



Minutes

EDUCATION, SKILLS AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE EDUCATION, SKILLS AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE HELD ON TUESDAY 18 FEBRUARY 2014, IN MEZZANINE ROOM 2, COUNTY HALL, AYLESBURY, COMMENCING AT 10.00 AM AND CONCLUDING AT 12.04 PM.

MEMBERS PRESENT

John Chilver, Dev Dhillon (Vice-Chairman), Paul Irwin, Valerie Letheren (Chairman), Wendy Mallen, Mark Shaw, Robin Stuchbury and Katrina Wood

CO-OPTED MEMBERS PRESENT

Michael Moore and Monique Nowers

GUESTS PRESENT

Michelle Kukielka and Angela Macpherson

OFFICERS PRESENT

Simon Billenness, Michael Carr, Amanda Hopkins, Raza Khan, Coral McGookin, Chris Munday and Yvette Thomas

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies of absence were received from Margaret Aston and David Babb.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Mark Shaw, Paul Irwin and Katrina Wood all declared an interest as they are members of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Mark Shaw declared an interest as he was a member of Ms Macpherson's Medium Term Plan (MTP) panel.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



Monique Nowers declared an interest as she currently works for an education publisher.

3 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 10th December 2013 were agreed as a correct record.

The Chairman advised that written responses to the questions raised at the December meeting would be provided for the next meeting.

4 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no public questions.

5 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Chairman provided the following update:

Members of the Committee visited the House of Commons Select Committee on 14th January 2014 and met with Clive Betts MP, Chair of the Communities and Local Government Committee, Kevin Maddison (the Committee Specialist) and Alasdair Mackenzie, Outreach Officer for London and the South-East of England.

The Narrowing the Gap Select Committee Inquiry has received evidence from Mr Nick Gibb MP, Mr Robbie Coleman Education Endowment Foundation, Diana Warne, Head of Secondary Learning and Achievement at the London Borough of Tower Hamlets and Jemima Reilly, Head Teacher of Morpeth School, Tower Hamlets. The Chairman said that the Vice-Chairman and she were also able to see the school first hand.

The Young People Ready for Work Inquiry has held a series of videoed and non-videoed interviews with young people.

6 COMMITTEE MEMBER UPDATES

Mr Stuchbury and Mr Irwin commented that they found the visit to the House of Commons very interesting.

7 QUESTIONS TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

The Chairman welcomed Mrs Angela Macpherson, Cabinet Member for Children's Services and the Committee received oral evidence from the Cabinet Member.

The Chairman invited the Cabinet Member for Children's Services to highlight to the Committee the key issues within the portfolio and whether there were any key performance issues that the Committee should be aware of.

The Cabinet Member advised that there are currently serious issues within the Children's Services portfolio particularly around demand and capacity. She said that in terms of capacity the portfolio was seeing a large number of referrals. She highlighted that in 2009/2010 there were approximately 3000 referrals compared to approximately 7000 to date. This is putting huge pressure on the Children In Need and First Response teams to process the referrals and then pressure on the social workers who then work with the families. The Cabinet Member said in terms of performance figures the high referrals could impact on the number of core assessments carried out within the 45 day timeframe. She said that the portfolio was working very hard to achieve the indicator and that it was being kept under continual review.

The Cabinet Member advised that the capacity issue was compounded by the fact that nationally there was difficulty in recruiting social workers and there is a shortage. The Council currently has some social worker vacancies and there are some locum social workers in place. The Cabinet Member said that this is fine for the short term but is not desirable for the long term particularly as the Council needed to embed the Munro training with all staff. High turnover of staff would make this process difficult. Recruitment of social workers is therefore a pressure and it was hoped that this would be addressed through the Medium Term Plan (MTP) process by investing more money to make social worker pay scales more attractive. She said some research was carried out on social worker pay and BCC's social worker pay scales was significantly below surrounding neighbouring authorities. It is hoped that by improving the pay scales more social workers will be attracted to Buckinghamshire. The Cabinet Member advised that newly qualified social workers were easier to attract but that the difficulty was in attracting experienced social workers. A mix of newly qualified and experienced staff is required and this is also part of the Munro requirements.

