

Minutes of a meeting of the EAP Education, Skills and Employment

At 5.00 pm on Wednesday 15th December, 2021 in the

Held as

Present:-

Members

Councillor Scott Edwards (Chair)
Councillor Wendy Brackenbury
Councillor Leanne Buckingham

Councillor Philip Irwin
Councillor Dorothy Maxwell

Officers

Cathi Hadley – Executive Director of
Children’s Services
AnnMarie Dodds – Assistant Director of
Education

Jenny Daniels – Democratic Services
Louise Tyers – Democratic Services

45 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Lee Wilkes.

46 Minutes of the meeting held on 16 November 2021

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 November 2021 were agreed as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

47 Members' Declarations of Interest

The Chair invited those who wished to do so to declare interests in respect of items on the agenda.

No declarations were received.

48 Special Educational Needs and Disabilities - Briefing

At the Chair’s invitation the Assistant Director for Children provided a briefing on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, highlighting the following:

- i. A key theme that had become clear was the need for co-production. There was a wish to address this first so that everything undertaken was co-produced.
- ii. Systems were in the process of being embedded and the Council was working with the SEND Ability Board. They had not yet shared understanding around all of the partners as they wished to have a clear vision and agree priorities

on which to base business. The expectation of all partners would be linked to pathways and they also needed to look at the strategy and plan.

- iii. Co-production with families would change the way they worked with families as they wished to work with and not do things 'to' them. Co-production would therefore take longer than expected because there would be more people involved. The aim was to gain people's confidence.
- iv. The Single Parent Carer Forums across the area had stated they would like just one forum for the whole area. This would be embedded in the work.
- v. The SEND Accountability Board included representatives from all partners. It met monthly and would begin co-production of the SEND Accountability Plan.
- iv. The SEND Accountability Board would split into two workstreams to oversee the operational functions by providing challenge and support. It would then take recommendations to North Northamptonshire Council.
- v. Initial data on SEND had been presented to the SEND Accountability Board across the North and West of the county. It was being triangulated with feedback from parents and carers.
- vi. There had been a sharp increase in the number of education healthcare plans by almost 300%. COVID was partly responsible for the increase but there were also other factors like high needs funding. There had also recently been an increase in the number of practitioners.
- vii. An additional 12 caseworkers had been employed in the SEND service. Once a plan had been allocated to a child it stayed with them and this created a huge pressure on the service. They were part of a pilot with disabled children to develop an outcome-based dashboard.

In answer to queries on the update the following was confirmed:

- viii. It was acknowledged that the Service was struggling to meet the need. Educational psychologists, health services, social care colleagues were all needed to go into schools and obtain information. Getting responses to consultations was taking time.
- ix. Some children required specialist provision and could not always get it and if providers could not provide it new providers would have to be sought. This took time and could leave a family feeling frustrated. They obviously wished to know what the wrap around care would look like and there was a need to communicate more consistently. Even if it was just letting families know that the Service was still seeking a solution to address their needs at least it was contact.
- x. The number of Assessments resulting in Education Healthcare Plans had not been recorded before but was something that would be looked at. If an Educational Healthcare Plan had not been the result of the assessment, they looked at what could be offered instead. Some schools had gone for high needs funding instead but there could be issues when a child changed

schools or phases. There was a need to understand if something was a short-term issue or a long-term issue which would require an educational healthcare plan.

- xi. Information on the number of educational psychologists employed would be provided following the meeting as the Council did employ some but also employed associates.
- xii. There were many partners involved in SEND work across both the North and West of the county so these partners would also sit on the Board.
- xiii. It was clear that cases were not meeting the 20-week deadline for Assessment. There were currently 6 Practitioners and the Council was looking to increase the size of the team significantly. This was an issue that was being discussed at all levels of the Council.
- xiv. Queries on individual cases could be e-mailed to the Assistant Director for Children.
- xv. Practitioners had an average caseload of 500 children. Reducing this number had been the subject of discussions for some time but the solution would not just be about employing additional workers.
- xvi. Not all of the 500 children would be those requiring assessments as some would only require a review. The way the workload was managed would be reviewed to ascertain if things could be undertaken differently.
- xvii. Some children would have been affected by COVID and may not have had an assessment and this could account for some of the additional demand in assessments.
- xviii. The Service was required to work with schools where they could make recommendations for advice and support for the child. It did not just involve employing a teaching assistant.
- xix. Members welcomed co-production and questioned whether there was member involvement in Accountability Board and Parent Carer Forum. The Chair confirmed he sat on the Accountability Board but there was currently no member involvement in the Parent Carer Forum. People did not always appreciate member involvement but the Chair's details could be passed on to them for consideration.
- xx. Many of the challenges were in the system prior to the Council being formed in April including a national shortage of places and qualified professionals to undertake the work.
- xxi. An update on the outcome based data dashboard would be brought back to the Panel in March/April 2022.
- xxii. Communication with Headteachers was maintained regularly. Every Monday they were informed about recruitment and their engagement was sought wherever possible. The Assistant Director also met with them at their invitation.

