

Lancashire County Council

Children, Families and Skills Scrutiny Committee

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday, 15th May, 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

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

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from County Councillor Stewart Jones.

County Councillor Jeff Couperthwaite replaced County Councillor Steve Clarke for this meeting only.

2. Disclosure of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None.

3. Minutes of the Meeting Held on 13 March 2024

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 March 2024 be confirmed as an accurate record.

4. Strengthening the Youth Offer across Lancashire

The Chair welcomed County Councillor Cosima Towneley, Cabinet Member for Children and Families and Kathy Ashworth, Head of Service, Children and Family Wellbeing Service to the meeting.



The report and accompanying presentation circulated with the agenda pack provided an overview on the key developments which have strengthened the youth offer in Lancashire. The information included a review of the development of youth activities and services within the council and in partnership with the wider youth sector in Lancashire. Further to this, the report provided information on the specific youth provision available within the council's Targeted Youth Support provision.

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

- It was queried if there was a targeted approach and investment to reduce knife crime in young people. It was explained to the committee that the Contextual Safeguarding Team worked with young people at risk of knife crime and young people choosing to carry knives, it was also highlighted to members that the Violence Reduction Network in Lancashire carried out work specifically surrounding the impact of knife crime and gang affiliation in young people and the voluntary sector was also commissioned to target youth violence.
- The committee queried the current number of vacancies. Members heard the number of vacancies in youth work was relatively low across all positions, furthermore it was explained that the hardest position to recruit and retain was Assistant Youth Support Workers and this was due to the culture changing surrounding this work, and this was a nation-wide challenge in youth services. It was confirmed to members that there were currently 5.2 full time equivalent vacancies in youth work.
- Further to this, the committee queried if there was a strategy in place to address the difficulties with recruitment and retention. Members were informed that reports from other local authorities presented a similar level of challenge, this could be attributed to many universities no longer offering a youth work training programme.
- Regarding the part of the report detailing how all young people should have access to sufficient youth provision, the definition of sufficient access was queried, and it was further queried how sufficient access to provision was provided universally across Lancashire, specifically to rural areas. It was explained to members that there was no specific guidance around what was and was not 'sufficient' provision, the statutory duty for youth offer was light touch, however Lancashire had a very strong offer as a local authority and benchmarking figures against other local authorities showed that Lancashire was in the higher quartile of investment in youth provision. Furthermore, it was highlighted to members that the voluntary sector in Lancashire was strong and many uniformed organisations offered provision in rural areas. It was also acknowledged that the youth councils had consistently fed back to the authority that transportation in rural areas was a challenge, and provision such as mobile youth centers were in place.



- Regarding the Youth Provision Audit 2024, attached at Appendix B, it was queried how organisations were selected to form part of the audit, as it was recognised that there were many organisations that were not on the list. It was confirmed to members that the audit report was not a definitive list, it was a voluntary survey and therefore did not contain all organisations.
- In relation to the Youth Provision Audit, members raised concern that some organisations listed within the audit were no longer in operation and further queried if Lancashire County Council determined what was sufficient provision. It was explained to members that the audit only included organisations who had engaged with the council, and the report was therefore more of a snapshot of organisations that the authority was aware of. It was highlighted to the committee that the council was aware of organisations who did not want to engage with the audit. Regarding the queries in relation to sufficiency, the totality of the youth provision offer across Lancashire was considered, not just the statutory youth offer provided by the council.
- The committee queried what improvement had been seen to support young people following the implementation of family hubs across Lancashire. Members were informed that 29 family hubs had been identified as the main offer, however the implementation of family hubs had created a network of support within the local area through collaboration between the council and the voluntary sector. It was highlighted that approximately an additional 1,000 people a month were utilising family hubs since September 2023, and 18 facilities had been identified where young people's services were a priority.
- Members queried how voluntary sector organisations accessed funding to carry out their work. It was explained to members that these organisations accessed a variety of sources for funding e.g. local fundraising, charitable donations.
- Regarding the Youth Investment Fund, members queried why the allocation of funding was disproportionate between divisions. It was explained to members that the fund was run at a national level, and the decision on who was awarded funding was subcontracted to other agencies. Furthermore, the committee heard that the threshold was very high, and some smaller organisations did not require such a large award. Lancashire County Council put in three bids for this fund and were not successful in any, however regionally the county did receive more funding than was anticipated last year.
- It was queried why support and provision focused on young people of high school age. Members were informed that provision was available in primary schools and the Inside Out programme provided support for primary school aged children with their health and wellbeing.



- The committee commented that longer opening hours for youth centers could aid in preventing violent crime and gang activity in young people. It was confirmed to the committee that safe spaces prioritised opening on Friday nights, as this was when young people were most at risk. Members were informed that a list of provisions for young people was listed within the report.

