

Lancashire County Council

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday, 9th November, 2021 at 10.30 am in Committee Room 'A' - The Tudor Room, County Hall, Preston

Present:

County Councillor Andrea Kay (Chair)

County Councillors

N Aziz	S Malik
J Berry	M Salter
S Barnes	J Shedwick
A Cheetham	A Sutcliffe
S Hind	R Swarbrick
T Hurn	R Woollam
S Jones	B Yates
N Khan	

Co-opted members

Daniel Ballard, Representing CE Schools
Mr John Withington, Representing Parent Governors
(Primary)

County Councillors Noordad Aziz and John Shedwick replaced County Councillors Jennifer Mein and Stephen Clarke respectively.

Also welcomed to the meeting were Mairead Graham and Mariam Hassouna, representing the Youth Council.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Mrs Janet Hamid, Co-Optee Voting Member, representing Parent Governors (Secondary).

2. Disclosure of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None were disclosed.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 5 October 2021

Resolved: The minutes from the meeting held on 5 October 2021 were confirmed as an accurate record.

4. Draft Education Strategy 2022-2025

The Chair welcomed to the meeting Delyth Mathieson, Head of Service Education Improvement.

The report to the committee presented the draft Lancashire Education Strategy 2022-25 for consideration. The Strategy was due to be reported to a future meeting of Cabinet for approval.

The Education Strategy set out the authority's priorities for Education for the next three years. It was anticipated that an annual report would be presented to the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee against the key priorities within the Strategy.

The Strategy linked with the following Corporate Priorities which were agreed at Cabinet on 7 October 2021:

- Delivering better services
- Caring for the vulnerable
- Protecting our environment
- Supporting economic growth

The ambition of the Strategy was to support integration across services so that barriers to learning could be overcome, particularly in vulnerable groups.

The Strategy focused on five priorities aligned to the four corporate priorities. These were:

- Improved outcomes in early years
- Further reduce exclusions, both permanent and suspensions
- Address risks associated with rising numbers of Elective Home Education (EHE) where this was not in the best interests of the child
- Improve outcomes for vulnerable groups including those eligible for Free School Meals, Children in Need, children with a Care Plan, and Children Looked After, as well as those with SEN support and those with an EHCP
- Increase the number of children and young people in Education, Employment or Training (EET)

In terms of delivering improvement it was important that the county council works in collaboration with its partners including locality boards. The county council also had to work proactively with its district councils and governor services.

A current recommendation as part of this Strategy was for an annual report to be submitted to the committee. Once this Strategy had been approved at Cabinet, it was confirmed that the annual report would be included as part of the committee's work programme.

Comments and questions raised were as follows:

- It was pointed out that mental health and wellbeing was highlighted in the report but was not mentioned in the five priorities. Members were assured that mental health and wellbeing was threaded through everything that the county council was doing. It was also discussed at locality boards and through the Integrated Care Partnerships (ICPs).
- Members were informed that there would be an ongoing development of the Strategy and plans would be driven by the locality boards as each locality board had a different set of needs for their area.
- There was concern about what success would look like regarding suspended and excluded pupils. It was highlighted that there were a series of development programmes in place for staff in schools in terms of exclusions and suspensions. In addition, there were behaviour hubs and inclusion hubs in place to provide support and guidance. Schools had their own behaviour policies which they set. The county council provided a model policy but it was a decision for the school whether to use it.
- There had been an initial rise in Elective Home Education (EHE) when the pandemic started but these numbers were reducing slightly now. The committee enquired if there were certain groups in the community or particular areas where the rise had increased.
- Members enquired if the pandemic had opened up opportunities for children studying at home. Members were informed that there were a number of online learning provisions available. There were also networks available which provided support and guidance for parents. However for parents who have elected to home educate, remote learning was not available.
- Lancashire County Council had worked proactively with all of its schools during the pandemic regardless if they were maintained schools, academies or independent schools. Advice and guidance had been given to all schools. The county council had worked in partnership with the Department for Education and had also worked proactively with children's services teams, facilities teams and health teams.
- Members enquired about what level of authority the county council had regarding academies. There were academy chief executives and head teachers who sat on the authority's locality boards. The county council worked in partnership with all of Lancashire's schools including academies. Partnership boards had representatives from academies and maintained schools as well as other partners. The locality boards fed into the partnership boards.
- High quality of nursery provision was of paramount importance to Lancashire County Council. The authority worked proactively with private nursery owners as well as maintained nurseries.
- It was important that the county council worked collaboratively with its partners, including locality boards, so that it could support children in making the right choices.
- In terms of how the Strategy would deliver improvement there was a collaboration between the services within the county council combined

