

Lancashire County Council

Children, Families and Skills Scrutiny Committee

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday, 9th September, 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

S Barnes	R Woollam
A Cheetham	N Khan
L Cox	P Rigby
A Hindle	S Clarke
T Hurn	M Salter
S Jones	J Couperthwaite
J Potter	

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from John Withington (Parent Governor representative).

2. Constitution, Membership and Terms of Reference

Members were presented with a report on the constitution, membership and terms of reference for the Committee.

Resolved: That the Constitution, Membership and Terms of Reference be noted.

3. Disclosure of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

No interests were declared.

4. Minutes of the Meeting Held on 15 May 2024

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 15 May 2024 be agreed as an accurate record.

5. Report from the Service on the Ombudsman Report

The Chair welcomed Paul Turner, Director for Education, Culture and Skills, Aby Hardy, Head of Education Improvement, and CC Jayne Rear, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills to the meeting.

On 21 April 2024 the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman upheld a complaint regarding the delayed issuing of a child's Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), which impacted on their mental health. One of the actions of the Ombudsman was to share the outcome with the relevant Scrutiny Committee and the full decision from the Ombudsman was brought to the Committee at its meeting on 15 May 2024.

Members were presented with a more detailed report on findings of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman report and the actions the service is taken as a result of the report.

Members were invited to ask questions and outlined below is a summary of the discussion held.

- With regard to a query raised on recruitment of staff to bridge the current staffing gaps, it was reported that agency staff continued to be utilised. However, demand for services remained high.
- In response to a query raised on the management of the oversight procedure, members were assured that a tracking system was in place for each caseload to manage timeliness. Further to this, ongoing work on management capacity and staff training particularly around case law had been identified. As a result, there were three SEND Team Managers in place, sickness levels have reduced, and supervision was being undertaken with staff to help manage any caseload challenges.
- Members were advised that a review of the SEND helpline was being undertaken to maximise effectiveness of the service.
- On a query raised regarding the number of complaints outstanding, it was reported that the majority of these were now being handled. Further detail could be provided to members on the number of complaints to the Ombudsman and the cost to the council as a result of these complaints.
- With regards to training, members were assured that baseline training was identified for each staff member around Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP). In addition, a Policy and Practice Manager was in place and currently in the process of recruiting to a Development Manager post. Further to this, it was reported that there were additional training courses in place for staff to access, as well as continual monitoring of training needs to ensure that training remains up to date, and relevant to the service need.
- It was reported that it was commonplace for schools to review EHCP's to support the SENCO's to review and amend where required. Further work was ongoing to explore all avenues with regards to reviewing EHCP's.
- With regards to the monitoring of the SEND helpline, the Committee was advised that key performance indicators (KPI's) were critical and were being further developed to ensure that the helpline remains fit for purpose.



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

- i. A breakdown of data regarding how many complaints from 2023-24 remain outstanding, including how many go to tribunal and associated costs to the council.
- ii. Information on KPIs and data relating to the SEND helpline to be included on future reports

6. SEND Update Report

Members were presented with a SEND update report on the progress made in improving communications for families in the SEND process.

It was reported that the number of EHCP new assessments had doubled in the last two years and as a result it has been a challenge to meet the required statutory deadlines. The report provided the Committee with an update on actions undertaken to date to further support communication to parents and carers.

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

- With regards to a query on the different ways that information is produced, it was reported that the SEND code of practice was available and outlined in the SEND offer webpage. However, it was identified that some information formats could present a challenge for parents and carers to understand and it was agreed that a review could be undertaken on how information was presented.
- On a question raised around the continuity of staff, it was reported that a case manager was assigned to each case as well as a team manager assigned from the colleges. In addition, the College's Forum have been included in conversations to further support.
- On the subject of escalating EHCP enquiries, members were advised that this was in part due to the increasing complexity of education need as well as changes to existing plans. It was reported that an enhanced use of technology was under review to support with managing the number of enquiries and in a timely manner.
- With regards to satisfaction of service provision, it was reported that this was emerging as a process and was being taken forward. However, it was established that more could be done, and further work was being undertaken. Members felt that the monitoring of the satisfaction of service should be included in future reports.
- From a query raised on the capacity and balance of specialist and administrative staff balance required to support the SEND helpline, it was reported that there was a need to understand who needs to support the helpline based on the queries identified, to ensure that queries are dealt with



the right person and right time. Further information could be provided to members.

- Members were assured that SEND advice could be provided through the Family Hubs. In addition, support to helpline staff included a comprehensive training package which included wellbeing.
- With regard to access to the SEND helpline, it was reported that the service were currently in the process of identifying options to provide a form to complete online rather than via the telephone.
- It was confirmed that engagement was ongoing with service users and that a young person could contact the helpline themselves if they had concerns and would like to advocate themselves.

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

- i. Further detail to be provided to the Committee on service satisfaction levels.
- ii. Review be undertaken on the information currently available to parents and carers on the issuing on EHC Plans to ensure accessibility.
- iii. Review be undertaken of support from the faith and community sector in disseminating information relating to EHC Plans.

7. Work Programme, Actions and Assurances Update

Members were provided with a report outlining the new work programme for 2024/25, as well as an update on actions and assurances.

The Committee was advised that the SEND Strategy 2025/28 was due to be presented at this meeting. However, it was felt that as the strategy required significant input from partners, and as such a meeting between partners had not yet been held at the time of the Committee meeting, the SEND Strategy would be best placed to come to a future meeting of the Committee.

As such it was agreed that a first draft of the strategy would be provided for the November meeting, with a view to presenting a more final version at the January 2025 meeting of the Committee.

Resolved: That

- i. The work programme for 2024/25 as at Appendix 'A' be noted.
- ii. The Cabinet Member response to recommendations, as at Appendix 'B' be noted.
- iii. Reports for the next meeting of the Committee in November be confirmed.



- iv. Information provided as part of the actions and assurances update at Appendix 'C' be reviewed.
- v. The SEND Strategy reviews be included on the work programme for the November and January meetings.

8. Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

9. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Children's, Families and Skills Scrutiny Committee is due to take place on Wednesday 6 November at 10.30am in Committee Room C – The Duke of Lancaster Room, County Hall, Preston.

H MacAndrew
Director of Law and Governance

County Hall
Preston