The Cabinet Member also informed the Committee that the number of Looked After Children (LAC) had risen over the last 5 years. She said that number had risen from 300 to 453 and that the portfolio was seeing an increase in the number of 15/16 year olds with quite risky behaviours some of whom require a high level of supervision or accommodation. She said that this type of care is expensive as it often means out of the county placements or secure accommodation. This produces budget pressures as it is more expensive. The Cabinet Member commented that the outcomes for young people was the priority and said that the outcomes for young people in residential care were not as good as long term foster care.

The Committee was informed that BCC had a disproportionate number of children in Independent Fostering agencies as opposed to its own fostering provisions. There is a huge need to encourage and recruit foster carers.

Members then asked questions. The questions and answers are summarised below:

Are you having to rely more on agency staff? How confident are you that we are keeping our children safe?

We are doing everything we can to protect children in our care and that we are rigorous in our procedures. I am confident staff are working as hard as they can.

When do you expect Ofsted to arrive for their inspection?

An Ofsted inspection is due and Ofsted could arrive any day.

Please can you provide us with a brief update on the Munro Programme? Do you think we will achieve our efficiencies linked to that?

The Munro programme started on 1 April 2013 so it hasn't been in place a year yet. I realise that the Committee has asked for this to be discussed in full at the next Select Committee meeting and I will have detailed figures available for that meeting. It is fair to say that the Munro Programme is still embedding and positively staff have responded favourably to the systemic practice and we are seeing good results on the front line with the children and families we are working with.

Were you hoping the Munro Programme would cut down the number of children in care?

When Munro was in its infancy and being planned and implemented we hadn't seen the unprecedented demand and level of referrals coming into the system. In some ways it can be a victim of its own success with First Response and Families Resilience services and preventative service being strengthened against a background of national issues which have fuelled referrals. That potentially has masked the impact of Munro had the situation been stable.

Can you please provide us with a brief update on the Families First programme and to what extent is the Families First programme achieving the predicted efficiency savings anticipated?

Families First is BCC terminology for the Troubled Families Initiative which aims to turn around the lives of families with different issues and troubles. It is a Payment by Results initiative focusing on different indicators such as worklessness, truancy, crime and anti-social behaviour. We measure against the indicators and then submit a claim against those. We identified 545 families in Buckinghamshire and officers are currently working with 526 families. The team is doing an amazing job. In terms of hard figures I cannot provide these today and it must be understood that some of the efficiencies will be spread across partners. The suggestion is that for every £1 spent the return is £4.30 and this figure could be significantly more with families who have particular difficulties. I can provide more details of this at a future meeting.

In programmes like Families First it is not just about cashable savings, it is also about cost avoidance for the future. The measures include financial savings but also the wider social return on investment and the costs which partners may avoid in the future.

Are the partnerships working?

The partnerships are working very well and new partnerships are being formed such as the Department for Work and Pensions.

Could you provide more information on the wider social benefits?

It is around the indicators we are looking at such as worklessness, truancy, drug and alcohol addiction. If issues are tackled at the right time a young person could be set up for success in life and that is the sort of intensive work being undertaken. By tackling the issues at source refer to the correct agencies and we hope put people on a path for the future which will prevent them requiring intensive health or social care provision. It is a holistic programme.

Please can you provide the Committee with a brief update on the Adoption and Fostering programmes in Buckinghamshire?

Campaigns have recently been run and these have been successful, particularly in adoption which received over 300 enquiries. A figure which was double the number compared to last year. The downside is capacity, and to handle those enquiries in a timely fashion has been a challenge. The number of enquiries has been encouraging. 25 children have been placed for adoption since April 2013 and a further 11 families are going through a matching and approval process but there is also a pool of children who are difficult to place.

