the initial letter from Ofsted.
- Members referred to the graphs within the report and the lack of trends and comparisons to previous years or areas. The Committee requested that comparative data be included in future reports.
- Child Protection Plans were an area of curiosity for the service area and were being explored by the safeguarding and quality assurance board.
- Members noted that children in care numbers were going up nationally and the service had seen an increase in demand for complex needs which required specialist support.
- Members referred to section 4.3.3 and the multi-agency action plan and sought clarification on what had been included within that plan. The Officer advised that the Ofsted visit had been on the integrated front door and the team were keen to engage partners in health and education by preparing the action plan prior to the Ofsted visits.
- Members were advised that the plan had been shared with Ofsted in advance of their visit and that it would be cited within the letter. The details of the plan could not be shared with the Committee prior to the publication of the Ofsted letter and report but could be provided as a briefing note after the embargo was lifted.
- Members referred to Missing and Exploitation and sought clarification on whether that could be added to the work programme for next year. The Officer confirmed that this would be a pertinent point as it would also be presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee.

AGREED ACTIONS

The Children and Education Scrutiny Committee considered the report and **RESOLVED** to:

1. Note the contents of the report.
2. Note the Focused Visit activity by our regulator, Ofsted.

The Committee also requested that the Executive Director Children's Services:

- Provide the Committee with the comparative data from previous years, for the graphs in sections 4.2.1 to 4.2.5 of the report.
- Include in future reports trends that allow the Committee to compare the data from previous years.
- Provide the Committee with the Multi-agency Action Plan after the Ofsted embargo has been lifted in May.
- Note the inclusion of a Missing and Exploitation (MET) report on the work programme for the 2023-2024 Municipal Year.

54. SERVICE DIRECTOR EDUCATION REPORT AND PORTFOLIO PROGRESS REPORT FOR THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDRENS SERVICES, EDUCATION, SKILLS AND THE UNIVERSITY

The Children and Education Scrutiny Committee received a report in relation to the Service Director report and a portfolio update from the Cabinet Member.

The purpose of this report covered two areas. A portfolio progress report from the Cabinet Advisor for Childrens Services, Education, Skills and the University and provided an outline of the latest position on Education in Peterborough across a range of the council's statutory duties.

The Director of Education accompanied by Cabinet Advisor to for Children's Services, Education, Skills and the University introduced the report and highlighted key items including:

The revised data for results had shown significant improvements and was a credit to the work of teachers, students and those within the education sector.

The Children and Education Scrutiny Committee debated the report and in summary, key points raised and responses to questions included:

- Members referred to the decrease in writing standards for Key Stage 2 and sought clarification on what would be done to improve that. The Director advised that this had been a challenge and was one of the priority areas.
- There had been a forensic focus the improvement in writing and that there had been a focus on reading during the pandemic as it could be dealt with better remotely.
- Members noted that in the context of the cohort, writing had improved dramatically. However, there would need to be more data before a trend could be identified. There had also been work with the Education Endowment Foundation who were providing support in that area.
- Members noted that writing continued to be a problem as students were not getting enough practice across all stages.
- Members were encouraged by the improved Key Stage 2 pupil outcomes and requested that the Officer provide data on how this was broken down by gender, pupil premium, SEND pupils and pupils who belonged to different ethnic groups.
- The Director advised that disadvantaged pupils had done better relative to the national picture, the gap between girls and boys had been larger in Peterborough and children with education health and care plans were lower.
- Members noted that the data had highlighted that English Additional Language (EAL) pupils were performing well.
- Members questioned how attainment and progress varied between academy and local authority-maintained schools. Members were advised that the gap at KS2 had been 6% and was higher in maintained schools.
- Members asked what the strategy would be to continue the improvement patterns and priorities. Members were advised that action plans for primary and secondary education were being developed and would form part of the Cabinet Member's education review.
- Members referred to school place provisions and sought clarification on what checks were done to ensure that there was sufficient space and resource for additional places.
- Members were advised that there were several steps taken that included an initial admission number (IAN) where there was a space calculation of the area of the school.
- Members congratulated teachers and students on their efforts to improve the education results in Peterborough.
- Members noted that there were 189 children in out of city or independent provision and that Officers wanted to decrease that reliance.
- Members were advised that children within that group had highly specialist needs, and the support could not be provided within the city.
- Members referred to the children who were waiting for a placement in specialist provision and were advised that some were doing well in mainstream education but would eventually need to move into more specific provision.
- The Officer advised that additional provision would be put in place and that special schools would be expanded to provide the right provision within the city.
- Members noted that schools were finding it difficult to deal with children in mainstream school who should be attending special provision.

- The Committee requested that the Director inform them of how many special schools provision places the authority has for pre-school aged children.
- The Committee also requested the figures for how much was spent on fighting tribunals for specialist cases.
- Members acknowledged the government response to the green paper that concluded that the tribunal system needs to be reviewed
- Members noted that Peterborough was 4% away from the national average and queried what was done to ensure momentum. The team were working on a primary and secondary plan which would focus on reading, literacy, numeracy and behaviour.
- Members requested that BAME students be included in the data provide relating to pupil outcomes.
- Members were advised that the new head of SEN had been working on the ordinarily available provision work programme which was the expectations on mainstream schools.
- Members referred to the listening events on page 132 and praised the work of the Officers for capturing those views.
- Members noted that this engagement would continue, and developments would be shared with family voice.
- The Cabinet Advisor highlighted the improvement on SEND services as they had attended the reading and writing forum and thanked the work of the teachers, students, family and the council team.

AGREED ACTIONS

The Children and Education Scrutiny Committee considered the report and **RESOLVED** to:

1. Note the contents of the report.
2. Support Elected Members and Officers in their work to support and challenge schools to improve standards of attainment and rates of progress for children in Peterborough early years settings and across our schools and colleges.

The Committee also requested that the Director for Education:

- Provide the Committee with the improved KS2 pupil outcomes data broken down by gender, pupil premium, SEND and BAME.
- Inform the Committee of how many special schools provision places the authority has for pre-school aged children.
- Share with the Committee the Government's response to the Green Paper alongside the cost per year for fighting tribunals for specialist placements.
- Provide the Committee with the Primary and Secondary action plans as part of a future report.
- Include in the next Service Director Report the CPD activity and schemes that the team provides.

55. FORWARD PLAN OF EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Chair introduced the report which included the latest version of the Council's Forward Plan of Executive Decisions containing decisions that the Leader of the Council, the Cabinet or individual Cabinet Members would make during the forthcoming month. Members were invited to comment on the plan and where appropriate, identify any relevant areas for inclusion in the Committee's Work Programme.

- Members noted that the Clare Lodge report had been deferred and requested it be added to the work programme for 2023-2024.
- The Werrington Fields decision was on hold while the Department for Education provided advice on the section 77 implications of the decision.

AGREED ACTIONS

The Children and Education Scrutiny Committee considered the current Forward Plan of Executive Decisions and **RESOLVED** to note the report.

The Committee also requested that the Clare Lodge Report be put on the work programme for the 2023-2024 Municipal Year.

The Chair thanked the Committee and noted that they had enjoyed chairing and being a part of the committee for 4 years.

The Committee thanked Cllr Robinson for her for her time as Chair of this committee and praised her diligence and thorough understanding of the reports. They also thanked her for her support to members before and during meetings that had helped the Committee to understand and adequately scrutinise the Children and Education services in Peterborough.

CHAIR

Meeting began at 7.00pm and ended at 8.27pm

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