

Lancashire County Council

Children, Families and Skills Scrutiny Committee

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday, 20th September, 2023 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	T Hurn
A Cheetham	N Khan
J Couperthwaite	J Potter
L Cox	R Woollam
A Hindle	D Westley

Co-opted members

Daniel Ballard, Representing RC Schools

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from County Councillor Stewart Jones, County Councillor Peter Britcliffe, and County Councillor Samara Barnes.

2. Constitution, Membership and Terms of Reference

Resolved: That the following be noted;

- i. The appointment of County Councillor Sue Hind as Chair and County Councillor Mark Clifford as Deputy Chair of the Children, Families and Skills Scrutiny Committee for the 2023-24 municipal year.
- ii. The membership of the committee, following the county council's Annual Meeting held on 25 May 2023.
- iii. The Children, Families and Skills Scrutiny Committee Terms of Reference.

3. Disclosure of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

County Councillors Loraine Cox, David Westley, Anne Cheetham OBE JP, and Nweeda Khan disclosed non-pecuniary interests in Items 5 and 6 as they were Governors of Lancashire schools.

4. Minutes of the Meeting Held on 10 May 2023

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 10 May 2023 be confirmed as an accurate record.

5. Academisation / Commercialisation

The Chair welcomed County Councillor Jayne Rear, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills and Aby Hardy, Head of Service, Education Improvement to the meeting.

The committee was presented with an update on academisation of education in Lancashire and the impact of this on the service. The update also detailed how this impacted our traded services and how the county council were seeking to capitalise on these opportunities where possible.

A presentation was provided to the committee, a copy of which is attached to the minutes.

Comments and queries raised from the committee were as follows:

- Support from the county council was provided to any school that decided they wished to become an academy. There were no concerns that trusts were not managing to achieve improved Ofsted results, where they had picked up inadequate schools. Work was taking place to improve communication with academies, which included visits to academy trusts, meetings with Chief Executives of the trusts, and the Local Education Authority (LEA) had joined the CEO Networking Group.
- It was noted that last year, 30 schools were academised and this has been a tight timeframe. Within the current timeframe, the LEA would need to process 50-60 schools per year, however this would be very difficult for the DfE due to capacity issues. It was noted that the LEA requested funding from academies to provide support for the process, which could be used for additional workforce, if required. A more realistic timeframe would be between 2035 - 2040. Diocese schools were moving at pace, and it was expected that it would mainly be diocese schools converting over the next few years.
- It was explained that Lancashire started academisation approximately 5 years later than most areas, which was the reason why Lancashire had not progressed as much as other areas. The recent white paper had removed barriers and helped to speed along the process.
- Whilst the DfE preferred to move to a large trust model, there was no preference from the LEA. As part of the quality assurance process, trusts



were asked to rate where they were up to, to assist with the annual record of visits. Less engagement had been seen from larger trusts, the LEA met with the DfE bi-weekly and their advisors would flag any concerns during this meeting. Traded services at the county council also shared any concerns internally. It was acknowledged that the statutory duty for academies did lie with the DfE, so the LEA could only request that the DfE visit the trust.

- There was no evidence that moving to an academy had affected pupil safety. SEND children and any safeguarding concerns was the responsibility for the LEA, regardless of the type of school they attended.
- It was clarified that the difference between an academy school and a maintained school was that the running and governing structure was different. It was financed differently, and academies were accountable to the DfE, whilst maintained schools were accountable to the LEA.
- It was noted that from a headteachers perspective, headteachers had seen no need to rush to move towards academisation because there was a lot of support as a group from the local authority and they saw themselves as a large trust already and the model was working well.

Resolved: That;

- i. The Children, Families and Skills Scrutiny Committee thank the Education Improvement Service and support the Academisation and Commercialisation report.
- ii. An update on Academisation and Commercialisation be provided to the committee in 12 months.

6. Education Strategy Annual Report 2023

The Chair welcomed County Councillor Jayne Rear, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills and Aby Hardy, Head of Service, Education Improvement to the meeting.

The committee was presented with an update on the work of the Education Strategy for the academic year 2022/23. The report also provided an update on the wider work of the service and their next steps.

A presentation was provided to the committee, a copy of which is attached to the minutes.

Comments and queries from the committee were as follows:

- Children's Champions and Children and Family Wellbeing (CFW) workers worked alongside the Attendance Support Workers to support absenteeism and persistent absence. Every school had a CFW Community Senior to support children back into school. The Children's Champions had two roles: supporting persistent absenteeism by gaining the child's voice and to help reduce exclusions.



