

EDUCATION, CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of the meeting of the Education, Children & Young People Scrutiny Panel held on Tuesday, 11 July 2017 at 9.30 am in Conference Room B, Second Floor, Civic Offices, Portsmouth

Present

Councillor Neill Young (in the Chair)
David Tompkins
Ben Dowling
Paul Godier
Suzy Horton
Will Purvis

1. Apologies for absence (AI 1)

There were no apologies for absence.

2. Declarations of interest (AI 2)

Councillor Godier declared a personal interest as his sister-in-law works for the youth offending team.

3. Minutes of the previous meeting - 8 November 2016 (AI 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Education, Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel held on 8 November 2016 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

4. Review into Child Sexual Exploitation (AI 4)

Members of the panel had received a draft copy of the report for discussion before the final sign-off. Councillor Young as chair introduced the report which the panel had completed before he was appointed chair of the panel in May this year. He felt that this was a very comprehensive report which had good recommendations.

Councillor Dowling said it was disappointing that recommendation 7 regarding holding further Operation Makesafe training sessions did not state that these should be compulsory. He felt this is what the panel discussed and agreed although realised there would be a cost implication of this. Councillor Tompkins pointed out that recommendation 8 stated that CSE training should be mandatory for taxi drivers. It was therefore agreed by the panel to amend recommendation 8 to read: 'That PCC makes CSE training mandatory for taxi drivers and considers the possibility of making this mandatory for other licensees. Officers should investigate how other local authorities have achieved this and explore the best model for Portsmouth.'

The panel had no further amendments or comments to make to the report and were happy for this to be signed off by the chair.

Councillor Young advised that the panel's report and the Director of Children, Families and Education's response report would be considered by Cabinet in September.

RESOLVED that the panel officially sign-off their report for submission to Cabinet in September 2017.

5. Discussion on future topics for the Education, Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel (AI 5)

The Chair invited Alison Jeffery, Director of Children's Services to introduce the two possible topics put forward on the agenda. Alison said that the two topics suggested were both areas that she felt would benefit scrutiny.

(1) The council's offer to vulnerable adolescents. Alison said that there is considerable pressure on social care in relation to teenagers, including requests to accommodate young people. The recent peer review of the early help offer considered that support for vulnerable adolescents could be strengthened.

(2) School attendance and part time timetables. Alison explained that Portsmouth's school attendance levels are in the bottom quarter nationally. There has been a drive to improve attendance with some success but more progress needs to be made. Pupils should only be on a part time timetable for up to 6 weeks before returning to full time education; however this is being exceeded which is a concern. This can also create issues for placement stability for looked after children on part time timetables as foster carers need to look after these children for longer. In addition when children are not in school they are more at risk of exploitation, alcohol and drug misuse. Alison added that the council has seen a doubling of the number of children being home schooled over the last five years, which is also a national issue.

Councillor Young said he agreed that the increase in the number of children being home educated was an issue in particular how the progress of these children is monitored. Parents are not required to tell the local authority why they have chosen to home educate their child. The reasons vary including the child experiencing bullying or the parent choosing that home education will provide the child with a different philosophical reasoning.

Councillor Godier added that in his experience there have been issues of trust between parents and schools and concerns about how the school addresses concerns raised by parents. He said he had seen examples where a parent has complained to the school and because this is not addressed the parent decides to take their child out of school. Alison said that this could be incorporated in this review.

Councillor Horton said that there are some really good examples of good practice in the city that the panel could draw on for this review. She added that parents/pupils could have a completely different experience with a school compared to another family.

Councillor Purvis said he was happy to put forward school attendance to the Scrutiny Management Panel as the first topic. He said that historically the panel have alternated their topics between children social care and education and as the last review was children's social care related, it was logical that the next topic was education based. In addition he had received many casework queries from parents about part time timetables.

The panel felt that in light of the above that the first topic should be school attendance and part time timetables.

RESOLVED that the suggested review topics be put forward to Scrutiny Management Panel for agreement:

(1) School attendance and part time timetables

(2) The council's offer to vulnerable adolescents

The Local Democracy Officer advised that there was not currently a date for the Scrutiny Management Panel (SMP) to meet to agree upon topics for the themed scrutiny panels but it was likely to be in early September. The Chair said that once the topics had been agreed by SMP a meeting of the panel would be arranged to start scoping the review. Once the scope of the review is agreed, he felt that the school attendance review might benefit a late afternoon/early evening evidence gathering meeting where schools, parents etc. could be invited to give their views. This would allow for some in depth discussions around the table. This could then be followed up by a separate meeting to compile all the evidence.

Councillor Horton said it would be useful if the panel could have some written evidence from children to find out their experiences as to why they did not attend school. It would also be useful to identify young people who have successfully re-integrated into mainstream schools. Alison said that she could look at the social care caseload to identify some potential children who could be asked their views.

The Chair said he would have some initial discussions with the Director to discuss potential witnesses and methods of getting parents and children involved in the review.

RESOLVED that a date of the first ECYP Scrutiny Panel would be arranged once the SMP had agreed the work programme for the panel.

The meeting concluded at 10.00 am.

Councillor Neill Young
Chair