

**MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MEETING HELD AT 7.00PM ON
MONDAY 6 SEPTEMBER 2021
VENUE: SAND MARTIN HOUSE, PETERBOROUGH**

Committee Members Present: Councillors G Casey (Chair), I Ali, A Dowson, T Haynes, D Jones, S Lane, N Moyo, L Robinson, B Rush, O Sainsbury,

Co-opted Members: Sameena Aziz, Mohammed Younis, Peter French and Parish Councillor June Bull

Officers Present: Lou Williams, Director, Children's Services
Jonathan Lewis – Service Director, Education
Dee Glover, Headteacher Peterborough Virtual School for CiC
Mohammed Sarfraz, Post 16 Education Coordinator CiC
Paulina Ford, Senior Democratic Services Officer

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

10. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Fenner, Councillor Skibsted and Councillor Hussain. Councillor Sainsbury was in attendance as substitute for Councillor Hussain and Councillor Jones was in attendance as substitute for Councillor Skibsted.

Apologies for absence were also received from Co-opted Members Peter Cantley, Flavio Vettese and Alistair Kingsley. Peter French was in attendance as substitute for Peter Cantley.

11. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING DECLARATIONS

There were no declarations of interest or whipping declarations received.

12. MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 15 JULY 2021

The minutes of the Children and Education Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 15 July 2021 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

13. Call In of any Cabinet, Cabinet Member or Key Officer Decisions

There were no call-ins received at this meeting.

The Chair advised the Committee that a request had been made to change the order of the agenda so that item 7, Annual Report of Peterborough Virtual School for Children in Care 2019-2020 be moved to the first substantive item on the agenda. The Committee unanimously agreed to this change.

14. **ANNUAL REPORT OF PETERBOROUGH VIRTUAL SCHOOL FOR CHILDREN IN CARE 2019-2020**

The Headteacher Peterborough Virtual School for Children in Care (CiC) accompanied by the Post 16 Education Coordinator for CIC introduced the report which provided the committee with information on the activity of the Virtual School (VS) and the educational outcomes of Peterborough's Children in Care (CIC) for the academic year 2019/20. It reflected the achievements and identified areas in need of development to achieve the best outcomes for this vulnerable group. Data contained in the report was for Children in Care who had been in the care of Peterborough City Council for a year or more on 31 March 2020.

The Headteacher highlighted the development priorities for 2020/2021 and what had been done to address those priorities over the last academic year. The major target was to minimise the impact of Covid where possible, making sure that both the mental health and wellbeing of the children was treated as well as their academic progress.

The Children in Care Council had been consulted with in 2019 concerning the review of the Personal Education Plan (PEP) processes. Suggestions were made which had now been implemented. The changes had since been reviewed again and further consultation had taken place with the CiC Council to ensure all changes were working well. The Childs Voice section of the PEP was amended to ensure it was appropriate for them.

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

- Members wanted to know if any data was available on what the young people had achieved, and what the aspirations of the sixth formers were that left last year. Members were informed that no achievement data had been reported for that particular year but there was data available for 2020. The Virtual School had high aspirations for all of the young people and supported and encouraged them to aim high which included going to university and entering into trainee apprenticeships. Last September ten care leavers went on to university to study a range of subjects including law, medicine, musical theatre and criminology. This year's cohort included at least five young people wanting to go to university. Every effort was made to keep in contact with the students after they left school to track their progress.
- Members acknowledged that examination data was not available but requested that what data was available be provided to the committee even if it was only headline figures. Members were informed that any available data would be provided via a briefing note.
- Members referred to the Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) Analysis for 2019-2020 on page 88 of the report and noted that as of 2 September one year 13 student was listed as missing and that on 28 January 2020 there was one year 12 and one year 13 student missing, additionally on 27 March 2020 a year 12 student was listed as missing. Clarification was sought as to what action was being taken to contact or locate the young people. Members were advised that as much detail as possible was recorded on the reasons why young people were listed as NEET. There were many reasons why young people went missing an example of which might be if a young person was due home at 9.00pm and they arrived at 9.30pm or 10.00pm they would then have been reported as missing. In cases where young people went missing for longer periods it would be dealt with in a social care setting through strategy meetings involving multi agencies including various partner

organisations such as the police. The Director, Children' Services advised that for young people in care, under the age of 18 there were protocols in place to follow for missing young people. Most young people in care who went missing only went missing for a few hours or occasionally overnight and then returned. The multi-agency approach always looked at whether it was likely that those young people that went missing regularly were being exploited and if so tried to deal with those who were exploiting them.