Resolved: That the following recommendations be shared with the Cabinet Member for Children and Families:

- i. Consideration be given to how the county council can further assist VCFS organisations across Lancashire in making successful grant bids.
- ii. Consideration be given to a method of communication such as a form to be sent out to county councillors, borough councils and parish councils regarding youth provision in local areas, in order to update the Youth Provision Audit on a regular basis.

5. Youth Justice Board Annual Report

The Chair welcomed County Councillor Cosima Towneley, Cabinet Member for Children and Families and Georgine Lee, Head of Service, Front Door, Assessment and Adolescent Services to the meeting.

The report and presentation circulated with the agenda pack provided information on the Child and Youth Justice Annual Plan, with information on the priorities for this year, progress made and the priorities for 2024/25.

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

- Where young people are not in education or training and instead attending a programme (the 'Chuckery' project), members queried if this was the only location of its kind and the possibility of expansion. Members were informed that the number of young people not in education, employment or training was low. It was confirmed that 'Chuckery' was the only programme of its kind and ringfenced to one location, however the training officer would make connections across other areas with business and organisations for young people to attend. It was further highlighted that the interests and needs of the child or young person were taken into account, as this provision may not be suitable for everyone.
- Further to the above, it was queried by members if children and young people could gain qualifications from the 'Chuckery' programme. It was explained to members that no formal qualifications were offered, however other organisations did give the opportunity to gain qualifications.
- Regarding the re-offending YOT comparisons, it was noted that most authorities saw an increase in reoffending. The committee queried what



Swansea had done to gain such a significant, 15% decrease in reoffending. suggested that a benchmarking activity with authorities such as Swansea could be considered to see what the authority had done to see such a significant drop in reoffending figures.

- Members commented it would be useful to have sight of a breakdown of Key Performance Indicators for each area in Lancashire, to inform a focused approach for future investment. It was confirmed the figures within the report had a focus on disproportionality, and work was currently being done to provide a detailed breakdown by age, gender, ethnicity etc. for each area in Lancashire. The dashboard tool was currently being developed and this would hopefully provide a more detailed breakdown of the figures and would allow focus to be placed on areas most in need and this was an aim for this year.
- It was suggested that for future reports, the figures within the report should always be provided along with the percentages.
- Regarding the Key Performance Indicator figures within the report, it was queried if these was decided locally or nationally. It was confirmed the Standard Key Performance Indicators were decided nationally, and an action plan was developed for areas identified as needing support.

Resolved: That the following recommendations be shared with the Cabinet Member for Children and Families:

- i. Consideration be given to a benchmarking exercise to consider what Swansea have done to obtain a significant decrease in youth reoffending figures.
- ii. A breakdown of KPI figures and the data behind them for each area of Lancashire to help inform a more focused and targeted approach for the future.
- iii. For future reports, the actual figures to be provided along with percentage figures.

6. Annual Quality Assurance Checks

The Chair welcomed County Councillor Cosima Towneley, Cabinet Member for Children and Families, Andy Smith, Head of Service, Safeguarding, Inspection and Audit Service and Catherine Bailey, Senior Manager, Safeguarding, Inspection and Audit Service to the meeting.

The report circulated with the agenda pack contained the Quality Assurance annual report and provided information on the progress made over the last 12 months regarding Quality Assurance activity across Children's Social Care (CSC).

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



- It was queried by members why the audit numbers were lower for children with disabilities and children leaving care. The committee were informed that the Audit Team previously only covered Childrens Social Care and Early Help, however this has now expanded to cover all services of Childrens Services and work was being carried out to produce a complete framework for all of Childrens Social Care. Previously, only the statutory duty was met, and this would come to the Independent Team to ensure work could be critical.
- Regarding the low uptake for the trained delivery programmes, members queried if this could be made mandatory. It was acknowledged the uptake was low, and the service wanted to make this mandatory for all new managers. It was further explained that feedback had been obtained from individuals who signed up for a course but did not attend, and this was being monitored to improve and was being regularly reviewed with a view to make the training mandatory.
- Members queried how the external audit (e.g. OFSTED) was working. It was confirmed that at the beginning of the year, it was set out what activity the external audit would review within Childrens Social Care.

Resolved: That the following recommendations be shared with the Cabinet Member for Children and Families:

- I. That the committee support the recommendations detailed in the report to strengthen the focus and drive in 2024 – 25:
 - a. Developing additional training for practitioners to understand the role and importance of Quality Assurance.
 - b. Further develop our children and families involvement in quality assurance and ensure their voice and views are heard and shared.
 - c. To work closely with the Principle Social Worker, Practice Development managers and Children's Safeguarding Partnership to ensure learning from findings are shared and that impact of learning is measured.

