



# Buckinghamshire Council

## Children's & Education Select Committee

### Minutes

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHILDREN'S & EDUCATION SELECT COMMITTEE HELD ON THURSDAY 8 SEPTEMBER 2022 IN THE OCULUS, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNCIL, GATEHOUSE ROAD, AYLESBURY HP19 8FF, COMMENCING AT 2.00 PM AND CONCLUDING AT 3.40 PM**

#### **MEMBERS PRESENT**

J Ward, K Bates, D Blamires, A Collingwood, S James, C Jones, Dr W Matthews, A Osibogun, J Towns, P Turner, Z Williams and T Wilson

#### **OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE**

K Dover, S James, R Nash, A Howard and J Macilwraith

#### **Agenda Item**

##### **1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

It was noted that Councillors Adoh, Dormer, Hussain, Kayani and Summers had given their apologies for the meeting. Cllr Susan Lewin attended the meeting in place of Cllr Hussain.

##### **2 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN**

The Chairman confirmed their appointment of Cllr Mark Dormer as Vice-Chairman of the Children's and Education Select Committee for the ensuing year.

##### **3 CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE**

The Chairman welcomed John Macilwraith, Corporate Director for Children's Services and Cllr Anita Cranmer, Cabinet Member for Children's and Education to the meeting.

The Cabinet Member introduced the Corporate Director and explained that he would replace Richard Nash, who returned to his role as Service Director for Children's Services. Mr Macilwraith thanked the Cabinet Member for the introduction and advised that he was looking forward to working with the Children's & Education Select Committee.

##### **4 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

- Cllr K Bates declared a personal interest as a Chair of Governors for nursery schools in Buckinghamshire.
- Cllr P Turner declared a personal interest as a Governor at Chiltern Wood School.
- Cllr A Osibogun declared a personal interest as a governor at Buckingham Primary School.

- Mr T Wilson declared a personal interest as a trustee of the Oxford Diocesan Bucks Schools Trust.

## **5 PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

No public questions were received in relation to this agenda of the Select Committee.

## **6 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

Cllr Collingwood requested that an audit log for items discussed in previous meetings be added to the agenda papers going forward.

**Action: KD**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meetings of the committee held on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2022 be AGREED as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

## **7 EARLY HELP STRATEGY & IMPACT OF THE FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICE**

The Chairman welcomed Cllr Anita Cranmer, Cabinet Member for Children's and Education, Simon James, Service Director for Education and Early Help, and Gareth Morgan, Head of Early Help, who attended the meeting to speak on this item.

In their presentation, the following points were highlighted:

- The two-year-old Family Support Service was a key service in the Council's progress towards improvements suggested in the latest OFSTED inspection. With cases growing in both number and complexity, early intervention and collaboration with partner organisations (schools, health institutions and the voluntary sector) were identified as key factors in meeting children's welfare requirements.
- The Family Support Service supported approximately 400 families, with just over 1000 children, most of which required statutory intervention via social care. In addition, support was also provided at a universal level through the 15 family centres.
- The demand for family support had increased by 25 % since last year. The service had been responding well to the increased demand, and performances had remained good. 85 % of families were able to achieve their desired outcomes. The biggest increase in requests for help has been received by schools. Family support link workers have been placed in all schools, and the use of family support centres and parenting groups were being promoted to reduce unnecessary escalation of work into children's social care.

During the discussion, comments and questions raised by the Committee included:

- Clarifying how the services provided are dovetailing, and if the increased capacity in accessibility of early health services would help reduce waiting times. It was noted that the children's mental health support teams, which included youth practitioners and family support workers, were an example of a collaborative service between Oxfordshire Health Trust's CAMHS service and the Early Help Service. Simon James explained that mental health teams in schools provided a faster way of accessing diagnostic services for neurodevelopmental conditions than a referral. In addition, specialist mental health workers could also support children prior to or instead of receiving a formal diagnosis. Gareth Morgan added that these teams would also provide opportunities for families to access longer-term support if needed. Although this did not directly impact waiting times, it reduced the impact of mental health issues in young people before requiring clinical intervention, thus resulting in fewer numbers of referrals overall. Furthermore,

parenting courses for parents of SEND children increased the understanding of their needs and the best ways to support their learning.

