

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Wednesday, 7 July 2021.

PRESENT: Mr A Booth (Chairman), Mr P V Barrington-King (Vice-Chairman), Mrs R Binks, Mr N J Collor, Mr G Cooke, Mr R C Love, OBE, Mr O Richardson, Mr A M Ridgers, Mr J Wright, Dr L Sullivan, Mr A J Hook and Mr P Stepto

ALSO PRESENT: Mr R W Gough (Leader of the Council), Mrs S Chandler (Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services) and Mrs S Prendergast (Cabinet Member for Education and Skills)

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr M Dunkley CBE (Corporate Director of Children Young People and Education), Mr D Adams (Reconnect Programme Director), Mrs A Taylor (Scrutiny Research Officer) and Mr M Dentten (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

5. Introduction

(Item A1)

The Chairman introduced the meeting and informed Members that Item B1 (Call-in of Decision 21/00044 - Reconnect: Kent Children and Young People Programme) would be considered as an urgent item, as the call-in had been approved following publication of the agenda.

6. Declarations of Interests by Members in items on the Agenda for this Meeting

(Item A3)

No declarations were made.

7. Minutes of the meeting held on 9 June 2021

(Item A4)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 9 June 2021 were an accurate record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

8. Short Focused Inquiries - Work Programme

(Item A5)

1. The Chairman introduced the item and invited Members from across the Council to get involved with future Short Focused Inquiries.
2. Mrs Taylor explained that the Committee were asked to agree the work programme and set out a priority order for the Short Focused Inquiries, as detailed in the report.

3. Following a question from a Member, the Chairman confirmed that whilst there was no strict timescale for each inquiry, completing inquiries within a compact timeframe was encouraged.
4. The Committee agreed to add an inquiry into Home to School Transport to the work programme and recognised the importance of analysing service provision, given the significant costs associated and context of KCC's financial pressures.
5. A Member asked that Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Home to School Transport be included the inquiry.
6. A Member raised the environmental impact of school journeys as an area for consideration by the inquiry.
7. The Committee agreed to add an inquiry into Section 106 (Town and Country Planning Act 1990) contributions to the work programme.
8. Speed camera policy, including the Kent and Medway Safety Camera Partnership's criteria for new cameras; analysis of KCC's estate, including maintenance; and highway infrastructure, including drainage and utility policies were raised by Members as possible future areas for inquiry.
9. The Committee agreed that an inquiry into Home to School Transport be considered first.
10. Mrs Taylor clarified that whilst any Member of the Council could be involved in Short Focused Inquiries, the Scrutiny Committee retained the decision on final reports and the work programme.

RESOLVED that that the work programme for Short Focused Inquiries was agreed and that Home to School Transport be the first inquiry to be undertaken, delegating to Officers the arrangement of the first inquiry as outlined in the report.

9. Call-in of Decision 21/00044 - Reconnect: Kent Children and Young People Programme
(Item B1)

Mr R Gough, Leader of the Council; Mrs S Chandler, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services; Mrs S Prendergast, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills; Mr M Dunkley, Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education and Mr D Adams, Reconnect Programme Director were in attendance for this item.

1. The Chairman introduced the item and invited the proposer of the call-in, Dr Sullivan, to provide an overview of the reasons for her call-in. Mr Hook and Mr Stepto as seconders were also invited to speak.
2. Dr Sullivan presented the reasons for her call-in. A need to scrutinise the Programme's key objectives, allocation of funding and proposed methods was cited. She raised concerns over the involvement of children and young people in the early stages of the project and sought assurances that sufficient engagement

had taken place. She sought further guarantees that children and young people would be able to reconnect as a result of the decision. Mr Stepto agreed with the reasons set out by Dr Sullivan.

