

**MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY MEETING  
HELD AT 7.00PM, ON  
THURSDAY, 1 OCTOBER 2020  
VIRTUAL MEETING: PETERBOROUGH CITY COUNCIL'S YOUTUBE PAGE**

**Committee Members Present:** Councillors D Over (Chairman), G Casey, A Coles, N Day, A Dowson, John Fox, T Haynes, M Nadeem, L Robinson, B Rush, H Skibsted

Co-opted Members: Peter Cantley, Flavio Vettese, Al kingsley, Rizwan Rahemtulla and Parish Councillors Susie Lucas and Dr Sridhar

**Officers Present:** Wendi Ogle-Welbourn, Executive Director, People and Communities  
Jonathan Lewis, Service Director, Education  
Lou Williams, Service Director, Children's and Safeguarding  
Paulina Ford, Senior Democratic Services Officer

**Also Present:** Councillor Ayres, Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Education, Skills and University

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Goodwin and Councillor Lane. Councillor Nadeem was in attendance as substitute for Councillor Goodwin and Councillor John Fox was in attendance as substitute for Councillor Lane.

No other apologies for absence were received.

**2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING DECLARATIONS**

The following declarations of interest were received.

Councillor Coles declared that he had recently been appointed as Chair of Nenegate School.

Councillor Over declared that he had recently been appointed as a Trustee of the Soke Education Trust

**3. MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 5 MARCH 2020**

The minutes of the Children and Education Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 5 March 2020 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

**4. CALL IN OF ANY CABINET, CABINET MEMBER OR KEY OFFICER DECISION**

There were no requests for call-in to consider.

## 5. APPOINTMENT OF CO-OPTED MEMBERS

The Senior Democratic Services Officer introduced the report which recommended that Alistair Kingsley, Rizwan Rahemtulla and Parish Councillor Susie Lucas be appointed as non-voting co-opted members. The report also recommended that Parish Councillor Dr Sridhar be appointed as either a second Parish Councillor non-voting co-opted member or as a nominated substitute for Susie Lucas should she be appointed as the substantive Parish Councillor co-opted member. All appointments to be reviewed at the beginning of the next municipal year.

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

- Members commented that the Good Scrutiny Guide listed four principles of Good Scrutiny: provide constructive “critical friend” challenge, amplify the voice and concerns of the public, be led by independent people who take responsibility for their role and drive improvement in public services.
- Members raised the following concerns with regard to the co-opted membership:
  - The level of attendance of some of the non-statutory Co-opted Members during 2019/2020 had not been adequate in that one member had an 80% absence and another a 60% absence and felt that their role and responsibilities of being a Co-opted Member had not been taken seriously.
  - One of the nominations for a Parish Councillor Co-opted Member to represent the rural communities had not come from a rural Parish Council. Members were therefore concerned that the voice of the rural communities would not be adequately represented.
  - There was still a vacancy for a second statutory Parent Governor. The majority of schools in Peterborough were now Academies and therefore this vacancy should not be restricted to Local Authority Maintained schools.
- In response the Senior Democratic Services Officer advised that legislation dictated that Statutory Parent Governor Co-opted Members should only be appointed from Local Authority Maintained Schools. Therefore the criteria for this specific role could not be changed. With regard to the attendance of Co-opted Members this could be monitored and consideration could be given to aligning the rules of attendance for Co-opted Members to those set out in the constitution for councillors.
- With regard to rural Parish Councillor Co-opted Members the Democratic Services Officer confirmed what the process was for the appointment of Parish Councillors to scrutiny committees, in that the People and Communities Directorate on behalf of the Parish Council Liaison Committee wrote to all Parish Councils to seek expressions of interest for the positions available. Terms of reference for each of the scrutiny committees were provided and expressions of interest were received from Parish Councillors for the committees that they were interested in. The nominations put forward for this committee were as listed in the report. The officer suggested that a request be put forward to the Parish Council Liaison Committee instructing them to only take expressions of interest for the role from rural Parish Councils.
- Members requested that an item be placed on the work programme to allow a full discussion around the appointment of Co-opted Members.

The Chairman proceeded to seek approval for each of the nominated Co-opted Members listed within the report.

The Committee agreed unanimously to appoint Alistair Kingsley, Rizwan Rahemtulla, and Parish Councillor Susie Lucas as non-voting Co-opted members of the Committee for municipal year 2020/2021 to be reviewed on an annual basis.

