

**MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING
HELD AT 7.00PM, ON
MONDAY, 15 JANUARY 2024
BOURGES/VIERSEN ROOMS, TOWN HALL, PETERBOROUGH**

Committee Members Present: Shaheed (Chair), Allen, Asif, Cole, Coles (sub), Rangzeb, Rush, Sabir – Vice Chair (sub) and Skibsted.

Co-opted Members: Sameena Aziz, Katie Howard and Dr Andy Stone.

Youth Councillors: Abigail Adebayo and Daisy Blakemore-Creetdon.

Officers Present: Madia Afzal, Democratic Services Officer
Chris Baird, Interim Director of Education
Jon Chapman, Chair of Cambridgeshire & Peterborough
Safeguarding Children Partnership Board
John Gregg, Executive Director for Children’s Services
Zoe Lattimer, Headteacher, Peterborough Virtual School
Angela Wellings, Interim Head of SEND and Inclusion

30. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: Hemraj, Fenner, Over, Lane, Co-opted Member Peter French and Gary Jones, Interim Service Director for Children’s Social Care and Safeguarding.

31. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING DECLARATIONS

Councillor Skibsted declared a personal interest in respect of agenda item 8 - An Overview of Special Needs and Disabilities: Progress, Priorities and Challenges in that she is Chair of the Trustees of Family Voice Peterborough. Due to the personal nature of the declaration, the Member was able to take part in the debate and vote.

32. MINUTES OF THE COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 06 NOVEMBER 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 06 November 2023 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

33. CALL-IN OF ANY CABINET, CABINET MEMBER OR KEY OFFICER DECISION

None were received for this meeting.

34. 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.

- Clarification on the Peterborough Sufficiency Strategy was sought. The plans for the local authority fostering service were outlined and Members were advised that a council led service would limit the use of independent fostering agencies.
- In terms of children's homes, it was noted that these were commissioned by the private sector.
- Clarification on the abandonment of the Werrington Fields and Ken Stimpson Secondary School decision was sought, with the Committee querying its impact on schools and sporting facilities. Members were advised that the application to the Secretary of State around the release of land had been rejected and the plans to fence the whole area were outlined.
- Furthermore, Members were assured that the children's playing areas would remain open.
- Further clarification on the decision was sought with one Member querying its impact on the Save Werrington Fields Group. The Committee were advised that the implications would be detailed in writing and circulated to members of the Committee and to members of the Werrington Fields Group.
- Councillor Brian Rush reserved his right to speak on this item having taken part in the initial discussions as a member of the Planning Committee.
- In terms of the Committee's queries on the right of appeal, Members were advised that the Secretary of State's decision was conclusive. However, the Interim Director of Education agreed to follow this up with colleagues in Legal Services.
- A query on the Approval to enter into a Section 75 Partnership Agreement with Cambridgeshire and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust decision was raised, with one Member querying the support for Peterborough further to the separation from Cambridgeshire.
- In response, it was confirmed that arrangements had been made for Peterborough to receive a fair share and for assurance purposes, the Executive Director for Children's Services agreed to review the operation of the Agreement.

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 Officers:

- Provide a written response on the impact of the abandoned Werrington Fields and Ken Simpson Secondary School decision and consult with the legal team to provide clarification on the right of appeal.
- Revisit the approval to enter into a Section 75 Partnership Agreement with Cambridgeshire and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust in light of the Ofsted inspection.

35. ANNUAL REPORT OF PETERBOROUGH VIRTUAL SCHOOL FOR CHILDREN IN CARE

The Children and Education Scrutiny Committee received a report in relation to the work undertaken by Peterborough Virtual School (PVS) for the academic year 2022-2023.

The report sought to provide the Committee with an update on the work and outcomes of the eligible cohort (children in the care of Peterborough City Council for a year or more as of March 2023).

The Headteacher of PVS introduced the report and key points raised included:

- Children and young people were recognised as the Virtual School's (VS) largest stakeholder.
- Members were advised of the retirement of Dee Glover, the appointment of Zoe Lattimer as the new headteacher of the VS and the appointment of 6 new members of staff.
- The new ways of working including the collaboration with schools, carers and social workers were outlined.
- The Committee were advised that the VS had noticed a shift in the population of children they were supporting including an increase in Separated Migrant Children (SMC).
- The work in relation to training was highlighted and Members were advised that training materials were being accessed by a significant number of people.
- The different channels of communication including eLearning materials and podcasts were relayed to the Committee.
- The changes in respect to the content and language of Personal Education Plans (PEPs) were noted.
- The gap around careers advice and guidance for young people was acknowledged and Members were advised that work in relation to this was underway.
- Last year's collaborative work with Peterborough College and City College Peterborough around ESOL provision (English for speakers of other languages) was relayed to Members of the Committee.
- Members were advised that the school's migrant children had successfully enrolled onto courses.
- The Committee were informed that over a 1,000 PEPs had been assessed and quality assured.
- Members' attention was drawn to People Premium Plus – the grant that is offered to children in care through the VS.
- The Committee were advised that the grant had funded a variety of initiatives including specialist support from an educational psychologist.
- The new grant for children over the age of 16 was also noted.