- Members sought clarification as to how many young people had gone to university by taking A 'Levels and how many by taking BTech qualifications. Members were informed that there was a mixture of both A 'level and BTech qualifications and the Virtual School supported the young people through both routes. There was no favoured route and often depended on what was being offered at the school they attended.
- Members referred to section 5.1 Educational Psychology (EP) and noted that the total number of children who received Educational Psychology involvement had been 30 and that only 2 had received a consultation and wanted to know if there was sufficient educational psychology provision available as a Virtual School. Members were informed that EP support had been very good, and the Educational Psychologist was now permanent and full time. The pandemic had affected the number of consultations held but the Educational Psychologist had offered a full service throughout the pandemic to those who needed her support which had included online assessments.
- Members wanted to know if the Virtual School was in contact with local employers to find out about vacancies and apprenticeship schemes that might be available. Members were informed that the Virtual School had a good network of providers who had contacts with local employers and independent learning providers.
- Members referred to section 6 Attendance. Members acknowledged that the pandemic had put a strain on attendance at school and wanted to know what strategies had been put in place to improve the rates of attendance between week 4 and 13. Members were informed that it was about ensuring that no one was under pressure during the first school closure. If a foster carer called and said that they really wanted their foster child to stay at home their choice would have been respected. Communication had been constant with the schools and regular Personal Education Plan meetings were held. Most of the normal activity continued and if a child was supposed to be at school and the Virtual School were informed that they were not in attendance then this would have been followed up. An attendance data collection service was used and the Virtual School received attendance alerts three times a day. It was also about safeguarding and if a child was not where they were supposed to be it would be followed up.
- Members commented that having multiple children across many schools must provide logistical challenges with regard to collating data and awarding grades. Members were advised that there were children in 163 different school / education settings, and it was a challenge but that every child had to have a designated teacher. They also had a Personal Education Plan three times a year which provided three data collection points for assessment. This information was then transferred into a RAG rating document which highlighted children who were not making progress. .
- Members referred to accessibility and noted that as of mid-year April 2020 there were 327 children on the school roll (pre-school to Year 13), compared to 372 children in care at the end of March 2020. Members wanted to know what data there was on the 45 not accounted for on the school roll. Members were informed that the school role went from reception to year 13 so the ones who were not recorded were too young to be on the school roll, however children from two

onwards were still monitored.

- Members sought clarification on what challenges there had been with monitoring the Pupil Premium Plus grant to ensure it had been used effectively during the Covid restrictions. Members were advised that targets had to be set within the Personal Education Plan and the Pupil Premium request would not be signed off if it was not guaranteed to address the learning needs of that child. Very little Pupil Premium was paid out during the summer term due to the children not being in school, therefore at the end of the school year every child was given a £600 recovery amount. The designated teacher would then have to explain and show how this money had been spent in the Personal Education Plan. The use of the Pupil Premium was monitored and the Headteacher felt confident that it was being used correctly to address the needs of the child.
- When schools closed a spot survey was conducted to determine which children did not have a laptop or appropriate equipment to enable them to continue learning from home. The Headteacher was confident that every child in care was provided with equipment who needed it to ensure that they could continue learning.
- Members wanted to know how often children were referred to the Pupil Referral Unit and if there were some persistent referrals and if children often change schools. Members were informed that there were three students currently in the Richard Barnes Academy which was the Pupil Referral Unit. Some young people, usually in Key Stage 4, ages 9, 10 or 11 got stuck when things had not gone well for them in school and a period out of mainstream school was often invaluable. Children were not normally moved from a school if they were in Key Stage 4. The aim was to try and provide consistency in one school. Data on alternative mainstream provision could be found in the report at section 8. Alternative providers were closely monitored, and regular quality assurance visits carried out.
- In June 2020 the Virtual School role was extended to include promoting education of all children with a social worker which would potentially increase the workload of the Virtual School.

The Chair thanked officers for attending the meeting and providing a comprehensive report.