with the services and partners within the Team around the Schools and Settings and Locality Boards which would deliver the aspirations articulated within the Strategy and realise the shared ambition for all children and young people set out within the vision statement.

- The locality boards were part of the mechanism around how the authority delivered the Strategy. It was important to bring together the right people and sharing data information.
- There was concern over preparation for adulthood. It was highlighted that the county council worked proactively with Further Education colleges to ensure there were lots of different routes available for young people other than university. They were looking at traineeships and apprenticeships.
- Members felt that career guidance should be provided by schools and the curriculum content should be reviewed.
- The committee enquired about the duty of schools regarding equality and diversity. It was confirmed that equality and diversity underpinned everything that was embedded in all of the Education Act.

The following actions were agreed:

- Committee members to receive a copy of the model behaviour policy provided by the county council.
- Tracking data from the districts on the number of children in EHE would be provided to members.
- A Bite Size Briefing or information to members around different levels of authority the county council has with maintained schools and academies with a request for clarity on the local authority's statutory duties to be included in the Strategy.
- To identify a package of data to be provided to committee members to include EHE numbers, areas and levels of deprivation.

Resolved: That the;

- i. Draft strategy be considered, and priorities supported.
- ii. Request for an annual reporting cycle through the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee be supported.

5. Draft School Place Planning Strategy 2022-25

The Chair welcomed to the meeting Mel Ormesher, Head of Asset Management.

The report presented explained that as an education authority for Lancashire, the county council had a range of statutory duties to fulfil. The county council's ambition to provide good access, quality and outcomes in education was set out in the Lancashire Education Strategy 2022-25.

The School Planning Strategy 2022-25 delivered on this ambition with the aim to provide the right number of school places, in the right areas, at the right time to

meet need. It set out a series of priorities for improvement, areas of growth and reduction in the need for school places, and areas for future action.

The Strategy supported the Corporate Priorities for 2021-2025:

- Delivering better services
- Caring for the vulnerable
- Protecting our environment
- Supporting economic growth

Lancashire County Council had a strategic responsibility for commissioning education provision in the county. It was its statutory duty to provide a school place for every Lancashire child who wanted one. The focus of the Strategy was the provision of mainstream school places for children and young people aged between 4 and 16 and aligned closely with the Inclusion Strategy for children with special education needs and also the Alternative Provision Strategy.

There were 628 schools in Lancashire of which 482 were primaries and 82 were secondaries which provided mainstream school places across the county. This Strategy was primarily concerned with ensuring that there enough places at primary and secondary schools, identifying where more were needed and where in some cases a planned reduction was necessary.

Lancashire had a mixed economy of schools (academy, voluntary aided, voluntary controlled, foundation, grammar, etc) where many determined their own admission arrangements. This relied on effective collaboration with and between maintained schools and academies in the county to ensure sufficiency of places.

An increasing number of schools were becoming academies which operated independently from the county council. New academies had to be part of an academy trust, which were operated by not-for-profit companies and were funded directly by the DfE. The county council would cooperate with the conversion of any school which was becoming an academy, whether this was a conversion directed by the Secretary of State for Education, or where the governing body of a school chose to do so.

