

Lancashire County Council

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday, 9th February, 2021 at 10.30 am in Teams Virtual Meeting

Present:

County Councillor Andrea Kay (Chair)

County Councillors

M Dad	J Mein
Mrs S Charles	E Nash
A Cheetham	J Potter
S Clarke	J Purcell
J Eaton BEM	M Salter
A Gardiner	D T Smith
N Hennessy	P Steen
S Malik	

Co-opted members

Dr Sam Johnson, Representing CE Schools

1. Apologies

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

2. Disclosure of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

County Councillor Peter Steen declared a non-pecuniary interest as he was a governor of Bacup Maintained Nursery.

County Councillor Jennifer Mein declared a non-pecuniary interest as she was a governor at Ribbleton Avenue Infant and Nursey School, St. Ignatius Primary School and Preston College.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 13 January 2021

Resolved: The minutes from the meeting held on 13 January 2021 were confirmed as an accurate record.

4. Early Years sector – impact on private providers supporting vulnerable children and families

The Chair welcomed to the meeting Edwina Grant, Executive Director Education and Children's Services; Andrew Cadman, Interim Head of Early Years; and

Peter Hindle, Representing Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) Early Years Sector.

A presentation was delivered on the Early Years Sector and the impact on private providers supporting vulnerable children and families.

The committee was informed that Lancashire had 1407 Early Years providers but the county received a historically low rate of Department for education funding for 2, 3 and 4 year olds. A key priority for the Early Years Service was to address the schools attainment levels.

Early Years providers continued to operate in a challenging financial climate. The Schools Forum had agreed a one-off payment to assist with PPE supplies. It was noted that there was a reduced take up of 2 year old Early Education Funding especially in areas of deprivation. An enhanced action plan would be delivered to reflect local demands for Early Education Funding.

The Early Years strategy was approved in November 2020 and would last until November 2023. Outcome measures would be sourced and populated to drive the strategy forward.

A key priority for the Early Years Service was to improve the low ' Good Level of Development ' score for children transferring from Early Years settings to formal education.

A consultation would hopefully be launched at the end of February 2021 looking at future delivery models for Maintained School nurseries. Private, voluntary and independent providers as well as Maintained Nursery Schools would be consulted on the financial vision for the whole sector.

Peter Hindle read a statement to paint a picture of the state of the PVI sector to the committee.

It was stated that the Private, Voluntary and Independent Early Years Sector (PVI) faced pressures from underfunding, increasing child needs, recruitment challenges and the Covid pandemic.

The PVI sector had responded well during the pandemic. The sector had been open for key workers and vulnerable children in the first lock down and then fully open for all, in the second and third lockdowns. It was noted however the PVI sector workforce were on or just above minimum wage leading to staff leaving the sector. PVI sector settings in deprived areas were considered most at risk now.

A lot of parents were not taking the opportunity to engage in childcare despite it being safer than many other activities. The sector was seeing low occupancy and missed opportunities for child development. The sector was also seeing an increasing number of children with special needs.

Comments and questions raised were as follows:

- The national trend showed that there were now less PVI providers delivering services. Recently the overall number of registered placings in Lancashire had remained stable. Ofsted data on the closures and openings of PVI providers could be provided to members in the future.
- The committee was informed that there was high quality childcare being delivered in Lancashire.
- If there was a drop off in two year old children taking up places this would have an impact on them when they moved into primary education. Lancashire must respond to the immediate challenges of the transition from the Early Years Sector into formal education.
- The 'Good Level of Development' measurement of the children would no longer be mandatory from September 2021. It would then be up to the schools to decide how they measured children from the Early Years Sector. In terms of funding, the early years sector required both a catch-up payment as well as a minimum wage increase.
- Funding was a challenge for the sector.. There was only a one-year funding in 2020 for Lancashire's maintained nurseries.
- Lancashire County Council had committed itself to engage with the PVI sector regarding supporting children with Special Educational Needs.
- When a child arrived at an Early Years setting, early intervention was vital. Capturing all the information about the child and the family was important.
- It was important that the Early Help Team worked closely with Early Years providers.
- Lancashire County Council and the Schools Forum showed a great deal of recognition for what the Early Years Sector did.
- It was suggested that Mr Hindle's statement be used to formulate the basis of a letter to write to the Secretary of State for Education and all Lancashire MPs to highlight the circumstances currently faced by the early years sector and the need for equitable funding.

Resolved: That the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee recommends that the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People and Schools give consideration to writing to the Secretary of State for Education and all Lancashire MPs to highlight the circumstances currently faced by the early years sector and the need for equitable funding.

5. Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2020/2021

The Committee received a report which provided information on the single combined work programme drafted for all of the Lancashire County Council scrutiny committees.

Resolved: That the report presented be noted.

6. Urgent Business

There were no items of Urgent Business.

7. Date of Next Meeting

The next virtual meeting of the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee would take place on Thursday 11 March 2021 at 10.30am.

L Sales
Director of Corporate Services

County Hall
Preston