7. Lancashire Education Strategy 2025 - 2028

The Chair welcomed Aby Hardy, Head of Education Improvement to the meeting.

The report circulated with the agenda pack provided information on the current position and priorities of the Education Strategy and the proposed move to a combined strategy of Education and Inclusion in 2025.

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

- The committee raised concern over the increased demand for an EHCP (13% rise from 2022-2023) and the increased demand for an assessment (36% rise from 2022-23) and further queried the cause of the increased demand. It was



explained to members that demand rose steadily until 2017, when the demand significantly increased however funding and staff remained the same. It was acknowledged that the pandemic impacted demand, as children missed social development opportunities. Members were informed that SEND units had given the opportunity to assess a child as they presented and potentially return them to mainstream education if it was a pandemic based problem causing speech and language difficulties opposed to a learning difficulty or autism.

- Members raised concern regarding young people's increased access to the internet and social media and whether this had affected children (e.g. decreased concentration). It was explained to members that the impact of social media was difficult to measure, and it could not be confirmed if SEND children were more impacted by this. It was confirmed that there were widespread studies looking at the impact of significant screen time use by children as it was a widespread issue.
- Concern was raised regarding poor communication between families awaiting an EHCP and the officers responsible for the case. Furthermore, concern was further raised regarding officers not communicating with councillors on behalf of families. The committee were informed that the priority was protecting the workforce, as each officer had approximately 500 cases to manage. It was confirmed that senior managers were dealing with queries from both families and councillors to help lessen the officer's workload.
- Regarding the increase of children arriving in area and into country (doubled in the last 3 years), the committee queried if there was a cause to this increase. It was confirmed for the committee that this figure was children arriving in area or into country and specifically being enrolled into mainstream schools. Regarding the reason for increase, it was explained that several reasons contributed to this, for example hospital recruitment programmes from overseas.
- It was noted the SEND Performance Dashboard was approaching completion. Members queried if this would be accessible to parents. It was explained that most local authorities utilised an EHCP App for families, and this allowed families to track their case and progress and it was confirmed the county council was looking to implement a similar app for families.
- Further to the concern regarding communication delays between the authority and families, it was queried if this led to complaints. The committee were informed that in order to reduce the number of complaints and court cases, the solution was to increase the work force to reduce the case load of current staff. It was further confirmed that the use of an EHCP App could also help reduce complaints.

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



- I. That the committee support the recommendations and priorities as detailed in the report to:
 - a. Ensure that the new Education Strategy for 2025 is focused on the whole journey of the child, not just academic progress.
 - b. Start consultation with families, children and schools around our next set of priorities.

8. Deep Dive Session on Inclusion April 2024

The report circulated with the agenda pack provided information on a Deep Dive Session (informal meeting of the committee) that took place on 23 April 2024 which focused on Inclusion, what it meant to councillors and why it matters. Members of the committee also heard from young people about their experiences of Inclusion.

County Councillor Mark Clifford provided an overview on the Deep Dive Session, including the focus of the session from the young people.

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

- I. That the committee support the suggestions and recommendations as detailed in the report to:
 - a. Parent/Carers of SEND children to be invited to regular SEND Forums based at LCC Family Hubs allowing for face-to-face interaction regarding any concerns. (Important to be listened to in person rather than emailing and phone calls and a useful platform for parents/carers to meet socially over a coffee).
 - b. A unique record or book relating to each child – (as described by Brendan Lee in another meeting about safeguarding – so that parent/carers don't feel they have to start at the beginning each time with new people).
 - c. Consider best practice across the country which could inform our SEND provision, for example other local authorities who had digitised the EHCP. Best practice within Lancashire to be shared by those schools that had been identified as 'shining in their SEND provision' in the form of 'Twilight Inset' sessions for local clusters.
 - d. Key Performance Indicators to be used where possible to inform the Children, Families and Skills Scrutiny Committee about progress for SEND provision on a regular basis.
 - e. IEPs and SEN Support monitoring and exclusion monitoring could be used to reassure members and parents that children without an EHCP were being well supported.



9. Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Report

The report circulated with the agenda pack provided the findings of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman further to a complaint that was raised regarding the delays in issuing an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) for a Lancashire resident.

The committee acknowledged the seriousness of the report and further to the recommendation detailed in the report agreed to review the issue in greater depth at a future meeting of the committee.

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

- I. That the committee review the issue in greater depth at a future meeting of the committee where a detailed report from the service be provided.

10. Work Programme 2023/24

The committee received a report which provided members of the Children, Families and Skills Scrutiny Committee with the work programme for 2023/24.

Resolved: That the Children, Families and Skills Scrutiny Committee work programme be noted.

11. Urgent Business

None.

12. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Children, Families and Skills Scrutiny Committee will be the Annual Portfolio and Service Area Update on Wednesday 12 June 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