Comments and questions raised were as follows:

- The county council would reduce the number of children missing education by improving the time taken to secure a place for in-year admissions. This would be managed through a new pupil access system that came in to effect in November 2021, to quicken the pace at which pupils were able to secure a place in a Lancashire school.
- Learning from success in other parts of the country, the authority would adopt a cultural relocation model of support for families, to gain a sense of belonging and the opportunity to settle. Through the principle of warranted variation, the authority has implemented this way of working in East Lancashire initially, to reduce the cultural shock of relocation and its wider

impact on a whole family and effects that could hinder educational achievement and wider aspects of wellbeing. This new provision came into place in November 2021.

- Members were informed that the area in which a child or young person had priority for a school was known as a Geographical Priority Area (GPA). Living within the GPA did not guarantee a place within a particular school but offered a degree of priority. GPA reviews were carried out annually to reflect changes in an area.
- The county council had committed to an ambitious carbon reduction strategy. In developing school sufficiency projects it would identify opportunities for decarbonising buildings and delivering sustainable school accommodation.
- In terms of protecting the environment there was concern over the expansion of schools and more parents driving their children to work. There were emerging problems outside schools regarding car parking. This had an impact on the surrounding neighbourhoods as well as air pollution.
- There was an opportunity for schools to green their car parks by putting in electric charging points. This would show that Lancashire's education sites were doing something positive.
- Opportunities to deliver traditional models of school expansion were limited by site constraints or the operation of Private Finance Initiative (PFI) contracts to deliver building services. The county council would consider the implications of such constraints and identify the conditions which might mean a greater focus on the delivery of new schools.
- If the county council wanted to expand a school in a PFI setting it would have to work within the mechanism of the PFI contracts.
- It was felt there needed to be a clear plan around innovation projects.
- Regarding school planning areas, the committee was informed that they were reviewed annually, and revisions shared with the DfE for approval. Most recently this had resulted in changes to planning areas in Burnley and Lancaster. The authority also considered places across district and planning area borders to ensure viability of existing schools, as well as a number of places taken up by pupils out of the county and vice versa.
- Concerns were raised around the viability of planning applications and whether Lancashire County Council should be a statutory consultee particularly given that the county council had the statutory obligation to ensure sufficiency of school places. It was highlighted that there was a planning reform underway, and this was an opportunity for the authority to bid to be a statutory consultee.
- Concerns were raised that Section 106 monies did not apply to the refurbishment of older school establishments. It was highlighted that the monies were about sufficiency of places and not suitability. However, capital money was available for the maintenance of schools.

The following actions were agreed:

- Information on the annual review of GPAs to be provided to members.

- There was a request for ensuring school data, showing the challenges around school place assessments, was readily available for members twice a year.
- The committee asked for a possible Bite Size Briefings on the policy around Lancashire County Council's retention of its education assets and their disposal and on school parking provision.
- Information on the reorganisation of education estates to be made available for councillors.

Resolved: That the;

- Report presented be considered and noted.
- Information on Geographical Priority Areas be presented annually and data be made available on school place assessments twice a year.

6. Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2021/2022

The Committee received a report which provided information on the work programme for the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee.

The topics included in the work programme were identified at the work planning workshop held on 5 July 2021 and at subsequent meetings.

Members were informed that the following topics were added as potential items to be included on the work programme:

- Child Poverty (date TBC)
- PHSE and life planning in schools (date TBC)
- Education catch up funding (February 2022)

It was noted that the Lancashire Youth Council had been working on a child poverty campaign for quite a while and would be interested in working with the county council regarding this.

Also a request was made to look at the financial budgets for children and young people in care of the authority when they started to look ahead regarding education and apprenticeships. It was agreed that this could form part of the item on looked after children due to come to the January meeting of the committee.

Resolved: That;

- The report presented be noted.
- Additional topics identified be included in the work programme.

7. Urgent Business

There were no items of Urgent Business.

8. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee will be held on Tuesday 7 December 2021 at 10.30am at County Hall, Preston.

L Sales
Director of Corporate Services

County Hall
Preston