

West Sussex County Council – Agenda Item No. 15 – Written Questions

20 July 2018

- 1.** Written question from **Mr Jones** for reply by the **Cabinet Member for Children and Young People**

Question

I would be grateful if the Cabinet Member could outline for me what financial, emotional and practical support the County Council provides for children looked after aged 18 or over who express a desire to search for their birth parents.

Can he also outline what financial costs are required of any individual, if they wish to pursue the search for their birth parents, in terms of this Council's charges, the request for records from external bodies such as other local authorities, and other services such as advice from qualified staff in advising whether to proceed with such a search.

Can he confirm whether there is any discretion for the Council to waive charges, should they exist, if the individual concerned is a former child looked after either:

- (a) by this authority; or
- (b) another local authority?

Answer

Children Looked After have a legal right to see their original birth certificate when they reach age 18, without cost, and the County Council will fully support them to exercise this wish. In practice, most care leavers maintain some personal contact with their birth families during their time in care. For the remaining 20%, the County Council maintains records of birth families and these can be made available on request at the appropriate time. Where further action was required beyond the supply of records, we would look sympathetically at each case on an individual basis.

The Customer Relations team oversees this process and Children's Services considers it is well and sensitively managed. Pre-access counselling is offered, recognising that the details to be disclosed to the young person may be emotionally charged.

All care leavers have a Personal Adviser (PA) who will give practical and emotional support automatically to age 21, and to age 25 on request. This enables them to build their adult lives more securely, which naturally includes understanding their own original circumstances where they wish to do so.

In the particular case of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, the County Council will put the young person in touch with the Red Cross Family Finding

service. Inevitably, due to their circumstances, no outcome can be guaranteed for these enquiries. No costs are charged either by the County Council, or any other local authority.

In addition, adopted adults have a legal right to access their original birth certificate at the age of 18. This costs £9.25 from the general register. In the case of post commencement adoptions - those taking place after December 2005 - the original birth certificate is required under the regulations to be placed on the adoption file. In practice most adopted adults know their birth name because when they were placed they should have had a life story book/letter, and many will have had letterbox exchange with birth family members up until the age of 18.

Should young adopted adults wish to access their adoption records and/or trace birth parents there is a specialist worker within the adoption support service who will offer counselling support and help with access to records. Should they wish to trace their birth parents/siblings/other relatives then support can be provided to do this through to reunion and beyond. The intermediary service would be offered at no cost. If it is not possible to trace birth family members then an independent researcher would be suggested. A cost would be applicable for this service - this is usually on a sliding scale depending on individual circumstances (ranging from £30 upwards to around £400). On occasion the County Council has financed this for young adults and also paid for the birth certificates.

The adoption service has a contract with the Post Adoption Centre (PAC) and is able to signpost young people to this provider if they do not wish to use the County Council's adoption service. This is free at the present time. PAC can offer counselling and access to birth records and support through to reunion. They will charge for tracing, but West Sussex has funded this in the past.

2. Written question from Mrs Mullins for reply by the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

Question

Young people are required to continue in education or training until at least their 18th birthday, choosing to participate through full time education, a job or volunteering combined with part time study, or by undertaking an apprenticeship or traineeship.

I understand that local authorities have a statutory duty to encourage, enable and assist them to participate in education or training.

Furthermore, under the September guarantee all 16 and 17 years olds are entitled to an offer of a suitable place in education or training regardless of what qualifications they have gained when they left school. I understand that West Sussex is performing well below its peer authorities in the South East and nationally with regard to the percentage of young people with an unknown education, employment or training (EET) status.

Can the Cabinet Member please:

- (a) Confirm the figures of those young people with an unknown EET status. In respect of West Sussex, the South East region and nationally for April 2018 and how this compares to the figures for April 2017 and April 2016?;
- (b) Explain how it is possible to lose track of these young people after they have finished their secondary school education, outlining the steps he is planning to take to address this area of poor performance and confirm what support is provided to those missing young people once they have been identified, to encourage them back in education or training?; and
- (c) Confirm how many young people in West Sussex aged 16-24 are currently identified as not in education, employment or training, and of those, what percentage:
 - (i) Have a low GCSE attainment level?
 - (ii) Have special educational needs or disabilities?
 - (iii) Are/were previously children looked after?
 - (iv) Are of black, Asian or ethnic minority origin?

Answer

- (a) Below are the figures for young people with an Unknown EET status for West Sussex, the South East region and nationally for April 2018 with comparison to April 2017 and 2016:

	National (England)	South East	West Sussex
April 2018	2.9%	3.6%	7.1%
April 2017	3%	4%	7.4%
April 2016*	6.2%	6.5%	13.8%

*At this time local authorities were measured on 16-18 year olds as opposed to 16-17 year olds.