ACTIONS AGREED

1. The Children and Education Scrutiny Committee considered the report and **RESOLVED** to note the content of the report and raise any queries they had with the lead officers.
2. The Committee also requested that the Headteacher provide assessment data which would include the number of children who were off track and Post 16 data via a briefing note.

15. DESIGN FOR FIRE SAFETY IN SCHOOLS

The Director for Education introduced the report which provided an opportunity for the Committee to comment on the issues being considered by the Department for Education (DfE) following its call for evidence on Building Bulletin 100 (BB100) – Design for Fire Safety – which set the standard for the design of fire safety and protection measures in schools. The DfE view was that sprinklers were not required in school buildings.

The Director provided further context advising that sprinklers were not designed to save lives but were in place to protect the building. The build and design of modern school buildings were particularly safe. There was a very low rate of fires in schools. The

provision of sprinklers in new or significantly expanded schools added approximately 2% to the overall capital cost of the project. Maintenance and ongoing upkeep of sprinkler systems was costly, there was also an added cost to train staff on the use of the systems. Sprinklers could also cause damage if they were activated by accident.

The key issues/conclusions in the consultation draft were:

- Sprinklers to be installed in all new special schools
- Sprinklers to be included in all new schools with 3 or more stories
- No single staircase access in multi-storey schools
- Multi-storey schools to have both evacuation and passenger lifts to protect the dignity of those with mobility issues
- Higher standards for all cladding post Grenfell
- More and stronger guidance on building management, maintenance and evacuation procedures for existing stock

The view of the council would be that sprinklers would not be required to be fitted in all Local Authority School buildings unless the risk assessment deemed it necessary following DfE guidance. It should be noted that only 20% of Local Authority schools currently had sprinklers fitted. The DfE view was that sprinklers were not required in school buildings, this was also the view of council officers.

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

- Academies provide insurance cover for their buildings and therefore would be responsible for any damage to them, likewise the Local Authority had insurance cover for their own buildings and was therefore responsible for any damage to them.
- When extending existing schools, the inclusion of sprinklers would be assessed on a case-by-case basis dependent on design and layout of the building.
- All school build projects went through a specification of need process which would take into consideration any existing buildings i.e. if it was a three storey extension then sprinklers would be fitted.
- Members commented that on some recent new school builds in the city the topic of sprinklers was raised as a point of contention, largely driven by parental perceptions of this being a necessary safety feature. Members therefore sought clarification as to what steps could be taken to ensure there was a clear message for parents to mitigate any ill-informed perceptions they may have. Members were informed if sprinklers were not to be installed in a school other mitigating factors would be looked at, such as how fire alarms would work and the design of the building. All these considerations would be made clear in the planning documents which would be available for parents to see. Proof would have to be provided that children and adults could evacuate from the school as part of the design.
- Members noted that Cambridgeshire Fire Service strongly supported sprinklers in schools. The Director advised that the Cambridgeshire Fire Service were statutory consultees for all planning applications.
- There was very little saving on insurance through having sprinklers in schools but by installing them it did add approximately 2% to the overall capital cost of the project.
- Members commented that damage from water could cause as much damage as fire.
- Members felt that it was a difficult decision to make and that it would only take one significant fire to happen in a school without sprinklers for everyone to challenge the decision not to put them in. Members were informed that it would not be a straightforward decision to make and all aspects including the cost, implications on the school, ongoing costs and the risks around safety would need to be considered including comments made by Members at this meeting.
- Members noted that there would be different specifications applied to Special

Schools and wanted to know if non-Special Schools who had children with special needs attending would have the same specification applied to them as Special Schools. Members were informed that schools would undertake a risk assessment and organise their school to mitigate for children with special needs and make the necessary provision.