Fostering has been more of a challenge, new foster carers are recruited but existing providers are also lost. It is a challenge to keep a base of foster carers whilst also adding new foster carers. To add an additional 60 foster carers is our target.

What are you doing to keep foster carers?

We are providing excellent support and training to our foster carers.

The Council carried out a big fostering campaign, which seemed to have a great response. However uptake wasn't taken forward and some foster carers leave. Do we know the reasons why those foster carers left and are we doing enough to encourage people to foster and retain those foster carers?

We need to be forensic about the reasons foster carers leave and to see if there is anything that the Council could have done to prevent them from leaving.

There are a number of initial enquires but then people find out that there is certain requirements such as the need for a spare room. We carried out an analysis of 26 foster carers who left. 12 had a significant change in their household circumstances, 4 were lost due to natural retirement, 5 left to go to other agencies due to financial reasons, 4 resigned due to

difficulties with the children they had been caring for and 1 stopped being a foster carer due to becoming a special guardian for the child.

15/16 is a difficult age and there is a stigma towards social workers from parents/carers who may want to ring for support. How are we communicating that there is help for parents/carers?

Preventative services are critical. We want to prevent children coming into care to ensure the best outcomes for those young people. We are getting the message out through initiatives such as Families First and universal services such as the Families Information Service and Children's Centres. It is not solely down to the Council to spread the message but a partnership approach. There are many different ways to get the message out such as health visitors, GPs and schools, who all have a role to play in the preventative agenda.

It has been highlighted at the Bucks Safeguarding Board the need for every agency to play their part in the preventative agenda and early help. This agenda will be progressed through the Bucks Safeguarding Board.

RESOLVED

That the oral evidence be noted

8 CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION PREVENTION

The Chairman welcomed Ms Coral McGookin, Safeguarding Business Manager and Ms Michelle Kukielka, Barnardos.

Ms McGookin advised the Committee that her role involved supporting and overseeing the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) and help drive the work of the LSCB through its sub committees. She said that the LSCB had a working group on CSE.

Ms Kukielka advised that she is the Assistant Director for Children's Services for Barnardos, South East and Anglia Region, which covers Buckinghamshire. She said that she strategically manages the Barnardos services in Buckinghamshire of which there were 19 overall. (16 Children Centres, 1 Family Support Service, 1 Short Break Service called Little Breaks, 1 Child Exploitation and Missing Service (the R U Safe project). Ms Kukielka advised that she set up the RU Safe project in 2007.

The Committee was informed that Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) was a complex issue and that until recently had been quite low in public profile and that Barnardos had recognised this for some years. Barnardos had some services around the Country which were specifically addressing CSE with young people. Barnardos also carried out the research which identified a link between young people who went missing and CSE. Ms Kukielka said that Bucks was very quick to respond to a scoping exercise carried out which identified that there was an issue of CSE in Buckinghamshire, which was very forward thinking at the time and Buckinghamshire started working on the R U Safe project early 2006 in partnership with Addaction and Barnardos.

The Cabinet Member commented that CSE can be a hidden problem and that no Local Authority was immune. She said that Thames Valley Police (TVP) identified 170 young people at risk of CSE. A figure she said is of great concern. She highlighted that it is not just girls at risk of CSE but boys also. The Cabinet Member said she was encouraged that the portfolio had received £200k extra funding following the MTP process and that the issue had been reflected in the Strategic Plan for the County Council. The Cabinet Member advised that the funding would primarily be used to fund staff to work in partnership with the Police and other partners.

Ms McGookin advised that the Council used the government definition for CSE which is “Sexual exploitation of children and young people under 18 involves exploitative situations, context and relationships where young people or a third person or persons receives something (such as food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, or money) as a result of performing, and/or others performing on them, sexual activities. In all cases, those exploiting the child or young person have power over them by virtue of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength and/or economic or other resources. Violence, coercion, intimidation are common. Involvement in exploitative relationships being characterised in the main by the child or young persons limited availability of choice resulting from their social, economic or emotional vulnerability”

Ms McGookin advised that there was a whole range of abuse within the definition and said that TVP had advised that they were seeing an increase of the number of 1:1 situations as opposed to the more organised or complex situations.