Members sought clarification as to whether the committee had to appoint Dr Sridhar as a second Parish Councillor Co-opted Member as it was noted that Dr Sridhar did not represent a rural Parish Council. The Chairman advised that there were three choices available to the committee: to appoint Dr Sridhar as either a second substantive member, or as a substitute for Parish Councillor Susie Lucas or to reject the nomination and not to appoint.

The Committee discussed the appointment and noted that Dr Sridhar was a governor of a Multi Academy Trust and whilst not a member of a rural Parish Council felt that this would bring additional expertise to the Committee. However going forward the committee felt that there may be people with other areas of expertise and knowledge that would benefit the committee and could be put forward for the fourth vacancy.

Councillor Robinson, seconded by Councillor Coles proposed that Dr Sridhar become the fourth substantive Co-opted Member of the committee. All were in agreement to the appointment of Parish Councillor Dr Sridhar as the fourth non-voting Co-opted Member of the Committee for municipal year 2020/2021 to be reviewed on an annual basis

The nominated persons were in attendance at the meeting and the Chairman invited all four newly appointed Co-opted Members to join the Committee for the remainder of the meeting and welcomed them to the Committee.

## **AGREED ACTIONS**

The Children and Education Scrutiny Committee **RESOLVED** to:

1. Appoint Alistair Kingsley to the Committee as an Independent Co-opted Member with no voting rights for the municipal year 2020/2021. Appointment to be reviewed annually at the beginning of the next municipal year.
2. Appoint Rizwan Rahemtulla as a non-voting Co-opted Member to represent the Muslim Community for the municipal year 2020/2021. Appointment to be reviewed annually at the beginning of the next municipal year.
3. Appoint Parish Councillor Susie Lucas as a non-voting Co-opted Member to represent the rural area for the municipal year 2020/2021. Appointment to be reviewed annually at the beginning of the next municipal year.
4. Appoint Parish Councillor Dr Dharshana Sridhar as a second non-voting Co-opted Member to represent the rural area for the municipal year 2020/2021. Appointment to be reviewed annually at the beginning of the next municipal year.
5. The Committee also requested that an item be placed on the work programme regarding the appointment of non-voting Co-opted Members for discussion at a future meeting.

## **6. RECOVERY PLANS AND PRIORITIES: SERVICE DIRECTOR FOR EDUCATION**

The Director of Education introduced the report which provided the committee with an outline of the latest position on COVID-19 and restarting education in Peterborough. The report also outlined key service updates from across the Education Directorate so that the committee were fully briefed on the challenges the Education Directorate faced moving forward in the autumn term.

The Director of Education wanted to acknowledge the role of all staff in the Education sector across Peterborough who had worked so hard to ensure Peterborough responded appropriately to the current crisis, and made particular mention to the following:

- Julie Taylor, Chief Executive of the Thomas Deacon Education Trust in leading the Peterborough Academy Trust CEO forum.
- Ben Wilding, Chief Executive of Soke Education Trust and Chair of Peterborough Primary Cluster Representatives.
- Scott Hudson, Director of Education, Thomas Deacon Education Trust, who chaired the Peterborough Partnership of Secondary Schools.
- Sheelagh Sullivan, Head of SEND for the City Council who led the Peterborough Special School Headteachers group.
- The support received from the local Regional School Commissioner team.

Areas highlighted by the Service Director were as follows:

- The Highlight Report at appendix 1 showed that situation had moved rapidly and all schools had remained open and none had closed fully in Peterborough. Attendance levels at the time of the meeting showed that 36,000 (91%) of children were back in school. This was significantly above the national average which was currently about 86%. Protective measures, risk assessments, and good communications with parents had paid dividends. Work was continuing with schools and parents of children who had not yet returned to school.
- Challenges had included access to testing which had been a big issue. There was however specific testing available for those in Education Services which had meant that schools had been able to remain open. Since the start of term there had been 28 cases of COVID across children and staff in city which had all been appropriately handled and led to relatively few children having to isolate.
- The Director of Education made special reference to the support given to children with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP's) in place. All families of every child and young person with an EHCP were written to and asked to fill in a survey to collect their views about the kind of provision they were receiving and what, if anything, they would like their setting to try to provide during the COVID-19 period. Staff also contacted every school requesting them to make arrangements to discuss with families the delivery of the EHCP and record the outcome on a form (Section M) and return to the authority to ensure provision continued. The Director gave credit to Family Voice for their assistance and support with this.

The Cabinet Member acknowledged the impressive work that the Service Director of Education and his team had done over the last 6 months and the good collaboration between all schools and the Council. The pandemic had brought people together to look after the city's children and schools.