- Simon James explained that family centres were a key facility for supporting hard-to-reach families and communities. Furthermore, the youth work also connected families with the local community, and increased the understanding of different levels of need across the county, as did work carried out with the voluntary sector. Partnership forums, located in three localities (Wycombe, Aylesbury and Chiltern & South Bucks), were attended by professionals from different agencies and served as a problem-solving mechanism for families who do not fit in one agency or need. Typically, a school might bring a young person and their family forward if work had been done but there was not enough progress, for example, in the student's behaviour or attendance. The group would then establish what additional support could be offered to best support the student and their family.
- A councillor requested the attendance of an officer from the Family Support Service at community board meetings. Simon James advised the member that Gareth Morgan would ensure that an appropriate officer attended.

**Action: GM**

- In response to a member's question, it was noted that the Family Support Service had no waiting lists and adhered to strict timeframes after work had been allocated through the multi-agency safeguarding hub. Requests were usually progressed within 24 hours, with a 72-hour maximum processing window. After progression to the locality team, the family would be contacted within 24 hours and support arranged within 5 days. Gareth Morgan added that monitoring data could be provided to the Committee.

**Action: GM/SJ**

- Family support workers operated within a cluster, averaging 3-5 schools for a link support worker. Additionally, Oxford Health had been awarded funding to increase the number of mental health teams in Buckinghamshire to six by the end of the calendar year, which would include additional youth and family support workers in areas needing the most support.
- Young people in NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) were monitored by the team to provide support. The team was also maintaining contact with apprentices who did not complete their training to encourage and enable them to return to employment through an appropriate pathway.
- Due to the success of the family support service, it was suggested that the programme be extended. Gareth Morgan advised that some transformation projects are already underway to reduce caseloads for social workers, in addition to some locality-based work.
- The importance of early health was highlighted, particularly assessment, being joint work between the Council, schools and the voluntary sector. It was noted that the focus should not lay solely on assessment, but on support for young people, for example through, local models and pastoral care in schools. This way, young people would access additional services from professionals in their locality, who would also be aware of increased risks in the area.
- It was noted that Councillors could support the early help partnerships through the community boards and networking with local communities.

**Action: Councillors**

- The timeframe for re-referrals was measured at 6 and 12 months. However, the service had an open-door policy for 3 months, meaning that a family could contact the service directly without having to go through the process again. Some cases were noted to be more complex, for example, if a family had support in the past and returned with a different issue. Statistically, this would be deemed a re-referral. Many families returning for further support were better suited to community-based support. A member

highlighted the importance of also fully understanding the context in which re-referrals happened.

- Before the pandemic, schools were invited to work with the service to understand its mechanisms. The team were keen to re-introduce this with the start of the next term.
- The demands for mental health support had increased by 25 % since last year, and a question was raised as to whether there was sufficient funding to respond to this. Richard Nash advised that there are many different views on what constitutes appropriate support to ensure children's emotional wellbeing, and that an over-referral to mental health services was not a desirable outcome. He emphasised the importance of receiving the right type of support. Health services and social work teams were liaising to ensure the right interventions were in place.
- A Councillor suggested that the service should be given priority if further resources were required due to the notable outcomes achieved for young people.
- The Committee supported the recommendations outlined in the report: The Committee acknowledged the progress of the service, the positive impact the early help family support had on children, and the role the service had in supporting vulnerable families and communities.

The Chairman thanked the presenters for their attendance and participation.

## **8 PARTICIPATION STRATEGY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE 2022-2025**

The Chairman invited Cllr Anita Cranmer, Cabinet Member for Children's and Education, Simon James, Service Director for Education and Early Help, and Gareth Morgan, Head of Early Help, to speak on this item.