CSE is a growing concern and has come into the spotlight following the cases in Derby. She said that at the same time the Office of the Children’s Commissioner launched a 2 year enquiry into CSE in gangs and groups. The outcome of which gave greater priorities to LSCB to develop local strategies. In response to the Derby case Buckinghamshire was quite proactive locally and it was identified quickly that frontline staff needed information and lunchtime forums were run during 2012 with experts from Derby who had that local experience to help embed the understanding, signs, symptoms and appropriate responses. Buckinghamshire was already in a fortunate position to have the R U Safe project which has been at the forefront of identification and providing support to the young people affected in Buckinghamshire especially those going missing.

In November 2012 the Office of the Children’s Commission produced an interim report called ‘I thought I was the only one, the only one in the world’. This followed a national audit which identified that 16,500 children were identified as being at risk of CSE and that 2409 were confirmed as victims of CSE between August 2010 – August 2011. Ms McGookin commented that not all agencies recorded data and that there was some caution with the actual figures but said that the national picture clearly showed that CSE was increasing.

LSCB were encouraged to audit local arrangements and map the nature and prevalence of CSE in their areas, to agree Policy and Procedures and measure the effectiveness of the agencies responding. Buckinghamshire already had Policies and Procedures in place and instead commissioned an independent auditor to audit how well equipped staff and local businesses such as local hotels were in order to identify and appropriately respond to cases of CSE. The findings of the audit informed Buckinghamshire’s initial strategy and the working plan for the newly formed CSE working group. Last year ran an event to help embed the understanding of CSE. The government produced another report at the end of November 2013 called ‘If only someone had listened’. The learning was drawn from key investigations and prosecutions including the Oxfordshire case. Some of the key findings were that professionals were still not taking a child’s statement seriously and sometimes ignored or discounted them.

In terms of responding the LSCB ensured the strategy was up to date, updated Policy and Procedures in light of the learning, run dedicated training courses on CSE, identifying data and information to improve local knowledge, mapping and measuring effectiveness. Ms McGookin advised that Buckinghamshire was working with Bedfordshire University on a project to help measure effectiveness.

Members then asked questions. The questions and answers are summarised below:

You have received an extra £200k funding. How will you achieve the reductions you are hoping for?

The extra funding will supply extra staff. In terms of reducing numbers there will be activities on raising awareness of CSE and activities on guidance for professionals to recognise CSE.

What are the strategies in Buckinghamshire?

It is a double edged sword because once the working group was formed and it was realised that prevention and raising awareness needed to be addressed more proficiently an officer was employed to raise awareness. As awareness is raised and young people understand that the situation they are in is not acceptable the referral rate in turn is shooting up. The strategy is very much to keep raising awareness and keep doing the preventative work but for a period of time we will see a flurry of activity and we need to respond to that.

Have we in Bucks got any notable knowledge of genital mutilation cases and how are we dealing with them?

I thought I read a report that Doctors were under reporting cases and that the government has asked for fuller reporting in the future.

If you work with maternity services the rate can be looked at. Unless someone notifies staff during the ante-natal period or it is identified during labour you may not know that someone is affected. It is very difficult to identify as it is such a private and discreet thing.

We address with young people we work with as they will be the future population and awareness needs to be raised. It is a horrendous problem but also very difficult to get to the root of.

Buckinghamshire does have procedures and protocols in place regarding response but it is about having the right people in place and constant raising awareness.

How can we be sure that we have identified the specific situations where they may be CSE and how can we be sure the strategies we adopt will prevent or mitigate them?

In addition to preventative work, training programmes for Year 11 pupils is being run. The course is due to run from April/May 2014 and all schools are encouraged to participate.

In relation to keeping on top of the intelligence we have set up a specialist multi agency group. The group looks at the cases coming through, escalates those at greatest risk. One finding which has proved very useful is that the discussions allow them to make connections with other cases. This wasn't anticipated and it is working very well. It has been running for approximately 8 months now and it means that Buckinghamshire is in a better position to identify where the risk areas are developing and the connections between cases.

