

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CHILDREN'S, YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION CABINET COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee held at Online on Tuesday, 14th September, 2021.

PRESENT: Mr M C Dance (Chairman), Mr M Dendor (Vice-Chairman), Mr A Brady, Mr G Cooke, Mr D Crow-Brown, Mrs T Dean, MBE, Ms S Hamilton, Mr R C Love, OBE, Dr L Sullivan, Mr M Reidy, Mr Q Roper and Mr M A J Hood

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

19. Apologies and Substitutes
(Item 2)

Apologies were received from Ms McArthur, Mr Beart and Mr Lehmann for whom Mr Hood was present.

20. Declarations of Interest by Members in items on the Agenda
(Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

21. Minutes of the meeting held on 30 June 2021
(Item 4)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee held on 30 June 2021 were correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

22. Verbal Update by Cabinet Member and Corporate Director
(Item 5)

1) Mrs Prendergast said work had been undertaken with Kent Supported Employment Service which supported people with physical disabilities, learning difficulties, autism and sensory issues to move into sustainable, paid work. Working with people aged 16 to 70, the service also supported employers with recruitment. From September 2021, the team was moving into mainstream schools to help support them in providing employment opportunities for all pupils with special educational needs and disabilities and would encourage pupils with to name employment on their ECHPs starting from year 9. KCC was the first council in the UK to introduce this in all mainstream schools. Training was to include embedding supported employment into the curriculum through head teachers, SENCOs, parents and teacher buy-in. Training also aimed to empower school staff through programmes such as systematic instruction, professional job coaching and the supported employment model as well as independent travel training skills. Work was being done with Oakley College (which was being re-named The Oaks Specialist School) to support their students into employment. The first phase was an on-site Tesco store and an independent coffee shop. Placements were to be

used as a transition to employment. Mrs Prendergast was looking forward to attending the official launch of the Tesco store on 29 September 2021.

The Kent Test was taken by Kent's pupils on Thursday, 9 September and testing for 'out of county' pupils took place on Saturday, 11 September. A significant amount of work was carried out by officers beforehand to ensure the testing environments remained Covid-safe and were in line with government guidance. Where necessary alternative arrangements were made to ensure that no self-isolating child was compelled to attend their original test date. This year, additional training sessions were provided to schools on making the best use of the Head Teacher Assessment process and highlighted the importance of referring all suitable pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and provided with support, where requested. Results were to be made available on 21 October before the national closing date for secondary applications on 31 October. Unlike in 2020, it was not necessary to provide pupils with additional preferences as parents were to apply knowing whether their child was eligible to attend a Kent grammar school.

Children and young people engaged in variety of online opportunities helping them to 'get ahead' before the start of new school term. Over 82,500 learning opportunities were delivered to children and young people over a 5 week period by Invicta National Academy with 40% of those participants being Kent residents. Over 200 children accessed the Lift Up platform over the summer period. Students took virtual trips to 6 destinations around the world to connect with inspiring human stories that modelled resilience, problem solving, teamwork and other critical skills. In partnership with Reconnect, over 100 young people furthered their learning using the free resources provided by AudioFy. GCSE and A-level students had free access to a library of more than 22,000 podcasts which brought to life a wide range of subjects. Broken down into short episodes of 10 to 12 minutes, students could tune in whether they were at home or 'on the move' so fitting in with their lives.

Following advice from the UK Chief Medical Officers, the Health and Social Care Secretary announced that pupils aged 12 to 15 years old in England were to be offered one dose of the Pfizer/Biontech Covid-19 vaccination. All young people aged 16 and 17 were able to receive a vaccination as well as some children aged 12 to 15 years old who had a condition or lived with someone with a condition that placed them at high risk from Covid-19. The vaccination programme was being expanded to protect young people from catching Covid-19, to reduce transmission in school and to keep pupils in the classroom. Locally, health services were preparing to deliver a schools-based vaccination programme. This was to be supported by GPs and community pharmacies. Parental or guardian consent was to be sought by vaccination healthcare staff prior to the vaccination in line with existing school vaccination programmes. It was understood that a national consent model was being worked on. Alternative provision was to be provided for those who were homes educated, in secure services or in specialist mental health settings.

The call for evidence for the 16-19 Review closed on 31 July 2021 and the findings were being collated. The Review aimed to improve the options and life chances of Kent's young people by enhancing education, skills and training opportunities available to them. Collaborative work with various sectors was being undertaken to utilise the evidence to bring about positive change. In line with the above, a considerable amount of work was being done with the Kent and Medway Employment Taskforce.

Thanks were given to schools' staff who helped to prepare school buildings ahead of the new school term.

In response to questions, it was noted:

- Updates would be provided to Members regarding the Covid-19 vaccination programme in schools. The guidance and consent model were not available at the time of the meeting.
- The news regarding employment services going into schools was welcomed.