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

- Members sought further clarification with regard to the Section M form and feedback received for the EHCP's, and wanted to know what the parents were asking for that was not already being provided. How long term were the plans and how big was the gap with what was being provided. Members were informed that there had been a very good response rate to the Section M form. The process reviewed what was in place for the EHCP and worked with the school to see if the plan could continue to be delivered at the school or at home. Some of the more involved therapies may not have been able to continue but there was a dialogue with the parents and school to ensure the parents knew what could not be delivered and why. Section M's ran through to the end of September. There was however a continuing dialogue with parents of those children who were not able to return to school yet to ensure that they were supported. It was an evolving process with a view to getting all children back into schools as soon as possible. There were however some health challenges that meant that some

children could not currently return to school due to the COVID crisis. Section M's would remain on the child's record should a future lock down be put in place.

- Members asked if there had been any feedback from any other Local Authorities that may have been subject to an Ofsted's 'supportive visit'. Members were advised that there had been two Ofsted inspections in the city and the feedback had been that there had been very open discussions in line with expectations. The visits had felt supportive and had not felt like inspections which was very positive.
- Members were concerned about children moving through the current EHCP process and felt that there might now be a new hurdle if children were not able to access the full range of services. Clarification was sought with regards to face to face contact and noted in the report that this would only happen when identified as critical and wanted to understand what was meant by critical. Members were informed that one of the pieces of work that had been done was to map out the needs of children and negotiate with the relevant partners on how the services could be delivered so that children could access the service. There were still some partners delivering services remotely and this was being monitored to see how successful they had been and any challenges would be tackled straight away. Delivering face to face services in some cases could be difficult with children who have challenging special educational needs making social distancing difficult to manage. The provision of additional PPE was being provided to assist with this where applicable. Any child entering the Special Educational Needs process at this time would still be processed within the statutory time scales, however where very specialist support was required there may be some challenges but every effort would be made to support those children in the timeframe required.
- Members sought clarification as to what additional safeguarding measures had been put in place to mitigate any risk with regard to any potential safeguarding issues for those students who were being home tutored as part of elective home education. Members were informed that currently there was a 400 percent higher rate of parents wanting to home educate their children and it was felt that over half of those were directly as a result of COVID concerns. There was a very thorough process in place for home educated children and safeguarding reviews were being undertaken where required. Children known to social care were prioritised. Attendance was very good but it was hard to obtain daily data from schools at the current time. Attendance of Eastern European traveller families was lower. The team had been very active in looking at schools where attendance was lower to provide additional support to those children. Parents were not currently being fined for non-attendance due to COVID but this would be reviewed and monitored as the situation evolved.
- The Educational Psychologists have been pivotal during the pandemic and had provided key information about bereavement to schools and 1:1 support to teachers. Recruitment of Educational Psychologists continued to be a challenge but the LA had a good record of growing their own and recruiting from abroad. The limitation of funding in the higher needs block may be a challenge going forward, the Educational Psychologists team was providing an excellent service.
- A considerable amount of work had been done with regard to catch up funding and a workshop had been recently held for schools to attend and share their plans. Additional work had also been done around the National Tuition programme. A further report could be provided with regard to catch up funding and the National Tuition programme.
- Members commented that there had been excellent feedback from schools on the support provided by the Service Director for Education and his team.
- Attendance was traditionally higher in rural schools and continued to be so during the pandemic. School transport had continued with protective measures put in place and had been working well. Further detailed information on rural schools would be brought back to the next meeting of the committee.
- Members were pleased to note in the report that two highly experienced head teachers had joined the team of School Improvement Advisers who would be looking at raising attainment in disadvantaged schools. Further details were requested on the National Literacy Trust Hub arrangements to improve outcomes in the city. Members were informed that the National Literacy Trust Hub was a long standing arrangement with a

