

Lancashire County Council

Children, Families and Skills Scrutiny Committee

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday, 31st January, 2024 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	N Khan
S Barnes	P Rigby
A Cheetham	S Clarke
L Cox	M Salter
A Hindle	J R Singleton JP
T Hurn	A Schofield
R Woollam	

Co-opted members

David Ballard

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from County Councillor John Potter.

County Councillor John Singleton replaced County Councillor Peter Britcliffe and County Councillor Alan Schofield replaced County Councillor Stuart Jones for this meeting only.

2. Disclosure of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None.

3. Minutes of the Meeting Held on 13 December 2023

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 December 2023 be confirmed as an accurate record.

4. School and Post 16 Transport

The Chair welcomed County Councillor Rupert Swarbrick, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, Oliver Starkey, Head of Service Public and Integrated Transport, Debbie Ormerod, Access to Education Lead Officer, Nanette Hog, Admissions and Transport Co-Ordinator, Sarah Hirst, 16-19 Education and Skills Lead and Andrew Glover, Principal Transport Officer for School Transport to the meeting.

The report circulated with the agenda pack provided an update on the County Council's Home to School Transport Policy. It provided information on the 'Think Transport' publicity campaign which provided parents with information when making their primary and secondary school applications. The report also included information on the Post-16 Transport Policy.

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

- Regarding the Communications Action Plan, it was queried if the actions listed had been completed or if not when they would be completed. It was explained to the committee the Communications Action Plan was undertaken in the Autumn 2023 term, specifically between 1 September 2023 to 15 January 2024 in line with the period parents had to apply for primary and secondary school places.
- A query was raised regarding the School Transport Review, Operational review – Season tickets, specifically when the review would be completed by, and the date actions would be effective from. It was highlighted to members that there were short, medium and long-term actions with differing time frames which had started over the summer 2023 and would continue until September 2026 as was detailed under Appendix 'B' of the report.
- Regarding Q Routes, it was explained that two licences were required as there were two officers that provided the service, covering the North and the South and this ensured that routes could be optimised.
- Members raised concern about students standing on school bus services, specifically if this practice was safe. It was explained to the committee that introducing standing on buses was a short-term action that was introduced to increase capacity quickly. It was noted that the legalities were set by the DVSA, and the school bus vehicles were fitted with appropriate holding equipment to meet the legal requirement to carry standing passengers. Members were informed that allowing students to stand meant opportunity was given to travel on these services to children who did not have a statutory entitlement to transport. The Cabinet Member acknowledged the concerns raised by the committee regarding the safety of standees on buses. It was requested that further information on how risks were mitigated in relation to children standing on school bus services be provided to the committee.



- Concerning the viability of the £2 bus fare and the cost to parents for school transport, it was noted that the council had been successful in securing funding for its bus service improvement plan however the Department for Transport guidance stated that this funding was for public services and not for school services. The committee were informed further monies were available for the bus service improvement plan and enquires had been made with the Department of Transport whether this potential award could be used for closed door school bus services. Regarding the £2 bus fare, its popularity was recognised however no guidance had been provided by the Department for Transport on its life span.
- Members queried how a route was confirmed as safe. It was explained the current policy on unsuitable routes was being revised to be modelled around information from the Road Safety Governing Body, it was also confirmed there was National guidance to how routes should be assessed. Mapping software was used for home to school routes, and unsafe routes were marked on this software. Members were assured if a parent were to challenge the safety of a route, officers were sent to assess the route.
- It was confirmed transport would always be provided to a child with statutory entitlement.
- The committee requested further detail on information gathering and queried the type of information being captured in relation to smart tickets. Members heard how the system needed for school transport had to facilitate several types of routes including rural and central routes, and creating a sophisticated ticket system such as those used by major providers would incur high back-office costs and feed into contract costs.
- It was highlighted there was no KPI data on passenger usage of services and volume of use. Members were informed that this type of software was ideal to manage and monitor services. It was recommended that consideration be given to investigating in software that could provide this data.
- It was questioned if there was data regarding the increased number of queries that arose due to the publicity campaign. It was confirmed whilst there were no overall statistics, officers were able to see levels of engagement on the Facebook campaigns on resulting queries.
- Members queried the annual review undertaken by officers in relation to school buses where there is no statutory entitlement for free travel, and hence all users pay to use the service. It was noted that sometimes this resulted in a financial loss to the county council and because of this the route is terminated. It was explained that potentially more could be done in terms of timescales provided for the notice to terminated services. A full 12 month notice period was provided to parents following a two year period of the service not providing any statutory entitled service, hence effectively after delivering a three year period of loss making service, it was identified in the second year where at this stage local service providers and the school were consulted to



see if there was any option for the service to be provided commercially or via the school.

