

Lancashire County Council

Meeting of both the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committees

Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday, 7th July, 2020 at 10.30 am in Skype Meeting

Present:

County Councillor Andrea Kay (Chair)

County Councillors

C Wakeford	J Potter
M Dad	M Salter
A Cheetham	D T Smith
S Clarke	D Stansfield
B Dawson	P Steen
J Eaton	N Hennessy
A Gardiner	L Beavers
J Mein	I Brown
J Molineux	P V Greenall
E Nash	M Tomlinson

Co-opted members

Dr Sam Johnson, Representing CE Schools
Oliver Moores, Youth Council Representative
Councillor Louise Edge, Children's Partnership Board
– Hyndburn, Ribble Valley, Rossendale

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Christine Melia, Mrs Janet Hamid and Mr John Withington.

2. Disclosure of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None were disclosed.

3. Minutes of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee meeting held 26 February 2020

Resolved: The minutes of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 26 February 2020 were agreed.

4. Minutes of the Education Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 3 March 2020

Resolved: The minutes of the Education Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 3 March 2020 were agreed.

5. Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic in Lancashire

The Chair welcomed Edwina Grant, OBE, Executive Director of Education and Children's Services; Hilary Fordham, Chief Operating Officer, Morecambe Bay CCG; and Sharon Hubber, Director of Children's Social Care to the meeting. Also welcomed to the meeting were Ambarin and Oscar (Youth Parliament representatives).

Ambarin and Oscar gave the committee a verbal presentation on their experiences during lockdown. Members were advised that young people had experienced an increase in mental health and wellbeing issues like stress, loneliness and worry. Also there were feelings of boredom and feeling trapped.

The Childhood Trust had reported that the lockdown had been extremely difficult for children as they no longer had access to support at school or other organisations.

It was reported that many young people were talking to their friends online but young people without social media were finding lockdown difficult not being able to see their friends.

It was felt that the impact of the lockdown had increased the level of anxiety for pupils. It was reported that they felt they were not receiving proper education and there was panic and confusion as they did not know what their exams would be like.

Members were advised that pupils who were at school felt trapped. There was no movement as they had to remain at their desks. This affected primary school children more as they did not understand the situation.

One of the biggest problems for young people was motivating themselves and putting the work in with children not going back to school until September feeling they were falling behind. Members felt that motivation was an important issue and enquired if there had been particular support measures from schools that had worked well. Some schools had set up online support using Microsoft Teams where pupils were able to communicate with their teachers. Another program used was Show My Homework. There was also recorded lessons for pupils. It was felt schools should increase their care of online learning. There should also be catch up sessions for pupils who did not do the work during lockdown.

It was reported that there was uncertainty amongst Year 11 pupils regarding GCSEs and how everyone was going to be graded and what going to college would be like. Another problem for Year 10 pupils was that they were having to

teach themselves some of the course modules and concerns that they might not understand the work or interpret it incorrectly.

It was stated that there is a need to get pupils back to school as quickly as possible without causing a second outbreak in Lancashire.

The committee enquired if there was any way it could ask the young people of Lancashire what they would like. It was pointed out that many schools had websites that questionnaires could be sent to. The committee could also communicate with the youth councils. The committee asked if officers could look into this. It was also felt that the county council could write to the schools asking them to engage more with the pupils online.

It was stated that children and young people would definitely benefit from extra wellbeing support. The committee was informed that some schools were already doing wellbeing checks. The committee stated that other schools must be encouraged to do this.

The committee praised and thanked Ambarin and Oscar for their presentation.

Edwina Grant OBE and Hilary Fordham provided the committee with a presentation outlining perceptions of the experiences of children and young people, and headlines from the operation of service during the Covid-19 emergency period. The presentation dealt with education issues, social care and related issues, family policy including free school meals, and, a summary of going forward. The presentation is attached at the end of the minutes.

Comments and questions raised by the committee were as follows:

- As well as mental health issues, obesity in children and young people during the lockdown was another area of concern.
- It was expected that there would be a significant increase in mental health referrals. Health and wellbeing materials had been developed for online support for young people. Schools had primary mental health workers in place. In addition it was reported that work was being undertaken through the CAMHS service to identify different ways to support and increase NHS contact through online technology in readiness for the anticipated rise in service use.
- Members enquired what the figures were in Lancashire for pupils who had done little or no work since lockdown. The county council were in touch with schools every day and gave its support if asked to. Ofsted would be going into schools and asking the questions around online learning. The county council had offered schools online learning advice.
- It was noted that laptops for vulnerable children had been slow to arrive but the number of laptops being delivered was improving.
- There were concerns over how to avoid the school rush hour and how could parents get their children to school safely. The Government had recommended staggered start times but there were concerns over the use

of public transport. The county council was waiting on guidance from the DfE. Good guidance had been given to schools on risk assessment.