- view to supporting the development of literacy from Early Years settings, through to Primary and Secondary schools. Further details could be provided at a future meeting.
- Members sought clarification as to what was happening going forward with regard to mock exams. Members were informed that the most stressful issue for Heads of Schools at the moment was GCSE and A levels in 2020/2021. Discussions were being held with Heads of Schools on how these might be delivered. Taking mock exams whilst social distancing would be incredibly challenging and this would need to be carefully thought through. Until Ofqual provided clear guidance regarding mock exams the teacher assessment would be very important.
  - All schools were required to deliver a Remote Learning Educational Plan by the end of September in case schools were asked to close again due to another lockdown. All Heads of Schools would be ready to deliver on line learning should this be required.
  - Members asked if Open Book exams had been considered and if there had been an impact on pupil numbers and churn due to the pandemic. Members were informed that Government had advised that they would like GCSE and A Level exams to continue to run in the same way as previously. Narrowing the curriculum in some subjects were concessions that were being considered. Churn appeared to have slowed down during lockdown and there had been a reduction in arrivals from abroad, this was however being monitored and would be reported back to the Committee if there were any significant changes.
  - Members sought clarification as to whether the teacher vacancy rate had been affected and if NQT's had been impacted by the pandemic and if they were still receiving the same level of support. Members were informed that there had been slightly higher numbers of people going into teaching as the Public Sector was seen as a more secure form of employment. Teach East had generated a huge amount of students. An update on recruitment would be provided in the New Year.
  - Members noted from the report that there seemed to be a lack of robust internal assessment data collected during the remote learning phase of the lockdown and asked if there would be a particular emphasis on assessment of education during the pandemic and where the gaps in learning were. Members were informed that most schools had been settling children back into school and concentrating on pastoral issues first. Discussions would be held with Heads of Schools to get information on where the gaps were and an update would be brought back to the committee at a future date. Lots of children had actually done very well at home especially Primary children with reading. Writing was more of a problem and this would be a key area of focus.

Over the course of the discussion Members took it in turns to thank the Service Director and his team for the magnificent work they had been doing during the pandemic. Members were appreciative of the robust and timely advice given and support that had been provided to schools and families by the team in Educational Services. The level of support had been exemplary throughout the pandemic.

## **AGREED ACTIONS**

The Children and Education Scrutiny Committee **RESOLVED** to

1. Commend the response of Schools and Early Years settings on their efforts to keep education operating during the COVID-19 crisis
2. Note the position of Education around COVID-19 and comment on areas the committee may wish to review moving forward as the recovery phase began.

## **7. RECOVERY PLANS AND PRIORITIES: CHILDREN AND SAFEGUARDING SERVICES**

The Service Director for Children and Safeguarding introduced the report which provided Members with an overview of recovery planning being undertaken across Children and Safeguarding Services as the COVID-19 pandemic continued. The report provided

information about the likely areas of impact for vulnerable children, young people and their families, and how services were preparing to meet possible increased demand. The report also included a brief update on likely inspection activity over the coming months.

Areas highlighted by the Service Director were as follows:

- Face to face visits had continued with the most vulnerable children where possible.
- Other work with children and families had continued virtually some of which had been successful an example of which had been parenting support where there had been lots of interest in online parenting programmes and advice lines.
- Virtual meetings had been more difficult with parents who had issues such as drug or alcohol abuse or suffered from domestic abuse and therefore not having face to face meetings may have impacted on the length of time children have been on a child protection plan.
- A great deal of focus had been on getting staff back to the office within social distancing rules. The role of the social worker was very stressful and being able to meet with their teams to discuss a case after a home visit was important.
- There had not been a big spike in referrals to children's social care from schools but this was normal and it usually took a few weeks for children to settle into school and for teachers to notice any concerns. The implications for children and vulnerable young people were likely to emerge over the next few weeks and months.

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

- Members sought further clarification with regard to the longer term impact and effects on children and young people during the pandemic. Members were informed that one group of particular concern which was a small number of young people could result in a series of complex needs developing. This would then mean that the services and support that they would need would become very complex and expensive. It would become more important to work across all sectors to identify children and young people doing less well. The economic fall out for some families was also a cause for concern particularly in areas of deprivation and poor housing where there were significant numbers of people in unstable employment. Work was being undertaken with Family Voice and other organisations to try and understand the pressures that some families were facing. Recent discussions had indicated that most families were coping and the main issues might be around children and young people falling behind on their education. The situation overall was being closely monitored.
- Parental participation in child protection conferences have restarted in a hybrid way. This has been a real challenge where a number of agencies were involved, but at least the parents were involved. Dependent on the number of participants it might not be possible due to social distancing to hold a physical meeting with everyone present, however office space was being looked at to try accommodate some meetings.
- Social workers had been maintaining the face to face contact with families which had been quite stressful for them, which was why it had been important to try and provide opportunities for staff to go back into the workplace to be able to have contact with other staff and managers especially after a difficult child protection visit.
- There had been no notification of an impending Ofsted inspection but the expectation was that there would be a visit at some point.
- The Early Help Team were proactive in reaching out to schools to offer support. Groups representing parents had reported that there were no major issues being reported. Schools had reported some slightly more challenging behaviour from young people due to being absent from the classroom for several months which was to be expected.
- The bid for extra funding to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) was for a team of staff for a six month period to come in and

support the work of schools and other agencies where the demand was expected to increase. There had been no requirement to draw on the funding at the present time and it was likely that the funding would be required over this financial year and the next. If the funding from the MHCLG was not provided alternative options of what could be done would need to be looked at as there was a need to continue the vital work already done.