2) Mrs Chandler said that the community in Kent had come together to deliver a successful summer programme to help children and young people reconnect to things they had missed during the Covid-19 pandemic including learning but also: health, happiness, friends, family, community, sports activities, the outdoors and economic wellbeing. The Reconnect Programme received lots of positive messages regarding the opportunities available and how valued these were by families. Thanks were given to all the clubs, companies, organisations and volunteers who were involved with summer programme. It was evident that children and young people and their families were able to enjoy a wide range of activities, fun days, trips and support with everything from archery to yoga on offer. A full briefing was circulated with more detail.

The holiday activities and food programme with partners delivered around 4200 free places weekly for children on free school meals. Mrs Chandler visited some of the events and activities taking place in east Kent and saw first-hand the fun and joy had by those attending. The Open Access Service ran a series of events across Kent with 2677 children and young people and 1713 parents and carers attending. Feedback had been particularly strong regarding the free travel offer provided by 14 bus companies, in partnership with whom we distributed approximately 150,000 child tickets and 40,000 family tickets, which recipients truly valued. Thanks were given to the bus companies and the Public Transport Team for their great contribution.

Leisure centres across Kent also provided a great offer, acknowledging that they were also in recovery from lockdown and it was not an easy ask from businesses. Mrs Chandler looked forward to the next phase of the programme and seeing the tremendous work of those supporting Kent's communities.

There had been an update from the Leader and from Mrs Chandler and a report from the Monitoring Officer which detailed the decision for KCC to resume duties in relation to Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC). Following protracted negotiations at the highest level, both with officers and at the political level with the Home Office and the Department for Education to find a sustainable long-term solution, a conclusion had been reached. Members were to be formally updated at an All-Member Briefing.

KCC's Open Access Team was involved with Afghan refugees and support was being provided. Further details would be provided at the Members' Briefing.

In response to questions, it was noted:

- Northfleet Youth Centre was partially re-opened but there had been considerable damage following its use as a Covid-19 centre. The Property Team were working to address the issues and how damage could be remedied.
- Conversations were ongoing with the bus companies but it could not be guaranteed that the free travel offer would be repeated in future years.

23. External Fostering Placements Commissioning Strategy (Item 6)

1) Mrs Chandler introduced the report regarding external fostering and reminded Members that KCC's Kent Fostering Service was providing an exemplary service. There had been active recruitment to the service and foster carers had been recruited within the previous 12 months. Kent Fostering Service had maintained its foster carer numbers during the pandemic. Even with this service, it was necessary to make external placements.

2) In response to questions, it was noted that:

- There were regional arrangements which had been explored by KCC but at the current time, there did not appear to be additional benefits to joining those alliances. Therefore, it had been decided to replicate the model with Medway moving forward.
- There was a priority for Looked After Children to have access to mental health support.
- Standards for fostering services were governed by OFSTED requirements. Fostering agencies brought in other services such as counselling and build this into their costs.

3) Members RESOLVED to endorse the recommendations detailed in the report with the following addition to part c):

“ ... in consultation with the Cabinet Member”.

24. Performance Monitoring (Item 7)

Katherine Atkinson (Assistant Director of Management Information and Intelligence) was in attendance for this item.

1) Ms Atkinson introduced the Performance Monitoring scorecard and reported that there had not been significant changes from the previous quarter. Most KPIs had remained stable. The figures relating to ECHPs had been improving each month.

2) In response to questions from Members, the following was noted:

- It was noted that the number of NEETs was previously reported annually but it has been requested that it be reported on a monthly basis. Therefore, the indicator was impacted seasonally. The figures that were reported to the Department for Education were those from December, January and February- as those gave the fullest picture.

- It was requested that a detailed report come to the Committee regarding NEETs.
- There was a slower recovery for the indicator relating to the issuing of ECHPs in some areas of Kent and this was due to the level of backlog in those areas. The timescales for issuing ECHPs would improve further once the backlog was cleared and areas across Kent would perform more similarly.

3) RESOLVED that the Committee noted the report.

25. SEND Update *(Item 8)*

Mark Walker, Director of SEND was in attendance for this item.

1) Mr Walker said that the Department for Education and NHS England had performed their quarterly monitoring visit. KCC had recorded and evidenced progress made. It was recognised by the DfE and NHS England that SEND was a high priority at KCC and areas 1 to 9 of the Statement of Action had progressed at different rates. Overall, the feedback was positive and the resources that had been put in had been recognised.

KCC had recruited to the following posts: Assistant Director for Disabled Children and Young People, Sharon Howard; Assistant Director for SEND, Steve Tanner; Assistant Director for Educational Psychology, Alison Farmer and Strategic Development Manager, Kerry Green.

2) Mrs Chandler said thanks to all staff who had worked hard to make improvements in SEND.

3) In response to questions from Members, the following points were noted:

- Work had started in March on the backlog of over 600 ECHPs and the backlog had been reduced to less than 190 which were over 20 weeks. At the same time, there had been an unprecedented increase in requests for the assessments. Most areas across the Kent had a backlog of about 10-11% but in Swale, this was over 30% and Canterbury, it was 23%. The higher numbers in the backlog were reflected in the percentage of ECHPs completed within timescale for these areas.
- There were some areas in the Statement of Action where KCC had made significant progress: family engagement, the family offer, information hub, the momentum with ECHPs and educational psychology assessments, joint commissioning, governance and leadership. Further information was sought around waiting times with Health services. Further evidence was sought on pupil progress, inclusive nature of schools and systems to track and improve outcomes. It was recognised that there had been challenges around evidencing these due to the pandemic.

