

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, 15 December 2021.

PRESENT: Mr A Booth (Chairman), Mr P V Barrington-King (Vice-Chairman), Mrs R Binks, Mr N J Collor, Mr G Cooke, Mrs S Hudson, Mr D Jeffrey, Mr R C Love, OBE, Mr H Rayner and Mr O Richardson

ALSO PRESENT: Mrs S Chandler (Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services)

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr D Adams (Director of Education), Mrs A Taylor (Scrutiny Research Officer) and Mr M Dentten (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

21. Declarations of Interests by Members in items on the Agenda for this Meeting *(Item A4)*

No declarations were made.

22. Minutes of the meeting held on 24 November 2021 *(Item A5)*

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 24 November 2021 were an accurate record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

23. Short Focused Inquiries Work Programme *(Item A6)*

1. The Chairman proposed that Section 106 Developer Contributions be the subject of the next Short Focused Inquiry, to be followed by an inquiry into Highways Improvement Plans.

RESOLVED that the work programme for Short Focused Inquiries was agreed and that Section 106 Developer Contributions be the next inquiry undertaken, followed by an inquiry into Highways Improvement Plans, delegating to Officers the arrangement of the next inquiry as outlined in the report.

24. Reconnect: Kent Children and Young People Programme *(Item C1)*

Mrs S Chandler, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services and Mr D Adams, Reconnect Programme Director were in attendance for this item.

1. The Chairman introduced the item and invited Mrs Chandler to provide an overview of the Reconnect Programme's outcomes to date.

2. Mrs Chandler outlined the progress made by the Programme over Summer 2021 and highlighted the key outcomes detailed in the report. She noted that it was difficult to quantify the impact on young people at this stage, though the response from communities had been significant. She emphasised the Programme's continued commitment to its priorities of improving young people's health, happiness, lifestyle and education.
3. Members raised concerns at the continued impact of the pandemic on children and young people, given the rapid spread of the Omicron variant and possibility that schools could be closed to tackle outbreaks. They asked Mrs Chandler for reassurance that the Programme would use all the financial resources at its disposal to mitigate the impact, wherever possible. Mrs Chandler reassured the Committee that all funding assigned to the Programme would be used to deliver against its five core objectives. Mr Adams confirmed that of the £10m budget, £1.2m had yet to be assigned, though it was noted that this sum was reserved for future events and sub programmes.
4. A Member asked for clarification on the difference between LGBTQ+ swimming sessions and the standard swimming session offer, as outlined in the report. Mr Adams confirmed that the sessions were delivered by a provider as part of a broader element within the Programme and that this was included as it had been determined that the group had suffered considerably during the pandemic, requiring a specialist response.
5. Mrs Chandler was asked by a Member, whether education had formed a significant enough part of the Programme. She noted that Reconnect was not the primary means for tackling missed education and that the national Catch-up premium, which included the National Tutoring Programme, was designed to fulfil this purpose. Mr Adams confirmed that as part of the Programme, the Invicta National Academy had delivered 33,000 learning opportunities for children in Kent. He added that work was ongoing with the Academy and involved a home study pilot which aimed to give children access to a teacher outside of school hours.
6. When asked by a Member what more would be done to engage hard to reach groups, including whether greater social media promotion would have been considered, Mrs Chandler acknowledged that engagement and take up had been varied across Kent. She outlined the different channels used, including corporate, partner agency, local stakeholder and school communications. She noted that partners had provided feedback on the most effective campaigns. Mr Adams recognised that communication through other organisations led in some instances to minor delays, though stated that this was outweighed by the benefits, which included greater participation rates. He explained that young people were more likely to engage with familiar local organisations than a corporate KCC campaign.
7. A Member asked for breakdown of summer bus pass distribution. Mr Adams confirmed that the summer bus passes had been a universal offer and were distributed through schools and further education colleges.

8. The importance of maintaining a strong communications network, including delegating communications to district councils and local partners, where appropriate, was emphasised by a Member.
9. A Member highlighted the Programme's added value and the that they had witnessed first-hand the positive effects its funded physical events had on children.
10. The Chairman commended the Programme's outcomes and recognised that young people had been positively impacted. He added that understanding children's lived experiences and the pandemic's impact on their lives was important for shaping services. Mrs Chandler responded that whilst the Programme was intended to address the impact of the pandemic on children's lives, it had become apparent that the impact would be longer term than originally predicted. She confirmed that work had been undertaken to consider how elements of the Programme could be continued beyond its finish date. She noted that the Programme had made voluntary and community sector organisations more reliant and effective.
11. Mrs Chandler thanked the Committee for their comments and continued scrutiny.
12. The Chairman thanked Mrs Chandler and Mr Adams for their attendance and shared his intention for the Reconnect Programme to return to the Committee in late 2022, in order to give Members the opportunity to analyse final outcomes following the Programme's conclusion.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

25. Work Programme

(Item D1)

1. Mrs Taylor confirmed that evaluation of the Reconnect Programme had been added to the work programme and would be scheduled following the publication of the Programme's own final evaluation report in October 2022.
2. Mr Barrington-King updated the Committee on the progress of the Home to School Transport Short Focused Inquiry. He confirmed that a draft of the Inquiry's report had been shared with Members.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.