How do we ensure that the multi-agency approach is effective? What are the information protocols in place? What are the key roles of the different organisations?

The message that the LSCB delivers is that everyone has a part to play. There are key players such as social care, R U Safe and TVP but in relation to identifying and supporting a child through the process, any agency working with that child has a responsibility and we try to impress that message across the field of services.

What protocols exist for schools to provide information to the Local Authority and to the police on any concerns they may have? We also heard in a previous meeting that the school had to choose between 3 different agencies to phone and it seemed confusion. Communication is the key and how does it work?

There should be no variation in Child Protection, CSE is a child protection issue. Any agency should refer their concerns to the First Response team or to the Police if immediate risk.

Was communication confusing as the First Response team was new?

First Response is an initiative under the new Munro model. If an agency has any concern whatsoever regarding child protection they should contact First Response. Schools are clear on this process.

RESOLVED

That the oral evidence be noted

9 CHILD PROTECTION AND INTERNET SAFETY

Mr Simon Billenness, Chairman, Child Safeguarding Board Sub-Committee Internet Safety was welcomed to the meeting.

The Committee had received a written report on Child Protection and Internet Safety.

Mr Billenness advised that according to an Ofcom report 47% of young people owned mobile phones which could access the internet. Young people can also go online through gaming and can establish a rapport with people. Recent results in the BCC Young People resident survey identified that 31% of young people said that they had people on their social networking profiles who they did not know personally. To address the concerns the E-safety sub-committee of the LCSB has been raising awareness with children, young people and parents by showing them how to set up devices and talking about conduct.

Mr Billenness advised that recent events included engaging a Theatre company to deliver a production to highlight to children and young people how to keep safe online and the risks. The aim is to deliver the programme to primary, secondary and grammar schools across the County. Mr Billenness said that the programme was very successful and produced evidence of young people changing their behaviour. Young people were involved in the programme from the start and also helped with the evaluation. Mr Billenness said that the young person's perspective was very important as they provided useful information to support the delivery. Officers also re-visited schools to ask young people whether they remembered what the production was about and whether they did anything differently as a result of seeing the production. Comments from young people included: "I am more careful about what I put online" and "I am only friends online with people that I know".

Members then asked questions. The questions and answers are summarised below:

How do you see Internet Safety working within your portfolio strategies?

It is fundamental as it is safeguarding young people. If we can raise awareness of internet safety it will link to the Core Strategy of providing effective safeguarding for all children. It will also link to the corporate plan to protect the most vulnerable.

How will you be measuring Internet Safety?

There isn't a direct measure for Internet Safety.

The Committee could perhaps do a Select Committee Inquiry on Internet Safety

As Corporate Parents it is important that all County Councillors are able to highlight how to use the Internet safely.

Please can you provide the Committee with a brief overview of the Internet Safety programme and how it works? What key partners are involved? What are the key areas of risk to young people?

In terms of the multi-agency approach we have the representatives on the Board, some of those are Ambassador trained by CEOP which means that their role is to go out and train other people.

We are also carrying out some pilot work with primary schools to look at how we can raise awareness with parents. It is a multi pronged approach. We are trying to change the conduct of young people, trying to raise awareness of professionals so they can support young people and parents and also support parents to have an open dialogue with young people so that they know what is going on.

The other group we are focussing on is peers because we know the impact that peer groups have on individual young people. On 28 March 2014 an Anti-bullying conference will be held.

What is being done with providers such as mobile phone providers?

Internet Service Providers are doing work highlighting how parents and young people can set up equipment to be safe. It is also about having a conversation with young people before they are given any devices which can access the internet. You can have the settings in place but we need to ensure that if a young person comes across something they don't like feel able highlight it.

What do we need to do to improve Internet Safety?

Previously we were working with older children, now we are working with parents, children centres and primary schools due to the influence of older siblings.

