

**Lancashire County Council**

**Children, Families and Skills Scrutiny Committee**

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday, 13th December, 2023 at 10.30 am  
in Committee Room 'C' - The Duke of Lancaster Room, County Hall, Preston**

**Present:**

County Councillor Sue Hind (Chair)

**County Councillors**

M Clifford	J Potter
A Cheetham	R Woollam
L Cox	P Rigby
A Hindle	P Britcliffe
S Jones	J Couperthwaite

**Co-opted members**

**1. Apologies**

Apologies were received from County Councillors Matthew Salter, Stephen Clarke, Samara Barnes, Nweeda Khan and co-opted member John Withington.

County Councillor Jeff Couperthwaite replaced County Councillor Terry Hurns for this meeting only.

**2. Disclosure of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests**

None.

**3. Minutes of the Meeting Held on 1 November 2023**

**Resolved:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 1 November 2023 be confirmed as an accurate record.

**4. Alternative Provision Strategy**

The Chair welcomed County Councillor Jayne Rear, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, Julie Bell, Interim Director for Education, Culture and Skills and Sally Richardson, Head of Service Inclusion to the meeting.

The report circulated with the agenda pack provided an overview of the work that has been completed to date and the action planned to support the implementation of the Alternative Provision Strategy 2023 - 2026. It provided an overview of the current situation and the actions that were underway and to be taken in the future to strengthen the oversight, quality, and range of alternative provision in Lancashire.

A presentation was provided to the committee, a copy of which is attached to the minutes. The following key points were highlighted:

- There were two types of alternative provision (Pupil Referral Units and other non-maintained, private providers or home tuition).
- The outcomes for children in Pupil Referral Unit's (PRU) were reported to be worse than in mainstream schools. Part of this was due to PRU's not having a range of subject areas as in mainstream schools.
- Stronger oversight has begun on PRU outcomes including attendance and aspirations for young people.
- For younger children, the aim was to ensure they do not stay in PRU for a long period of time.
- It was reported that the Northwest region were looking to develop a framework for commissioning alternative provision, and Lancashire were looking to move this forward to include governance, quality assurance etc.
- Members were advised that Government were promoting a three-tier approach to alternative provision – outreach, short term and longer term.

Members were invited to ask questions and a summary is outlined below:

- With regards to costs, it was confirmed that work was underway to understand how to use collective resources better. Further funding has been provided through the high needs block. It was highlighted that there was an Inclusion Education Support Team now in place, where a school supporting a challenging situation could make a referral. This would enable provision of some teaching modelling support to ensure children continue within mainstream education. This support had been very successful and was to be further rolled out.
- It was reaffirmed that the local authority was responsible for all children regardless of type of education establishment attended.
- It was reported that a survey had been undertaken around different providers to identify a potential quality assurance framework. This would provide information on any gaps in provision to see how further support could be developed.
- With regards to transition from primary to secondary schools, it was confirmed that secondary schools were showing greater recognition of the challenges around transitions, particularly with regards to school environment.
- With regards to education for those children with mental health challenges, it was highlighted that there was a need to look at the home environment, any



support already available and options for services such as Child Action Northwest. However, it was acknowledged that there was not a one size fits all solution and was very much dependent on the individual child.

- It was acknowledged that there was a greater need for more work around prevention. Trauma informed training was now in place, and it was reported that around a third of schools had already attended. As a result, a correlation between the reduction in the number of exclusions and take up of the training had already been seen.
- Two children's champions were appointed during the pandemic and due to the success of these posts, four more posts had been established which have had a good impact. A link to trauma informed information would be provided to all members.
- With regards to speech therapy, it was confirmed that the Early Years Team and specialist teachers were working closely with pre-schools to identify all those children with speech challenges to provide early support and resources. However, it was recognised that this could still lead to an Education, Health and Care Plan depending on the needs of the child. To help support families on a waiting list, a drop-in centre had been set up for pre-school children in the East of Lancashire and would be rolled out across Fylde and Wyre. Further to this, a programme of intervention was being rolled out across all primary schools.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and officers for answering the committees' questions.

**Resolved:** That the action taken to date and planned in relation to the Alternative Provision Strategy be supported with no further recommendations from the committee at this time.

## 5. SEND Sufficiency Plan

The Chair welcomed County Councillor Jayne Rear, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, Julie Bell, Interim Director for Education, Culture and Skills and Dr Sally Richardson, Head of Service Inclusion to the meeting.

A brief overview of developments to date in relation to increasing the range and availability of more specialist provision across the county was provided to the committee.

A presentation was provided to the committee, a copy of which is attached to the minutes.

It was reported that in 2022, the demand for education, health and care need and assessments rose by 70%, with a 33 % increase in Education, Health and Care Plans. In addition, there was an increase seen in complexity of need. Members were



advised that there were several contributory factors such as the pandemic and cost of living crisis.

Further to this, it was confirmed that demand for special school places had seen an increase year on year, with a reported £30m spent on independent, private non-maintained special school places. However, members were assured that more special school places had been identified and were now in place, with further places identified.

It was reported that development had been undertaken to create 100 SEN unit places with a further 100 places in the pipeline. Discussions were underway with secondary schools on how this could be further developed.

It was highlighted that staffing challenges had impacted on assessments. However, investment had been provided to increase staffing numbers to alleviate current pressures.

The committee were informed that there was no provision currently for Social, Emotional Mental Health (SEMH) special schools in the north of Lancashire.

Members were invited to ask questions and a summary of the discussion is set out below:

- With regards to curriculum differences in special schools, members were advised that special schools (SEMH) provided more vocational opportunities as appropriate, as well as academic. For those schools working with children with considerable learning difficulties, the curriculum was adapted to the needs of the child.
- It was confirmed that with regards to provision of support to schools all schools were offered a visit by an advisor, there were tools provided to support school evaluation, and the council had access to data on schools. On that basis, schools were RAG rated on that information and offered support as needed.
- It was acknowledged that there was a need to work better with parents to achieve goals and have a more holistic approach.
- Members were informed that a SEND helpline was implemented in September 23 with approximately 100 calls a week and had provided considerable support providing triage to help parents and carers. It was confirmed that details on the helpline would be shared with members.
- In answer to a query on the creation of surplus special school places to assist with future demand, it was reported that these places would be allocated to children from other LA's and that the county council had no control over this.
- Although the government had agreed to a 3% increase, previous years have shown that additional funding had been provided due to the increased



demand. It was confirmed that long term plans were in place looking at provision across the county. A chart showing the number of places that were being provided vs the demand over time was requested by the committee.

- It was confirmed that every new school should have SEN places and/or unit.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and officers for answering the committees' questions.

**Resolved:** That the proposals that are being developed to increase the range and availability of specialist provision across Lancashire be supported with no further recommendations from the committee at this time.

## 6. Work Programme 2023/24

Members were provided with an up-to-date version of the Children, Families and Skills Scrutiny Committee work programme for 2023/24.

**Resolved:** That the work programme of the Children, Families and Skills Scrutiny Committee be received.

## 7. Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

## 8. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Children, Families and Skills Scrutiny Committee is due to take place on Wednesday 31 January at 10.30am, Committee Room C – The Duke of Lancaster Room, County Hall, Preston.

H MacAndrew  
Director of Law and Governance

County Hall  
Preston