- The SEND service was undergoing a process of transformation and staffing was to be considered as part of this. There was also to be investment in training and ‘upskilling’ staff as well as ensuring recruitment processes were robust.

4) Members RESOLVED to note the update.

26. Provision of Community Support Services for Disabled Children and Young People - outcome of procurement process
(Item 9)

Christy Holden (Head of Strategic Commissioning – Children’s) and Mark Walker (Director of SEND) were in attendance for this item.

1) In response to questions from Members, it was noted:

- The existing contract was to expire on 31 March 2024 and there was an option to extend by a further 3 years. If the contract was operating well and delivering, being able to extend under the same terms and conditions was to be welcomed. The contract would allow some improvements throughout.
- There were fewer contracted staff on ‘Zero-Hour’ contracts due to the nature of the work that they were doing and the need to have personalised, tailored support. This could be monitored through contract monitoring.

2) RESOLVED to note the report.

27. 21/00067 - Commissioning of a service to Support Families to build resilience and self-help strategies (neurodevelopmental pathway)
(Item 10)

Christy Holden (Head of Strategic Commissioning – Children’s), Stuart Collins (Director – Integrated Children’s Services- Early Help Lead) and Helen Cook (Senior Commissioner – Community Resilience) were in attendance for this item.

1) Ms Holden introduced the report which recommended establishing a contract with the voluntary sector. It was felt that the voluntary sector was best placed to meet KCC’s requirements. However, Members were asked to consider whether this was best approach or whether other economic sectors should be considered.

2) In response to questions, it was noted:

- There was an NHS waiting list of around 12,000 for formal clinical assessment and KCC’s investment along with the NHS was to alleviate concerns and provide early help but it was not expected to reduce the waiting list.
- The voluntary sector was considered best placed to manage volunteers and the services would be delivered through a range of voluntary sector resources. It had also been considered whether to use virtual or in person delivery, depending on the needs of the local families being supported.

- There had been an engagement process with SEND Improvement Board, parental partners, young people and services to consider options. The options had been co-produced and engagement with parents had continued to increase and improve. Parents had expressed a wish to have support from other parents with lived experience and parents volunteering received training. Workshops had been held with partners about what the model should look like and levels of engagement had been high.
- It was requested that where there was engagement and co-production with parents that evidence be provided.

3) Members RESOLVED to endorse the recommendations detailed in the report with the following addition to part b):

“ ... in consultation with the Cabinet Member”.

4) Dr Sullivan and Mr Brady asked for it to be noted that they had abstained from noting the recommendations.

28. 21/00069 - Proposal to permanently expand Borden Grammar School, Avenue of Remembrance, Sittingbourne, ME10 4DB from 120 places to 150 places for September 2022
(Item 11)

Marisa White (Area Education Officer – East Kent) was in attendance for this item.

1) Ms White introduced the report. There had been objections to the planning proposal associated with the expansion and therefore, the planning application was going to be considered at Planning Committee and there was to be a site visit for members of the Planning Committee. The school had taken a temporary one form of entry ‘bulge’ in mobile buildings on the school site and the proposal was also to be subject to a full business case that the Academy would have to put forward to the Regional Schools’ Commissioner, subject to planning permission.

Work was being undertaken with Highsted Grammar, the girls’ grammar school around a funding agreement to expand by one form of entry as well. However they had chosen to take forward their own build proposals.

2) In response to questions from Members, it was noted:

- 5 options had been considered and there had been meeting with residents who were unhappy with the siting of the expansion proposed. As part of the planning process, the options were being reconsidered.

3) RESOLVED to endorse the recommendations in the report.

29. 21/00070 - Proposal to expand Whitstable and Seasalter Endowed CE Junior School from 192 places to 240 places, increasing the published admission number (PAN) from 48 to 60 for Year three entry in September 2022
(Item 12)

Marisa White (Area Education Officer – East Kent) was in attendance for this item.

- 1) Ms White introduced the report and advised that further to the report brought to the Cabinet Committee on 15 January 2021, a more detailed feasibility study had been undertaken alongside other work. The cost had been assessed as higher than previously expected and therefore, required a Key Decision.
- 2) In response to questions from Members, it was noted:
 - The feasibility study had been sub-contracted and there had been mistakes made. The detailed surveys had not been undertaken at the time of the initial feasibility and costing. Some of the pre-planning discussions had not been taken account of at the time of the initial study
 - There had been a 14 month delay and there had been an impact around material and labour costs that could not have been anticipated.
 - An arrangement was in place to manage places at the school for September 2022
- 3) RESOLVED to endorse the recommendations in the report.

30. Proposal to expand Thamesview School
(Item 13)

Ian Watts (Area Education Officer – North Kent) was in attendance for this item.

- 1) Members AGREED to endorse the recommendations in the report.

31. Work Programme
(Item 14)

- 1) Members noted the work programme.