The recently launched strategy focused on involving young people in decision-making processes in the areas of the service's work affecting them. A key factor in the strategy was the introduction of a properly safeguarded and monitored participation champions' programme. This included children's panels for the recruitment of high-priority senior staff within the Council, the launch of the Youth Voice Hub website (<https://www.youthvoicebucks.co.uk>) and the 'Shout out for SEND' programme. The strategy's success would be measured over the coming months.

During discussion, comments and questions raised by the Committee included:

- The Councillors welcomed the development of the strategy and expressed their enthusiasm for the programme.
- Gareth Morgan explained that the Council would roll out a programme to identify young people as community board youth ambassadors. The youth voice executive would initially identify volunteers to share opportunities through schools and community-led youth centres. A new website was also in development to ensure accessibility on phones to involve young people in local democracy, recruitment and other activities.
- Simon James advised that the councillor mentoring scheme would be a corporate-wide programme rather than solely run by Children's Services. Councillors would be trained and supported through the corporate team. Chrissy Hatton had recently been appointed as the Participation Coordinator to engage young people and communities. She had been making links with local organisations and also the young carers commissioning service to ensure the inclusion of young carers' views in the programme.
- The Youth Interview Panel was launched as an opportunity for young people to be trained on interview questions. It was noted that the programme was an important priority for both Officers and Cabinet Members, as it could prepare young people leaving school for further education and employment.

- The Youth Voice Hub Website had gone live on the 7<sup>th</sup> September 2022. The design and content had been co-produced with children, young people, and Buckinghamshire Council's partners. It was built by the team's identification of best practice, was made fully accessible via mobile phone and would be reviewed regularly. The website would be promoted through social media channels, the Council's Youth Voice Executive and through school bulletins. The team would also include younger employees with significant interest and knowledge in social media.

- Councillors raised suggestions on further promotion opportunities and offered to seek engagement through resident Facebook groups in their own wards.

**Action: Councillors**

- It was also suggested that the programme team could seek contact with families through local housing associations, for example by forwarding links to tenants or advertising the website on their own. Simon James welcomed the suggestions and agreed to implement them.

**Action: SJ**

- In relation to the financial implications of the programme, Simon James noted that the participation work was part of the service budget and not dependent on external grants. A breakdown of the service budget can be found in the Council's budget. A cost breakdown of the participation work could be provided to the Committee.

**Action: SJ**

- Simon James advised that in order to ensure that young people across the entire county would have the opportunity to participate, an event would take place in central Buckinghamshire before Christmas. This would be designed by young people themselves with the aim of ensuring that as many young people as possible could attend.

## **9 WORK PROGRAMME 2022-2023**

The Select committee received the draft work programme and made the following suggestions for consideration with the Chairman at the next meeting:

- The Committee had previously agreed that issues around SEND would be prioritised in the forthcoming year for some detailed work. Since the last meeting, a potential scope around this work was being developed, with particular focus on access to services. Evidence gathering on this topic would commence in October. The Senior Scrutiny Officer would email the Committee to identify a working group around this topic. Councillors Blamires, James, Turner and Ward, put their names forward for the group.

**Action: KD**

- Cllr Collingwood expressed interest in attending the working group and highlighted the importance of consistency in SEND offerings across different educational institutions. Simon James advised that a five-year sufficiency strategy for SEND has been published, and would share the link with the Committee.

**Action: SJ**

- Cllr Blamires suggested that the OFSTED action plan be added to the work programme. She further requested that reports around the attainment gap be shared with the Committee prior to January 2023.

**Action: SJ**

- Simon James advised that the team would consolidate a list of the department's achievements in decreasing the attainment gap over the past 12 months before the January Select Committee meeting.
- Cllr Bates noted the importance of the Committee discussing children missing from education in the next meeting's agenda due to the high numbers nationally. Richard Nash suggested that Committee members familiarise themselves with the statutory obligations around this issue prior to it being discussed.

## **10 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The date of the next meeting of the Select Committee would be Thursday, 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2022.

CHAIRMAN