- The committee enquired about how certain Lancashire County Council was about getting all the children back to school in September. Government advice had come out regarding this and every school had to do a risk assessment before they reopened for every pupil to come back in September.
- The county council would talk to head teachers about making them aware of the parents' working situation, if they were working from home or going back to work.
- Members enquired if the county council was offering support for distancing in schools. Guidance had been developed regarding the accommodation situation in schools. It was reported however that there were potential staffing issues around breaking children down into small groups.
- Uncertainty was a concern. With the right support and help children would be able to catch up. Morale and aspirations had to be kept high. Talks were taking place on restricting the curriculum to the core subjects in order to catch up.
- Lancashire County Council had contributed to a national report regarding how young people had been affected by the lockdown. 80 young people from Lancashire, who were looked after or had been looked after had also contributed to this national report. The report would be going to the Corporate Parenting Board.
- The rules for clinically vulnerable children were the same as those for clinically vulnerable older people. Regarding children who had an Educational Health and Care Plan, each had to have an individual, personalised risk assessment to ensure the correct PPE were in place and that the right individual arrangements were in place in order for parents to be comfortable with sending their child back to school.
- The committee enquired about what provisions and support were in place for before school and after school clubs so that parents could return to work. It was confirmed that the county council was promoting provisions for these clubs as long as they were safe.
- It was confirmed that, on 30 June the county council, through its Health and Wellbeing Board, published its Outbreak Management Plan. The authority was very clear on what to do if schools got an outbreak. In addition, there would be Public Health Advisors in place to advise the schools.

The Chair thanked Edwina Grant, OBE, Executive Director of Education and Children's Services; Hilary Fordham, Chief Operating Officer, Morecambe Bay CCG; and Sharon Hubber, Director of Children's Social Care, for attending.

Resolved: That;

- i. The information provided as part of the presentations be noted.

- ii. Key areas for the committee to review
- iii. Going forward, the education aspirations for Lancashire's children and young people and the next steps for children's social care be included as part of the work programme.

6. Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2020/21

The committee was informed that a single combined work programme for all of the Lancashire County Council scrutiny committees was currently being formulated. A draft copy of the work programme was presented.

The topics included were identified at a work planning workshop for members of the Internal Scrutiny Committee held on 29 May 2020.

The committee felt it was important to get the perspectives of service users, especially from young people and parents for a future meeting. Particularly through lockdown and what was needed to catch up on their education. It was important to find out what support was needed for children, young people and parents. It was also vital to look at children's social care.

Resolved: That;

- i. The perspectives of children, young people and their parents be obtained as part of the work programme going forward in order to understand the support needed for them.
- ii. The Scrutiny Officers be delegated the development and delivery of this work programme, identifying appropriate methods of scrutiny, in consultation with the Chairs.
- iii. The work programmes (2019/20) of the current Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committees be temporarily suspended and for these to be kept under review.

7. Urgent Business

There were no items of Urgent Business.

8. Date of the Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee was due to be held at 10:30am on Wednesday 2 September 2020.

The next meeting of the Education Scrutiny Committee was due to be held at 10:30am on Tuesday 10 November 2020.

L Sales
Director of Corporate Services

County Hall
Preston

Experiences of Covid-19

Joint Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee 7 July

Edwina Grant, OBE, Executive Director of Education and Children's Services

Hilary Fordham, Chief Operating Officer, Morecambe Bay CCG

Sharon Hubber, Director of Children's Social Care

To discuss perceptions of the experience of children and headlines from the operation of service during the Covid-19 emergency period

Structure of presentation

- Brief introduction
- Education issues
- Social care and related issues
- Family policy including free school meals
- Going forward summary
- Questions

Introduction

- The service has shown some significant strengths in the Covid-19 period. This presentation will show both strengths and challenges.
- The current situation may exacerbate issues children, young people and families were already facing if they were poor, had poor housing and insecure work - there are a number of national report coming out.
- Questions asked about exposed inequalities in children's access to technology, opportunities to learn online, safe space to play, food and availability of transport to allow for social distancing.
- Time will tell if these issues are fully evidenced in Lancashire.

Schools and other educational settings

Positives

- Approximately 10,400 children prioritised for attendance at school before wider re-opening
- Online working well for some children
- School's safeguarding worked well in partnership with local authority, Regional Schools Commissioner and other partners.
- Morale stayed high

Challenges

- Reduced access may impact on child development and possible decline in educational outcomes
- Pressure on families with a particular impact on children with SEND
- Lack of clarity about arrangements for exams, disruption to apprenticeship starts and youth employment
- Early years sector viability concerns

Social care and related issues

Positives

- Social workers, early help and other staff adapted to working remotely very quickly
- Children have been supported sympathetically when talking about feelings and voluntary sector support continued throughout
- Preparation for family safeguarding and other work on trauma informed practice prepared staff well
- Sickness absence was low in staff teams which allowed us to support children well
- Family courts functioned well 'virtually' as did visits using technology

Challenges

- National research shows young people have been anxious during this time and are also concerned about the future
- Children are possibly feeling isolated and suffering from grief – likely increase in referrals to CAMHS
- Difficult for children to speak openly about fears when using technology at home
- Pressure on parents when home learning and dealing with family issues
- Adolescents not able to congregate which is an important part of their development

Family policy including free school meals

Positives

- Significant co-ordinated effort from staff to get food to families in the early days – vouchers settled down eventually
- Greater awareness of family issues nationally
- The council did not use easement in the relevant Acts regarding social care and SEND unless absolutely necessary
- Partnerships worked well across the system

Challenges

- Concern that families not previously affected by job loss may now be
- There were early challenges accessing free school meal vouchers – later resolved
- Children in poor housing needed a particular close eye on them
- Possible increased likelihood of challenges for families going forward post Covid-19

Going forward

- Need to respond to predicted rise in referrals in autumn term
- Review health issues – mental health/obesity
- Council will have the opportunity to contribute to the National Care Review
- Many children in care and care leavers said they have had more time to be with their carers
- Need for even greater partnership working with health on mental health issues
- Strong positive – strengths of partnerships and ways of working

Questions

Member's views/thoughts on which aspects they would like to discuss in more detail at future meetings