- Regarding siblings, it was noted that it was not necessary that younger siblings automatically received free transport if an older sibling was at the same school due to the pattern of allocations being different during a particular year. Secondary school allocations, and the priority a pupil would have for a place at the school, regarding eligibility for free transport, was considered based on the nearest school where a place could have been secured. If the nearest school was over three miles, then the child was automatically entitled to school transport.
- A question was raised over disputes between parents and LCC over mileage from home to school measurements, the committee heard that the measurement provided by LCC was a definitive answer and undertaken on a bespoke mapping system which included the forementioned safe routes.
- Members were informed that it was not a statutory requirement to provide transport to the nearest faith school.
- It was queried if there was any extra supported provided to students when travelling to school in extreme weather. Members heard that there were no extra provisions taken to support children in their commute during extreme weather.
- Concerning changes in road systems, for example the removal of a footpath, members questioned if safe routes were appropriately updated. It was explained new mapping software was fed into through the Ordnance Survey, it was also noted that parents often brought hazards to attention.
- It was confirmed there was provision in the Home to School Transport Policy for children with medical difficulties.

Resolved: That the following recommendations be shared with the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport:

- i. Consideration be given to investing in software that can provide tracking data on passenger routes, use of passes and how often routes are used to better manage, monitor, and rationalise the services provided in relation to school transport.
- ii. Further information to be provided on how risks are mitigated in relation to standees on buses.



5. Education Attainment Data

The Chair welcomed County Councillor Jayne Rear, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, Julie Bell, Interim Director of Education, Skills and Culture and Aby Hardy, Head of Education Improvement to the meeting.

The report circulated with the agenda pack provided a summary of the attainment of children and young people in Lancashire in the 2023 Summer exam season.

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

- A query was raised into what support was being offered to pupils with communication difficulties which could possibly result in behavioural issues resulting in an increase in suspensions and exclusions. It was explained that there was an Inclusion Engagement Support Service that could go into schools to support pupils with EHCP and Send support for immediate support, this service had been in place since September 2023. Behaviour consultants who developed a comprehensive training programme for schools but could also attend schools to deliver Twilights and work with staff and pupils. There was also a lot of speech and language support being provided in primary schools.
- It was confirmed for students entering mid-year, they were supported by the Equality and Diversity Team for ELA tutoring as well as support for families new to the country. It was also noted that advancements in technology had aided non-English-speaking children.
- The committee raised a query as to whether Lancashire as a county received any extra funding after Covid to help bridge the attainment gap, as it was noted that Lancashire was a region that spent a longer time in Covid restrictions and therefore children were absent from school for longer. It was explained to the committee that the county had received Covid catchup tuition which had been available to all local authorities, but no other extra funding had been received.
- The committee questioned what was being done to raise the attainment of districts such as Burnley and Pendle where levels of deprivation were lower so ultimately the attainment of Lancashire overall would increase. It was noted that any school not achieving what they needed to and was considered vulnerable came under schools requiring additional support. These schools were supported by the Monitoring and Intervention Team who go into the school and work with the school to deliver everything the school needed to improve for example in areas such as a SEND audit, disadvantage, quality of teaching, relationships with social care etc. Regarding the quality of teaching, it was noted that many schools were now receiving Good and Outstanding OFSTED judgements, and it was also an issue between the crossover of other services, it was noted that the Family Hubs service had really helped to bridge some of the gaps. It was suggested that the relationship between



parents and school had deteriorated following Covid, and a report would come back the committee later in the year surrounding the new attendance strategy.

- It was confirmed the report contained data for all 628 Lancashire schools, excluding independent schools. It was further queried by the committee if figures were available on how many pupils with educational and healthcare needs stayed an extra year in school. It was explained that the majority of EHCP pupils were taught in their own year group, and any pupil attending a special needs school would have their own specific curriculum and many of those schools taught pupils up to 19 years of age before they moved onto further education or work.

Resolved: That the following recommendations be shared with the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills:

- i. When available, the 2024 Attainment Data Tables to be made available to members of the committee.
- ii. Outcomes of the Disadvantaged Conference with schools to be shared with the committee once available.

6. Work Programme 2023/24

The committee received a report which provided an update on the work programme of the Children, Families and Skills Scrutiny Committee and a response to recent recommendations of the committee.

Resolved: That the Children, Families and Skills Scrutiny Committee work programme be noted.

7. Urgent Business

None.

8. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Children, Families and Skills Scrutiny Committee will be held on Wednesday 13 March 2024 at 10.30 am in Committee Room 'C' – The Duke of Lancaster Room, County Hall, Preston.

H MacAndrew
Director of Law and Governance

County Hall
Preston