- Members noted that sprinklers did not save lives but that they did allow for escape routes where a fire would not spread. Members were informed that school buildings were now planned in such a way that they would design out fire risk issues which meant modern square buildings which no longer had long corridors. Safety would not be compromised in any Peterborough school and if sprinklers were needed then they would be installed.
- Members felt that the questionnaire should have also included a cost analysis and that the decision should not be rushed into.
- Members sought clarification as to how the cost of maintaining current fire suppression systems would be addressed. Members were informed that the cost of running a school sat within the delegated budget given to each school which was part of the funding formula driven by national requirements. The LA role as landlord which applied to LA Maintained Schools as well as Academies where the LA owned the buildings was to check and encourage them to maintain the buildings. There was no revenue budget to pay for servicing of utilities etc.
- Members sought clarification as to whether the LA had an awareness of what existing combustible materials were being used in the city's schools and if they were within the current regulations. Members were informed that full condition surveys of each school were undertaken including asbestos surveys. If current materials were below current specification, they would be replaced if required.
- Members referred to responses to the questionnaire and in particular concerns raised one of which was that guidance was needed on Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPS) for occupants with mobility or other special needs. Members sought clarification as to where schools could find assistance on how to write PEEPS. Members were informed that the expectation was that the Head Teacher would risk assess their school as to what was required and if a particular plan was needed for an individual child. The Health and Safety Team provided excellent support in how to manage spaces and would provide support to any school should they need it. The Director advised that he would check to see if there was a template available for the PEEP.
- Members noted that Norfolk Property Service (NPS) were commissioned by the Council to undertake Fire Risk Assessments (FRA) of all maintained schools. Members sought clarification on where the Fire Risk Assessments were kept, how often they were reviewed and if they were looked at if any structural works or change of use of an area had taken place. Who would own the maintenance work and who was ultimately responsible for making sure it happened. Members were informed that the Director for Education was responsible for all LEA maintained schools and this was delegated to Governors at each school. NPS would check and ensure compliance. The Director advised that he would find out how often the Fire Risk Assessments were undertaken and report back to the Committee..

ACTIONS AGREED

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

1. Comment on the issues being considered by the Department for Education (DfE) following its call for evidence on Building Bulletin 100 (BB100) – Design for Fire Safety – which set the standard for the design of fire safety and protection measures in schools
2. Further comment on the subsequent publication of a consultation draft of the revised BB100 guidance in which DfE has reached conclusions on some of those issues previously under consideration.
3. The Committee also requested that the Director for Education:
 - a. Check to see if there was a document template available for producing a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan and circulate to the Committee.
 - b. Check how often Fire Risk Assessments were undertaken and report back to the Committee.

16. PETERBOROUGH SUFFICIENCY STATEMENT

The Director for Children’s Services and Safeguarding introduced the report. The report informed the Committee that every local authority with children’s services obligations was required to publish a Sufficiency Statement. The Statement described how the local authority provided services to support families and avoid the need for children to go into care whenever possible, and to do everything possible to ensure that there was a sufficient number of placements available locally for those children who did need to go into care.

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

- Members referred to the Ofsted focussed visit to Children’s Services in June 2021 and the area highlighted regarding the fact that the proportion of children in care living more than 20 miles from home was relatively high. Members wanted to know what could realistically be done for children in care that had been placed at a distance and was the action plan addressing Ofsted’s concerns. The Director informed Members that an action plan would be developed in relation to Ofsted’s findings. Most children in care were placed closer to home and the Director provided examples of when children had to be placed outside of the local authority. There was a need to have an individual child focussed approach for every placement. Ofsted would return to complete a full inspection next year and would look at the extent to which the LA were meeting their sufficiency duty.
- Members noted that Peterborough’s Care Leaving population’s engagement in Education, Employment or Training (EET) had continued to reduce over the years and was below the national average. Members were informed that the data provided in the report was from March 2020 and that the current situation was that both the EET and Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET) numbers had significantly improved. This year contact had been made with 98% of care leavers and in terms of EET and NEET there had been an increase to 59% in employment, education or training. A new manager was now in place who had put a lot of effort into improving the EET figures.
- Members congratulated officers on the Ofsted report which stated that “The local authority provides a highly effective response to children who go missing or who are

at risk of exploitation”.