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

- Members queried whether assessments had been carried out to verify learning outcomes and whether the changes were being delivered to children in care.
- A query was also raised on the ESOL provision and whether the VS had revisited Compass.
- In terms of the offer, it was noted that the VS had considered the universal offer for every child and reference was made to the new self-evaluation tool.
- Members were further advised that the VS was looking to move away from every child being case held to impact a wider number of people.
- The target support for different groups of children was noted.
- In terms of the question on training and assurances on the impact moving forward, the hierarchical training offer was noted as well as the evaluation of PEPs.
- One Member requested an overview on PEPs and EHC Plans. It was confirmed that a PEP (Personal Education Plan) was the statutory care plan for children in care whereas an EHC was the statutory Education Health and Care Plan for children with special educational needs and disabilities.
- Furthermore, Members were advised that children in care often qualified for both.
- The Committee requested further clarification on the background of children in care. Members were advised that currently, many of the children were of a Syrian or Iranian background.
- A query was raised on faith-based provisions and whether these had been

explored. In response, the Committee were advised that the responsibility for such lied with colleagues in Social Care.

- In terms of the increasing number of unauthorised absences, the Committee were advised that these were being addressed at a national level and by the Children's Commissioner.
- The Committee queried whether the VS had the remit to support parents who homeschool their children. It was advised that the VS did not support the delivery of such education for children in care.
- A further query was raised on the delivery of education for homeschooled children. It was confirmed the responsibility for such lied with the local authority, however only for those children who had previously attended state schools.
- In terms of the eligibility criteria for the Pupil Premium Grant, it was confirmed that children in care were automatically eligible after 24 hours of being in care.

AGREED ACTIONS:

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

- Note the content of the report and make comments as they see fit.

36. CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP BOARD ANNUAL REPORT 2022-23

The Children and Education Scrutiny Committee received a report in relation to the Safeguarding Children Partnership Board.

The report sought to provide the Committee with a summary of both the work of the Safeguarding Children Partnership Board and the work of the sub committees and highlight the significant events from April 2022- March 2023.

The Chair of Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Safeguarding Children Partnership Board introduced the report and key points raised included:

- The three key priorities and responsibilities were outlined.
- Reference was made to the Cambridgeshire reviews and the three ongoing safeguarding practice reviews for Peterborough.
- It was noted that the Safeguarding Board covered both Peterborough and Cambridgeshire despite decoupling.
- The Partnership's scrutiny functions were outlined, and reference was made to the Section 11 audit.
- Attention was drawn to the Quality and Effectiveness Subgroup which met on a monthly basis to consider emerging themes.
- The training responsibility was highlighted as well as the safeguarding conference which focused on child exploitation in 2022-2023.

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

- In terms of the support for South Asian, female survivors of domestic abuse and whether the Safeguarding Partnership had the capacity to fund South Asian support workers, the Committee were advised that the Partnership did not have the budget to offer financial support.
- However, the Partnership offered to promote the initiative through their various channels of communication.
- Members were also referred to the Domestic Abuse Strategic Board.
- A query was raised on page 89 of the report - the Cambridgeshire and

Peterborough Child Death Overview Panel and whether children within this category had died in unusual circumstances or not from natural causes.

- The Committee were advised that the Panel was required to review every death – even those from natural causes as it enabled them to gather themes around illnesses.
- Comparative data was requested on the Panel and clarification on the common links between suicide was sought.
- The Partnership agreed to circulate the Regional Report on the National Child Mortality Database to members of the Committee.
- In terms of the Member's query on page 91 of the report and the data on successful Child Sexual Abuse and Child Sexual Exploitation prosecutions, the Board agreed to liaise with police colleagues to fulfil this request.
- A question on concerns was raised. It was confirmed that the Partnership had experienced difficulties, especially since the separation from Cambridgeshire. However, Members were assured that the Board had learnt from experiences and were in a stronger position.
- With respect to the Partnership's approach to identifying and dealing with problems, it was noted that in such instances the Board encouraged employees to escalate.
- The developments in respect to this area were also highlighted and the need for a coherent set of data across the Partnership around risks and threats was noted.
- The Committee requested comparative data on the number of completed single assessments as the data on page 80 of the report did not draw any comparisons.
- Members felt it would be useful to have the existing data compared to the national average or similar sized areas. The Partnership Board agreed to provide this data.
- Clarification on page 95 of the report was sought, with one Member querying the next steps for training and whether any lessons had been learned from this.
- It was advised that the Board would look to amend the training following a review and that amendments to the programme enabled the Partnership to incorporate feedback.
- However, it was noted that historically, the Board had struggled with the training, but the virtual sessions had seen an increasing number of people access training materials.

