

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, 20 April 2022.

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, Dr L Sullivan, Mr A J Hook and Mr P Stepto

ALSO PRESENT: Mr D L Brazier (Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport), Mrs S Chandler (Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services) and Mrs S Prendergast (Cabinet Member for Education and Skills)

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr S Jones (Corporate Director for Growth, Environment and Transport), Mr B Watts (General Counsel), Mr P Lightowler (Interim Director of Transportation), Mr C Chapman (Head of Fair Access), Mrs A Taylor (Scrutiny Research Officer) and Mr M Dentten (Democratic Services Officer)

IN VIRTUAL ATTENDANCE: Mr O Richardson

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

39. Declarations of Interests by Members in items on the Agenda for this Meeting (Item A3)

No declarations were made.

40. Minutes of the meetings held on 8 March and 23 March 2022 (Item A4)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meetings held on 8 March and 23 March 2022, subject to the addition of Mrs Binks as a virtual attendee in the 23 March minutes, were an accurate record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

41. Future meeting dates (Item A5)

RESOLVED that the following future meeting dates be noted:

Wednesday 21 September 2022 - 2pm
Thursday 11 October 2022 - 10am
Thursday 24 November 2022 - 10am
Wednesday 7 December 2022 - 2pm
Wednesday 25 January 2023 - 2pm
Thursday 23 February 2023 - 10am
Thursday 20 April 2023 - 10am
Tuesday 6 June 2023 - 10am
Wednesday 19 July 2023 - 2pm

42. SEND Transport Update

(Item B1)

1. The Chairman introduced the item and invited the Cabinet Members to provide an update on developments relating to the provision of SEND home to school transport since the last Scrutiny Committee meeting.
2. Mr Brazier confirmed that all children affected by the retender of SEND transport services had been provided with transport. He reminded Members that daily situation reports were shared with internal stakeholders in the Growth, Environment and Transport (GET) and Children, Young People and Education (CYPE) directorates and included information on the number of outstanding complaints. He reassured the Committee that KCC's provision of SEND transport was now operating in a business-as-usual capacity. Mrs Prendergast confirmed that she had continued to meet with Kent Parents and Carers Together (PACT) on a weekly basis, in order to understand ongoing concerns, and concurred with Mr Brazier that the service was in a business-as-usual position.
3. Mr Jones gave an overview of the number of children awaiting an allocation of transport who had entered the system following the retender of the service, which stood at 1 added in January and 3 added in February. He confirmed that over 5,600 children with SEND had Council provisioned home to school transport. In relation to correspondence, he reassured Members that all parents and carers had been contacted throughout the process, with 10 cases ongoing.
4. The Committee were provided with a copy of Internal Audit's Terms of Reference for their SEND Transport Lessons Learnt Review. Members raised their concern that the document had been shared on the day of the meeting, Mr Watts explained that the document was finalised on 19 April and circulated to Members at the earliest opportunity.
5. Mr Watts provided an update on the Internal Audit SEND Transport Lessons Learnt Review. He verified that the Terms of Reference had been published on kent.gov.uk. Concerning consideration of the Review's findings, he confirmed that they would be reported to the Governance and Audit Committee initially. He noted that the Head of Internal Audit had continued to meet regularly with Kent PACT. He emphasised that the Head of Internal Audit had developed the Terms of Reference independently.
6. A Member asked that the Terms of Reference include consultation with schools and teachers in addition to the Consultation Process with Parents, Carers and Kent PACT already detailed in section 2.3. Mr Watts agreed to share the suggestion with the Head of Internal Audit, though emphasised their independent prerogative to decide on the contents.
7. A Member asked whether the transport in place was suitable and took account of each child's individual needs. Mr Jones confirmed that transport suitability

was decided based on the information in a child's Education, Health and Care Plan. He reassured the Committee that there had been dialogue with parents where transport had been adapted, including where operators had issues with drivers, fuel or vehicles. He stressed that the child's needs were the main priority whenever changes to transport were considered on a temporary or permanent basis. Mr Lightowler recognised that there had been some discrepancies where operators had used different vehicles to those commissioned, due to capacity issues, with KCC Transport minimising the impact on children where possible. Mr Chapman added that Fair Access had managed changes based on developments in individual requirements, in line with statutory guidelines. He noted that there had been broad parent and carer satisfaction where changes had occurred recently.

8. In response to a question from a Member, Mr Lightowler confirmed that no significant changes in SEND transport arrangements had occurred at the start of the easter term.
9. A Member asked if there had been a decrease in the number of SEND children using alternative transport arrangements. Mr Chapman confirmed that approximately 400 personal transport budgets were funded by KCC, which represented an increase of 90 over the previous 6-month period.
10. A Member asked what initial measures had been put in place to mitigate against the impact of transport disruptions on children's educations. Mrs Prendergast agreed to circulate information to the Committee following the meeting outlining the education response and measures implemented.
11. Following a question from a Member, Mr Watts confirmed that the precise timeframe of the Review had yet to be established and that once it was known Members would be informed, with future Review developments reported principally to the Governance and Audit Committee.
12. The Chairman asked that any questions from Members related to the Internal Audit Review Terms of Reference be sent to the Scrutiny Research Officer, in order that they may be collated and sent to the Monitoring Officer and Head of Internal Audit, with the respective answers shared with all members of the Committee.

RESOLVED that the update be noted.