Can you do more with parents?

Ofsted will inspect schools specifically on Internet Safety. Schools will need to have a strategy in place, engage with parents and teach staff.

RESOLVED

That the oral and written evidence be noted

10 THE ADOPTION CAMPAIGN

The Chairman invited Members to ask the Cabinet Member questions on the Adoption Campaign.

The questions and answers are summarised below:

Can you please provide us with a brief update on the adoption campaign?

The current campaign has been very successful in creating interest. We have learnt that the majority of those expressions of interest came through Google which is quite interesting and something we can build and learn from in terms of our media approach.

We are actively working with our families to achieve a suitable match. We also have a pool of children who are quite difficult to place for adoption and this needs some further work.

Are you able to speed up the process through the courts?

We have to shorten the process and we are working hard to reduce the time it takes from the initial enquiry to the end of the process.

We are meeting much shorter timescales than previously. As part of the adoption reforms we invited a company to undertake a diagnostic service on our adoption services and see what we could make improvements. As a result we are working with Milton Keynes on developing a family drug and alcohol court. The aim is that families where drugs and alcohol is an issue agree to work with us and the courts in a different way so that we can work better with those families.

In terms of permanency we have improved and increased the number of family of group conferences to see if there is anyone in the wider family who may be suitable to adopt the child. We have also streamlined the adoption panel process by looking to see if it is possible to reduce the amount of paperwork, arranging more panels, training for social workers who write the reports and arrange adoption activity days.

We heard earlier how successful the adoption campaign had been and that you had received many initial enquiries but only 25 children have been adopted. What was your target?

The target is to recruit and improve 30 adopters and we are well on the way. There is a lot of interest but we need to be rigorous in the recruiting and matching process which means that there will be a large number of people fall out from those enquiries.

Is the department at capacity to deal with the current demand?

The department is over capacity. In terms of caseloads most of our units are operating at overcapacity. It is hugely variable geographically with the areas of greatest deprivation having very high caseloads. The teams are all working at capacity and we are working hard within our financial constraints to manage that.

RESOLVED

That the oral evidence be noted

11 NARROWING THE GAP SELECT COMMITTEE INQUIRY

The Chairman welcomed Mr Chris Munday, Service Director for Learning and Skills Mr Raza Khan, Chief Executive Officer, Bucks Learning Trust and Mrs Amanda Hopkins, Director of Education, Bucks Learning Trust

The Chairman Advised that Mrs Hopkins was new in post and invited her to introduce herself to the Committee

Mrs Hopkins advised that she was currently Chief Executive Officer for Broughton Meadow Education Trust which is in Buckingham and is part of Broughton Meadow Academy. The Trust is also responsible for Grenville Combined School and the new school which will be opening. She advised that there is initial teaching training at the school and that 40 graduates a year were trained who are then employed in Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes and Oxfordshire. She advised that she had recently been appointed as Director of Education for the Bucks Learning Trust and would be starting the post full time after Easter following a gradual change over.

The Chairman invited the Committee to look at the Select Committee Inquiry report and thanked the Committee and Officers for all their hard work and contributions.

The Policy Officer advised that the report was the product of the work of the Committee over a period of months where numerous stakeholder and witnesses had been interviewed. He advised that if the report was agreed it would be submitted to Cabinet who would be invited to respond to the recommendations. The response would then come back to a future Select Committee.

The Chairman then took Members through each of the recommendations.

RESOLVED

That the Narrowing the Gap Select Committee Inquiry report and recommendations be agreed and referred to the Buckinghamshire County Council Cabinet and any other relevant decision makers for consideration, requesting an Executive Response.

12 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered a report from the Policy Officer on the detailed Annual Committee Work Programme 2013-2014

RESOLVED

That the agreed Education, Skills and Children's Services Committee Work Programme be noted.

13 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Members noted the next meeting of the Education, Skills and Children's Services Select Committee on Tuesday 25 March 2014, 10am, Mezz room 2, County Hall, Aylesbury, Bucks

CHAIRMAN