RESOLVED:

That the Education Skills and Employment Advisory Panel notes the presentation on Special Educational Needs and Disability.

49 High Needs Funding - Briefing

At the Chair's invitation the Assistant Director of Children presented a briefing stating the following:

- i. High Needs Funding came from the Government's Dedicated Schools Grant which was managed on behalf of schools through the School's Forum. An annual return had to be submitted to the Department of Education stating where and how it was spent.
- ii. There was a £2.14million deficit at the beginning of the year, which was smaller than many other local authorities in the country. However, the deficit for the end of the current year was expected to be above £3million.
- iii. There were a number of mitigations in place but there had been an unprecedented level of demand on the system. These included out of county placements which had created a pressure of £1.5million. £200k also came from pressure for support to children with SEN who were outside of school provision.
- iv. Children who entered higher education with an Educational Healthcare Plan continued to be supported up to the age of 24 years.
- v. It had been a priority to examine every line of the finances and there was now confidence that every line did link to a child correctly. There was a great challenge around the Service Level Agreements in place with schools.
- vi. Some schools had named provision a 'unit' so that they could get funding. Some of these service level agreements would now have to be cancelled which would be a difficult conversation with those involved. There was a need to match the needs of children with what a school could reasonably expect to offer and this might not always be a cash offer. Sometimes it could be access to services. Where a child had enduring needs, it was considered they should have an educational healthcare plan.

In answer to queries on the briefing the following was confirmed:

- vii. In response to a question on how the position in North Northamptonshire compared to other councils, the Assistant Director of Children advised that she had previously been at a Council where there had been an excess deficit of over £10million. Some local authorities had almost a 100% overspend in this area. North Northamptonshire Council would continue to closely monitor finances.
- viii. There was a requirement to prepare a deficit recovery plan for the Department for Education and Scrutiny from members and the School's Forum was welcomed.

- ix. It was not possible to identify another local authority with best practice in this area. An inspection produced a written statement of action rather than an Ofsted style rating. The written statement of action was for all partners.
- x. In a year's time they would be seeking agreement from the School's Forum to move funding from the schools block into the high needs block of funding. It was hoped that by that time the School's Forum and partners would understand all of the issues.
- xi. The Assistant Director of Children would find out how many children were placed out of county and let Councillor Maxwell know outside of the meeting.
- xii. Issues with funding were well known across the country and there had been some Government recognition of the issues with the system. Some local authorities had received extra funding from the Government but North Northamptonshire had not qualified for additional assistance. There was a new inspection framework regarding SEND but the fear was that the Council would solely hold the rating rather than with social care or health care.

RESOLVED:

That the Education Skills and Employment Advisory Panel notes the High Needs Funding briefing.

50 Forward Plan of Executive Items

The Panel considered a copy of the forward plan attached as 'item 6 on the agenda'.

RESOLVED:

That the latest Executive forward plan be noted.

51 Forward List of Items for Education, Skills and Employment EAP

RESOLVED that:-

The following be added to the forward list of items for presentation at future meetings by officers:

- a. More statistics on how many SEN children the Council looked after placed both inside and outside of the county. How many of these children were not in school and if so how would education be provided? How many speech therapists were going into schools and how many children were being seen by them?
- b. The next time the youth justice plan was brought for consideration, that this also include more statistics surrounding children who were involved with the police.
- c. A narrative on home schooled children, numbers and provision particularly how this may have increased resulting from Covid and how many children had returned to school thereafter.

d. That a presentation be provided by PROSPECT detailing the work being undertaken by, and in conjunction with, the Council to support young adults not in education, employment or training.

52 Close of Meeting

There being no further business the meeting closed at 6.30pm.

Chair

Date