AGREED ACTIONS:

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

- Note the contents of the annual report.

The Committee also requested that Officers:

- Provide comparative data around the Child Death Overview Panel - regional and national figures and provide clarification on the common links between suicide and whether these were prevalent year on year.
- Provide comparative data on the number of completed single assessments.
- Liaise with police colleagues to provide data on successful Child Sexual Abuse and Child Sexual Exploitation prosecutions within the past 12 months.

37. AN OVERVIEW OF SPECIAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES: PROGRESS, PRIORITIES AND CHALLENGES

The Children and Education Scrutiny Committee received a report in relation to Special Educational Needs (SEND).

The report sought to provide Members with an update on key areas including the current performance in SEND.

The interim Director for Education accompanied by the interim Head of SEND and Inclusion introduced the report and key points raised included:

- The Interim Director for Education welcomed the recently appointed Interim Head of SEND and Inclusion to the Committee who provided an overview of the current performance.
- SEND'S statutory 20-week target with respect to the completion and dissemination of Education and Health Care (EHC) plans was noted.
- However, Members were advised that Peterborough performed well in respect to this challenging measure.
- The challenges around annual reviews were noted.
- Reference was made to the costly transport and out of city provision where children were sent out of Peterborough due to the lack of sufficient local school places or due to complex needs.
- The Accelerated Progress Plan was highlighted.
- Ofsted's recently established framework was outlined, and the 25 inspections were noted.
- An emphasis was placed on the impressive 20-week target and how this was being met.
- In terms of the annual review, the complexities with respect to timescales were noted.

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

- A query was raised on the 20-week target and the effectiveness of the plans if no reviews were being undertaken.
- In response, it was advised that a number of partners were involved in ensuring that needs were being met and that the team had made significant progress to mitigate delays and make improvements.
- In terms of the increasing need for EHC plans, Members were advised that these arose from the increasing complexity of children's needs especially social/emotional behavioural challenges and autism as well as greater awareness and coverage of such plans.
- In terms of the query on 4.5 of the report, it was advised that comparisons could not be drawn until the publication of SEND 2 in the summer of 2024.
- It was further advised that the budget proposals for 2024-25 had included additional funding for the Social Care Team to support the delivery of the increasing caseloads.
- The work in respect to the review of the quality of plans was noted.
- One Member queried how Peterborough City Council was planning to support secondary schools with the influx of SEND starting in the new academic year.
- Concerns were also raised around the assessment and guidance in terms of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and how the child minder provision failed to adequately identify SEND needs.
- Furthermore, the importance of liaising with Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) was emphasised.
- In response, the need for additional support was recognised and it was advised that the new area SENCO role was in place to make contact with the service area and where necessary, to take their advice on board.

- Moreover, the Committee were assured that their concerns would be explored in further detail.
- A question was raised on the membership of the SEND Best Value Scheme. It was confirmed that Peterborough wasn't a member.
- Reference was made to the discussions around expanding Peterborough's specialist provision and the national recoupment system.
- A query was raised on the appointment of substantive, permanent key roles within Peterborough City Council's Children's Services.
- The Committee were advised that an appointment had been made to the Head of SEND and that Chris Baird would continue as the Interim Director for Education until the new Director of Education was in place.
- In terms of recruitment, it was hoped that the Director for Education's position would be listed in the coming months.
- In terms of the additional classrooms for SEND and the work in relation to this, it was confirmed that work had been undertaken and was ongoing.
- Furthermore, the importance of expansion and local provision was acknowledged.
- A question on the alleviation of transportation costs was raised.
- The Committee were advised that the service area was looking into local transport contractors, the National Statutory Guidance for Transport and the transport arrangements for children who were placed in other areas were detailed.
- The Committee queried the national government's role in meeting the increasing demand for EHCps and whether there was any scope for the service area to lobby the government for additional funding.
- In response, the importance of lobbying government for resources was recognised and reference was made to the SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan – a plan which enabled children and young people with SEND or in alternative provision to access the help and support they required.
- However, it was noted that resources were limited.
- In terms of the resourcing for the team responsible for EHCp's, it was advised that funding had been considered as part of the budget proposals for 2024-2025 and that Peterborough was a member of the national funding formula.

AGREED ACTIONS:

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

Note the report, make comments and seek clarification where appropriate.

38. COMMITTEE START TIME REPORT 2024/2025

This item was pulled at the request of the Monitoring Officer until discussions with Group Leaders had taken place.

39. WORK PROGRAMME 2023/2024

The Democratic Services Officer presented the report which considered the relevant items presented in 2023/2024 of the Children and Education Scrutiny Committee and looked at the work programme for the new municipal year 2023/2024 to determine the Committees priorities.

AGREED ACTIONS:

The Children and Education Scrutiny Committee considered the Work Programme for

2023/2024 and RESOLVED to note the report.

40. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was noted as being the 11th of March 2024.

CHAIR

Meeting started at 7.00pm and finished at 8.50pm