- (b) Once young people leave statutory education the local authority is reliant on robust information sharing procedures involving schools, colleges, training providers and others so that we can update our database. The majority of young people are successfully tracked in this way but if young people are not participating, or the information sharing procedures break down, it becomes much more difficult to keep up to date with every young person's EET status.

Responsibility for tracking Unknowns has only recently transferred across to Education and Skills from the Integrated Prevention and Earliest Help Service (IPEH). It should not be underestimated how huge a task it is to track the EET destinations for all 16- and 17-year-olds in the county. At the beginning of every academic year every 16- and 17-year-old's EET status moves to Unknown until we can prove otherwise. Despite the efforts of individual staff within IPEH there has been a need for a robust strategy and sufficient resource to make a significant impact on improving

our Unknowns figures – we are currently in the bottom quintile nationally. Education and Skills are committed to addressing these challenges over the coming year. We have already started to do this by:

- Better data sharing from schools and colleges.
- More responsibility given to delivery teams to ensure better information sharing within their local networks.
- Recruitment of apprentices to focus on calls and texts to Unknowns.
- Additional resource through our new European Social Inclusion Fund (ESIF) programme to look strategically and innovatively at improving our data collection approach.

We are likely to lose contact with three times as many Year 13s as Year 12s so we will need to ensure a focus on those coming to the end of one-year courses.

Our Post-16 Support Team delivers 1:1 careers support for young people who are NEET. Careers advisers aim to work with all NEETs but some are difficult to engage. During this summer term the team has also been providing 1:1 careers support to over 260 Year 11s who have no intended Post-16 destination in an attempt to prevent these pupils becoming NEET.

Our new ESIF Think Futures programme will enhance our work with NEETs and Unknowns. The programme brings £984,382 of new money which is match-funded through in-kind contributions. The County Council is the Lead Partner working with our Delivery Partners - Surrey County Council and Brighton & Hove City Council. The funding split involves the County Council contributing 60% and the remainder being funded by Surrey County Council and Brighton & Hove City Council. The programme commenced on 1 July 2018 and ends on 31 December 2020.

We believe this programme, together with our existing work and focus, will aid our aim of being in the top tier of local authorities for NEETs and tracking performance by 2022.

- (c) We have currently 425 NEETs aged 16 to 24 years.
- (i) We are not able to extract this information
 - (ii) 7.2%
 - (iii) 0.47%
 - (iv) 2.6%

3. Written question from Mr Quinn for reply by the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

Question

I understand that a meeting between officers from West Sussex County Council

and the Governors from Woodlands Meed School, Burgess Hill took place on 4 July 2018 to discuss the results of the recent feasibility study with a number of options identified for further discussion with the Cabinet. Could the Cabinet Member confirm what progress has been made with those discussions and confirm to members what has been agreed and when action will be taken on this matter.

Answer

On 4 July 2018 a meeting was held between officers of the County Council and Woodlands Meed School Governors to discuss the feasibility study into the various options for improving the facilities for Woodlands Meed College students.

Following a lengthy discussion, County Council officers and School Governors agreed that the option of replacing the current Woodlands Meed College buildings and facilities on the College site, also known as the Newick House site, was to be presented to Cabinet Members for further consideration.

The County Council's Cabinet Members met on 17 July 2018 and considered all the proposals in the feasibility study. Cabinet Members resolved to ask officers to commission detailed design work on the proposal for a new build on the College site, noting that this was the School Governors' preferred option.

All the options presented and considered would require a significant amount of financial investment from the County Council over a long period of time in order to progress from concept, through detailed specification and planning to delivery.

If this project is to progress the County Council would need to look at resourcing this programme of work from the Capital Programme. This would require very difficult choices on other projects if this scheme is to be accommodated.

Therefore, the cost of any scheme would need to be kept as low as possible while ensuring that we are still meeting the needs of the children and young people to get the education they deserve, recognising the financial constraints of the County Council. We look forward to continuing our partnership working with the School's Governors in order to enable us to achieve a solution that is in the interests of the children yet is able to be delivered within the financial purse of the County Council.

4. Written question from Mrs Mullins for reply by the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources

Question

At a recent meeting of the Performance and Finance Select Committee members learnt that the County Council had recently purchased the Kamelia Kids Children's Centre in Worthing in order to provide medium term security for the services being delivered there.