- The committee requested information on the raw numbers behind the 3.3% of pupils not obtaining a top three choice in secondary school admissions and a breakdown by district.
- Concerns were raised about the lack of data and the need to understand the reasons behind persistent absenteeism, schools did not record the reason for absence on the daily registers. However, the Attendance Support Workers would be asking these questions during their termly visits from all schools to help gather this data. Emotional based school avoidance and mental health had rocketed since the pandemic, and this had contributed to persistent absenteeism.
- Members were informed by the Youth Council about the UCLan Young Researchers Project, which was a questionnaire which would go out to both pupils and staff, to find out more information about how young people could be supported better in school life. The committee was also informed about the Participation Strategy, which consulted young people on attendance.
- Members expressed concern about the number of children being educated from home, as there was no data to analyse how children were performing. It was explained that this could be tracked if home educated children went onto further education by gaining information from colleges. It was requested that an update on Home Education and any available data on attainment be presented at a future committee meeting.
- The increase in permanent exclusions was seen to come from a variety of factors. It was noted that one of these was a significant rise in autistic children, which had not been identified or diagnosed before primary school age. The LEA was trying to ensure these children get the right support in place. Since the pandemic, other factors included speech, language, communication, and the social anxiety gap where children did not have much social interaction with people has meant a rise in anxiety and mental health issues. Other factors such as cost of living, wider mental health issues with the family and NHS waiting lists had all had an impact. Members requested the number of permanent exclusions be broken down by district and provided to the committee.
- It was identified that there was a wider conversation about how the LEA could make mainstream schools more inclusive and supportive for all children so that home education was not seen as a family's only option.
- There was interest from the committee in the Behaviour Consultants. It was acknowledged that they were often recruited from retired school's workforce and therefore they had significant experience. The costs a Behaviour Consultant would be circulated to the committee after the meeting. The committee were notified that there had been a behaviour seminar from the DfE at County Hall the day before the meeting.



- Members requested a structure plan to illustrate the different services which were offered to a school including their roles and responsibilities.

The Chair thanked the service for the report and the work performed to improve the service.

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

- An update on Home Education (to include the number of children who are home educated in Lancashire, and where possible, attainment data on what they go on to achieve e.g., at college) to be presented to the committee at the January 2024 meeting, or at an appropriate time.
- A piece of work to be completed to understand the reasons behind persistent absence, using data from the termly visits conducted by Attendance Workers, to be circulated to the committee when available.
- Details of the number of permanent exclusions, broken down by district, including details of any specific clusters and trends to be circulated to the committee.
- Details of the percentage and raw numbers of families not receiving any of their top three choices in secondary school admissions, and a breakdown by district to be circulated to the committee.
- Details of the cost to schools for a Behaviour Consultant to be circulated to the committee.
- A structure chart or diagram to illustrate the different services which were offered to schools, including their roles and responsibilities be circulated to the committee at an appropriate time.

7. Report on School Place Planning Inquiry Day

The committee received a summary report of the findings and recommendations from the School Place Planning (Mainstream and SEND) and School Transport Inquiry Day which was held on 21 June 2023.

Resolved: That the following recommendations be endorsed and shared with the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills and the Cabinet Members for Highways and Transport:

- A piece of work to take place on school place planning and how it has been distorted by various factors such as margin of error above 5% and new housing developments. Faith schools to also be included in this review.
- Consideration be given to what issues cause inaccurate forecasting when the margin of error is above 5%.



- iii. Consideration be given to what measures can be taken to ameliorate the destabilisation of established schools when the margin of error is approaching 5%.
- iv. The Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport to consider the reinstatement of the Safer Travel Unit, as and when the budget allows.
- v. A report be presented to the Children, Families and Skills committee setting out how we work closer with the district planning authorities to ensure that we maximise developer contributions. Progress to be reported and updated on a regular basis on the Dashboard.
- vi. Consideration be given to a review of the procurement process for school transport contracts in relation to environmentally friendly issues such as cleaner, low carbon and greener options and for this to be considered as part of the scoring process. Review to include types of fuel, vehicle age and plans for electric/hydrogen vehicles etc.
- vii. That the Education Improvement Team liaise with schools and consider using the safest routes (not necessarily the shortest) to schools when assessing eligibility for home to school transport applications and proximity of schools to homes.
- viii. That the School Transport Team and School Place Planning team have a closer working relationship with the aim of endeavouring to avoid an allocation of a place for which school transport is eligible but cannot be provided due to a lack of capacity.
- ix. That a review of School Transport take place in conjunction with the Public Transport Team, to consider how best to increase uptake of greener school transport options and bus use more widely though better service provision. The aim of the review will be to provide sufficient places for all those who want to use the bus (notwithstanding the fundamental statutory obligation to provide for children who qualify for home to school transport). The review could explore:
 - a. increased co-ordination of commercial, subsidised, school buses, and where appropriate, school-commissioned bus services;
 - b. making better use of existing combined resources,
 - c. more flexible fares for young people, and co-ordination with the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP)
- x. That the Cabinet Members for Education and Skills and Highways and Transport attend a meeting of the Lancashire Association of School Governing Bodies.



8. Work Programme 2023/24

The committee considered a report which provided information on the work programme for the Children, Families and Skills Scrutiny Committee.

It was noted that Local Elections were due to take place on Thursday 2 May 2024, the committee was due to meet on Wednesday 1 May 2024. Members asked if consideration could be given to reschedule the meeting on Wednesday 1 May 2024.

Resolved: That;

- i. The Children, Families and Skills Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2023/24 be noted.
- ii. The progress relating to several recommendations from the 2022/23 work programme be noted.

9. Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

10. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted the next meeting of the Children, Families and Skills Scrutiny Committee would take place on Wednesday 1 November 2023 at 10:30am in County Hall, Preston.

H MacAndrew
Director of Law and Governance

County Hall
Preston