- Moving forward there would need to be a continuation of the community based response and to work with the volunteers and the Think Communities place based model in order to support community resilience. In general most families could support an economic downturn without a negative impact on children as a direct result but there were some families that would find it very difficult to cope and consequently this would have a direct impact on their children. It was therefore imperative to look at the broader based solutions.
- The digital based approach had been very helpful for parenting support and parenting programmes. It had been less helpful for those with significant long standing problems.
- Members were concerned about those families in less secure employment and the fact that the furlough scheme was coming to an end and asked what plans were in place to assist those families. Members were informed that within the council there was not a great deal of funding available, the key concern would be that if there was a loss of income what that would do to housing security. Those who were unemployed would be dependent on Universal Credit. As a Unitary Authority proactive work could be done with the housing team and the council had a responsibility to respond quickly. Children's Services would do as much as possible to ensure there was limited negative impact on the children.
- Members sought clarification as to how many domestic abuse referrals there were during lockdown and how they were dealt with. Members were advised that the details were not available at the meeting. Assurance was given that domestic abuse cases that involved children would be referred to children's social care and would be automatically assessed to see if intervention was required. In the vast amount of cases no intervention was required but the team still had to go through the process of assessing each referral. The police had now been asked to triage their own referrals to ensure that only those cases that needed intervention were referred on to children's social care thereby reducing the referrals.

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services addressed the committee and gave congratulations to all social workers who were working with the most vulnerable people in society and also to the foster carers who had continued to work tirelessly to provide support and care to the most vulnerable children in Peterborough. The Cabinet Member also thanked the Councillors who had supported the campaign to get more foster carers. The Cabinet Member also praised the Service Director for running a proactive service.

The Committee thanked the Service Director and his team for the dedicated service that they had continued to provide during the pandemic and in particular the staff that had to continue to go into homes whilst lockdown was in place which must have caused considerable anxiety. The Committee also wished to record their thanks to all foster carers.

## **AGREED ACTIONS**

The Children and Education Scrutiny Committee **RESOLVED** to

1. Record their thanks for the dedication of children's services staff and foster carers throughout the pandemic.
2. Note the content of the report and areas where possible increased demand for children's services as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic are possible;
3. Note the actions being taken by the service to prepare for and mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable children, young people and their families;



4. Note comments about likely inspection activity by the regulator, Ofsted.

## **8. REVIEW OF 2019/2020 AND WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2020/2021**

The Senior Democratic Services Officer presented the report which considered the 2019/2020 year in review and looked at the work programme for the new municipal year 2020/21 to determine priorities and agree the proposed way forward for monitoring future recommendations.

The following requests were made for additions to the work programme.

- 2016 2021 Peterborough Child Poverty Strategy. To provide an evaluation of the strategy and impact.
- A review of the attendance and nomination process for non-statutory co-opted members to the committee.
- A report to each meeting providing a COVID update from both Education and Children's and Safeguarding service areas.

The above items to be discussed at the next Group Representatives meeting.

### **AGREED ACTIONS**

The Children and Education Scrutiny Committee **RESOLVED** to

1. Consider items presented to the Children and Education Scrutiny Committee during 2019/2020 and make recommendations on the future monitoring of these items where necessary.
2. Determine priorities and approve the draft work programme for 2020/2021 attached at Appendix 1.
3. Note the Recommendations Monitoring Report attached at Appendix 2 and consider if further monitoring of the recommendations made during the 2019/2020 municipal year is required.
4. Note the Terms of Reference for this Committee as set out in Part 3, Section 4, Overview and Scrutiny Functions and in particular paragraph 2.1 item 1 Children and Education Scrutiny Committee as attached at Appendix 3.
5. Agree to add the following items to the 2020/2021 work programme:
  - 2016 2021 Peterborough Child Poverty Strategy. To provide an evaluation of the strategy and impact.
  - A review of the attendance and nomination process for non-statutory co-opted members to the committee.
  - A report to each meeting providing a COVID update from both Education and Children's and Safeguarding service areas.

## **9. 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 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**

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.

**10. Date of next meeting:**

9 November 2020 – Children and Education Scrutiny Committee  
11 November 2020 - Joint Scrutiny of the Budget

CHAIRMAN

7.00pm to 9.00pm