3. Mr Hook questioned whether the Programme budget of £10m would be sufficient to deliver a 16 month project across Kent; how the Programme targeted those most in need; and whether Officer provision had been appropriately allocated.
4. The Chairman invited Mrs Chandler to outline the justification for the decision. Mrs Chandler provided context and reminded Members that the Reconnect Programme constituted a Covid-19 response programme. She recognised that children and young people had been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and that there was a resulting need to address vulnerabilities. She confirmed that the Programme would be open to all children and young people in Kent. It was noted that many other authorities and organisations in Kent had indicated their interest to support the initiative. Reassurance was given that the Programme comprised additional fixed term provisions and did not involve a remodelling of existing permanent services.
5. Mr Gough welcomed consideration of the decision by Scrutiny. He reminded the Committee that children in Kent were the collective responsibility of Members. He confirmed that all opposition Group Leaders were invited to Cabinet when the decision was originally considered. In relation to engagement, he highlighted the role of the Young Persons Steering Group, as detailed in 4.4 of the decision report, as a conduit for the receiving the views of young people. The Programme's objectives were addressed, he recognised the challenge of measuring the effectiveness of delivery, when the scale and variety of contributing factors which influenced the lives of young people were considered. He provided an example of the challenge, that if the attainment gap had not returned to pre-pandemic levels, this did not necessarily mean that the Programme had failed. In relation to local and Member involvement, Mr Gough welcomed the participation of Local Children's Partnership Groups (LCPGs) and recognised that Member evaluation at committees would be vital for judging overall effectiveness.
6. Mr Dunkley provided further details and reassurance. He set out the differences between the Reconnect Programme and other fixed term programmes previously delivered by KCC. He noted that data collected by KCC had demonstrated that children and young people in Kent had been negatively impacted by the pandemic. Members were reminded that the £10m project cost was covered by £7.5m from the Covid-19 reserve and £2.5m from the Containing Outbreaks Management Fund (COMF). He added that it was anticipated that further funding streams would be made available by Government, which would support with the successful achievement of Reconnect's objectives. Reassurance was given that existing networks would be used to engage with partners and children, with their feedback influencing the five project objectives. It was noted that Reconnect had been named by young people.
7. Mr Adams added that in excess of 2000 consultation responses had been received, which included more than 200 from parents and children. He verified that district council Chief Executives, Kent Police and Kent Fire and Rescue

Service had been engaged. It was confirmed that the Young Persons Steering Group would operate throughout the Programme's lifecycle and that the Reconnect Partnership Board would consider the role it played in funding decisions. He shared additional operational details and aspirations, which included maintaining a small programme team whilst using other services of the Council, such as commissioners, education staff and sports officers. It was emphasised that the approach taken sought to avoid duplication and encouraged greater service integration.

8. When asked what had been done to address travel barriers, Mrs Chandler remarked that the Programme would build partnerships with local organisations to ensure local people were identified and positively impacted. Mr Adams added that free travel formed a key part of the Programme and that following agreement with bus companies, 120,000 free tickets would be issued to children aged 10-18 for summer 2021, together with 40,000 family tickets. It was further noted that leisure passes had been secured, costing £25 for a six-week summer period, reduced to £10 for those children eligible for free school meals.
9. Mrs Chandler was asked how the quality of the services delivered as part of the programme would be assessed. She confirmed that the evaluation process relied heavily on feedback directly from children and young people, it was noted that long-term numerical evaluation would not adequately judge programme effectiveness.
10. A Member noted from their own observations that many grants provided through LCPGs as part of the Reconnect Programme had funded existing projects or services. Mrs Chandler was asked how it could be ensured that grants went towards additional services. She agreed to investigate the issue and meet with the Member outside the meeting.
11. Members stressed the need to draw a distinction between output and outcome when evaluating the effectiveness of Reconnect. Mr Gough replied that whilst many other services delivered by KCC in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic focused on short-term impact, Reconnect would have a longer-term legacy. He reassured the Committee that delivery would be analysed to sustain successes and learn lessons where required.
12. Direct operational oversight was raised by a Member, who noted that no Members sat on the Reconnect Partnership Board. They asked that the relationship between the Board and LCPGs be explained further. Mr Adams confirmed that a quarter of Programme funding would be managed through LCPGs, that each LCPG had decision making autonomy and that the role of the Delivery Board in relation to these decisions was to ensure there was no service duplication.
13. The need to benchmark Reconnect's performance against similar programmes in other counties of similar demographics was emphasised by a Member. It was asked that metrics including the rates of children's mental health referrals, school attendance and exclusions be compared. Mrs Chandler recognised the need for further preventative work on mental health and confirmed that as part of the Programme funding had been provided to HeadStart Kent, to expand their

services which build young people's resilience and mental wellbeing in schools. Mr Adams added that Headstart Kent had operated for two years and that the expansion of their services, which included a mentoring offer, had been made possible through a contract variation which extended to July 2022.

14. A Member asked how Reconnect engaged with 12-14 year olds who were not members of youth groups. Mrs Chandler acknowledged the need to provide an attractive offer for young people and cited Challenger Troop CIC as an example of an organisation which would attract and benefit the age group.
15. Members recommended that young people be given the opportunity to have a say on the funding of local schemes at the earliest possible stage.
16. In response to a question from a Member, Mrs Chandler confirmed that contract monitoring would be carried out by the Reconnect Partnership Board and LCPGs.
17. Mrs Chandler stressed that Reconnect was not wholly a summer holiday programme, though Members were reminded that it would encompass the 2021 and 2022 summer holidays. She confirmed that LCPG Chairmen, local providers and Youth Advisory Group (YAGs) would be engaged throughout the Programme's lifecycle. Members were encouraged to engage with these stakeholders.
18. Mrs Chandler thanked the Committee for their interest in the Reconnect Programme and confirmed that their comments would be considered during the rollout of the Programme.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Committee expressed comments but did not require reconsideration of the decision.