I understand that the County Council has been providing financial support in addition to advice and direct support over the past few years in recognition of

the fact that the Centre fulfils an essential need for young children in the locality, particularly those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. Can the Cabinet Member provide me with the following information:

- (a) How much the County Council has paid for the purchase of the Centre, when members agreed to the purchase of the site and when the purchase was completed;
- (b) Details of how much funding the County Council has provided to the Centre in each of the last five years, including any Community Initiative Fund (CIF) funding, but excluding payments directly related to individual nursery places, and what that funding was for;
- (c) Confirm the basis on which the Centre is currently being used by Kamelia Kids Children's Centre and how long the current arrangement is anticipated to be in place for; and
- (d) Confirm the long term plans for both the site and the services for young children in the locality.

Answer

There are two separate plots adjacent to each other in Marlborough Road, Goring by Sea:

- The larger plot is occupied by the Kamelia Kids nursery (formerly the Camelia Botnor Children Centre) and leased from the County Council on a long term basis.
 - Camelia Hall –a small, separate but linked, site previously owned by Camelia Botnor Centre, sold to the County Council in 2017.
- (a) The County Council paid £200,000 for the site (as valued by the District Valuer), completing the purchase on the 7 September 2017. Being under £250,000, the decision was taken by the Director of Economy, Planning and Place in accordance with capital programme governance rules and the County Council's Scheme of Delegation. Consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources took place after the purchase, owing to the urgency of the transaction, and the acquisition was later noted in the capital programme performance report.
 - (b) Kamelia Kids is the nursery name for what was formerly Camelia Botnor Children Centre. The nursery was funded using a large trust fund which became exhausted in 2016/17. The purpose of the trust fund was to provide childcare for young children with highly complex additional needs. The following funding was made available to support the nursery's transition from being Trust fund dependent to becoming a viable inclusive nursery to support a more diverse mix of 0 to 4-year-old children whilst retaining their specialist skills and high reputation for this specialist provision.

2014/15 - £112,000
2015/16 - £ 60,000

The transition payments were approved by the Acting Director of Children's Services and the Cabinet Member for Children – Start of Life in 2014/15 and 2015/16. Other than funding for Early Years places, including SEND support for Early Years children, there have been no further payments.

- (c) The County Council owns the freehold of the Kamelia Kids Day Nursery site which is leased to The Camelia Botnar Centre on a long-term leasehold from September 1978 for 99 years. The extension to the site at the rear was also leased to the Camelia Botnar Centre by the County Council under long-term leasehold from 1984 until the expiry of the main lease. The freehold of Kamelia Hall (previously known as Camelia Hall) is now owned by the County Council and it is anticipated that this will continue to be used by the Worthing Portage Team. The Portage Team supports children with disabilities, including their parents and carers, in the Worthing area. A number of these children attend the Kamelia Kids Day Nursery.
- (d) **Property strategy:** There are no other plans in the developing Asset Strategy for these sites.

Childcare in Worthing area: Data currently shows that across the area, there is currently sufficient childcare to meet the needs of the families needing or wanting it. Officers will monitor and analyse sufficiency and the impact of the 30 hours Extended Free Entitlement based on information gathered from parents, settings and other local knowledge such as building developments and setting openings and closures that may affect sufficiency of childcare.

5. Written question from Mr Jones for reply by the Cabinet Member for Safer, Stronger Communities

Question

I remain concerned about the delays with the Sussex Fire Control Centre such that West Sussex emergency calls are still being managed using an outdated West Sussex computer system. Can the Cabinet Member please tell me:

- (a) What progress has been made since the last Council meeting to ensure that the Rescue 4i system is compatible with, and will work seamlessly with, the various West Sussex County Council and West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service systems and equipment necessary for reliable operation;
- (b) When members can expect to learn whether it is still intended that West Sussex emergency incidents will be managed using the Rescue 4i system; and
- (c) Whether any alternative options are being explored.

Furthermore, I understand that grants from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) in respect of £1.8m for each Fire Authority was

provided for transitional costs (including IT) to complete the project. Can she advise if it is decided not to proceed to using the Rescue 4i system, will there be a need to return any of that grant funding to the DCLG?

Answer

Our current NX mobilising system is operating to its designed specification and mobilising fire engines and other resources successfully to emergency incidents. We are enhancing the maintenance and resilience of the system to ensure operational requirements for the current period.

- (a) We are working with East Sussex Fire Service to ensure the Rescue 4i system is compatible and will work seamlessly with West Sussex County Council and West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service systems and equipment necessary for reliable and consistent operation.
- (b) Members will be informed of progress as and when there is progress or change to report.
- (c) We are always open to exploring new and improved options as opportunities arise.

There have been no discussions with the DCLG.