- Members noted that Peterborough’s population of young people living in Residential Accommodation not subject to Children’s Homes Regulations (i.e., Supported accommodation) had increased from (27) in 2017 to 45 at March 2020. Clarification was sought as to what was classed as unregulated accommodation and what was deemed as suitable accommodation for care leavers. Members were advised that the law stated that no regulation was required for accommodation for young people in supported accommodation aged between 16 and 17. Children’s Services had a framework provider in place for this type of accommodation and a rigorous quality assurance process to ensure that the accommodation met the needs of the children and young people. The accommodation would not be used unless it was suitable and in the best interests of the young people being placed there. Unsuitable accommodation would include those in custody and hospital and would also include those young people who had lost touch with children’s services.
- Members noted that the Ofsted report mentioned that written records of supervision did not consistently evidence oversight of the progress of children’s plans or the impact of supervision in driving forward agreed actions. There was also variable evidence in written records of supervision being used to reflect on children’s experiences effectively. Members questioned why this was happening. The Director advised that the social workers really knew the children well but that the information was not necessarily written down. The Ofsted comments were with regard to supervision recording, and there was an element of social workers finding the time to record visits, however the Director was confident that the records were good, and Ofsted had recognised that there was coordinated care planning in place and that appropriate actions were taken to support children’s progress.
- Members wanted to know what could be done to increase foster carers that were more local to Peterborough and at what age did foster carers retire. The Director advised that there was no retirement age for foster carers and that some were still fostering into their seventies. Foster carers had to be realistic when they took on a child about how long they could foster the child for. Some older foster carers provided short term breaks. There was an active ongoing recruitment campaign which was run in partnership with Cambridgeshire and was constantly refreshed. At the start of the pandemic there was quite a lot of interest in fostering, however whilst people were still showing an interest, they were worried about the pandemic still being in place and the increased risk of getting Covid and were therefore delaying the decision to start fostering.
- Members commented that sometimes people were put off fostering due to the extra intrusion into their families lives with regard to safeguarding. Members were informed that fostering regulations were very clear and there was a requirement to ensure that the care provided for each child was appropriate, therefore there was a need for the intrusion to ensure that the environment that they were moving to was a safe one with appropriate care provision.
- Members praised the authority for being one of the ten local authorities to be part of the Governments Care Review and wanted to know when the LA would receive feedback. The Director advised that all work would be completed by the end of October 2021, but it was not clear when feedback would be received. A briefing note would be provided to the committee when the information was available.
- Members were pleased to see that the Ofsted report had stated that Peterborough was a conscientious corporate parent and looked after most children in its care well. The Chair paid tribute to Councillor Ray Bisby who was the Cabinet Advisor to the Cabinet Member for Children’s Services, Education, Skills and the University and had been the Chair of the Corporate Parenting Committee for several years.

AGREED ACTIONS

1. The Children and Education Scrutiny Committee **RESOLVED** to:
 - a. Agree that the implementation of the Sufficiency Statement should proceed, and:
 - b. Thank the children in care for their contribution to developing the Statement, and:
 - c. Note the arrangements in place to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children and young people in care, and:
 - d. Note the positive outcome of the Ofsted Focused Visit that took place in Peterborough in June 2021.
2. The Committee also requested that the Director for Children's Services provide the Committee with a briefing note on the feedback from the Governments Care Review when available.

17. FORWARD PLAN OF EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Committee received the latest version of the Council's Forward Plan of Executive Decisions, containing decisions which the Leader of the Council anticipated Cabinet or Cabinet Members would take over the following four months. Members were invited to comment on the Forward Plan and where appropriate identify any relevant areas for inclusion in the Committee's work programme.

AGREED ACTIONS

1. The Children and Education Scrutiny Committee considered the report and **RESOLVED** to note the current Forward Plan of Executive Decisions which identified any relevant items for inclusion within their work programme.
2. Further information to be provided via a briefing note regarding the decision for Approval to commit funding for a bespoke specialist placement for a four year period 2021-2025 - KEY/07JUN21/01

18. WORK PROGRAMME 2021/2022

The Chair introduced the report which considered the work programme for the municipal year 2021/22 and asked the committee if they had any further items that they would wish to be considered for the work programme. No items were suggested at the meeting. The Chair therefore suggested that if items were forthcoming in between meetings that they could be directed to the Senior Democratic Services Officer who would add them to a list for discussion at the next Group Representatives / Agenda Setting meeting.

AGREED ACTIONS

The Children and Education Scrutiny Committee **RESOLVED** to note the work programme for 2021/2022.

The date of next meeting was noted as being:

- 17 November 2021 – Joint Scrutiny of the Budget Meeting
- 18 November 2021 – Children and Education Scrutiny Committee

Chairman

7.00pm to 20:52 pm

