



Minutes

EDUCATION, SKILLS AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE EDUCATION, SKILLS AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE HELD ON TUESDAY 25 MARCH 2014, IN MEZZANINE ROOM 2, COUNTY HALL, AYLESBURY, COMMENCING AT 10.07 AM AND CONCLUDING AT 12.32 PM.

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

CO-OPTED MEMBERS PRESENT

David Babb

GUESTS PRESENT

Mike Appleyard, Angela Macpherson, Tom Pike and Kavita Sharma

OFFICERS PRESENT

Stephen Bagnall, Michael Carr, Amanda Hopkins, Raza Khan, Bill Moore, Chris Munday, Joy Shakespeare and Steve Tanner

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Chris Adams, Margaret Aston, Rebecca Burchell and Michael Moore.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Paul Irwin, Mark Shaw and Katrina Wood declared that they were all members of the Corporate Parenting Panel and in addition, Mark Shaw was a member of Mrs Macpherson's Medium Term Planning (MTP) Panel.

3 MINUTES



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



The minutes of the meeting held on 18th February 2014 were agreed as a correct record.

4 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

The Chairman welcomed Mr Derek Berry from High Wycombe who wished to raise some questions concerning the Committee's recent Narrowing the Gap Inquiry. The Chairman and the Democratic Services Officer explained the process for Public Questions and it was noted that Mr Berry would have four minutes to address the Committee and the Cabinet Member Mr Appleyard would then have four minutes in which to respond.

Mr Berry explained that he had read the Committee's Narrowing the Gap report and he felt that some of it was very good. However he was still concerned about why Buckinghamshire has such a big gap and he wanted to know which geographical areas and which communities were most affected. In addition he noted that the report recommended supporting children who receive Free School Meals (FSM) further to assist them in securing a place at a Grammar school and he asked what the local authority was planning to do to achieve this aim. Mr Berry also asked why the Committee's report was being presented to Cabinet prior to the report which has been commissioned from Professor Strand from Oxford University.

Finally Mr Berry expressed the opinion that the attainment of pupils in Buckinghamshire Upper Schools could be improved and he urged the Cabinet to look into ways of raising the standards within Upper Schools.

The Chairman thanked Mr Berry for his questions and asked Mr Appleyard, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills to respond. Mr Appleyard explained that the Bucks Learning Trust would be delivering initiatives with a view to narrowing the gap and he felt that the Committee had already achieved some changes simply by raising awareness of this issue. Mr Appleyard asked Mr Chris Munday, Service Director – Learning, Skills and Prevention to provide more details for Mr Berry and it was agreed that Mr Munday would speak to Mr Berry outside the meeting if he required any further information.

Mr Munday explained that there is quite a large gap in achievement across the whole of the South East region therefore Buckinghamshire is not unusual. However in Bucks, the achievement of pupils is generally higher than the national average, whilst the performance of pupils in receipt of FSM is lower than the national average, which creates a significant gap. However the performance of pupils in receipt of FSM has improved with Bucks ranking 61st out of 150 local authorities in 2013 with regards to FSM attainment, as compared to a ranking of 116th in 2012.

Some trends have been identified in Bucks and more work was needed to understand how best to resolve these issues. Generally the larger gaps in achievement were seen not in deprived areas but in areas where FSM pupils were in the minority within their school. Boys tend to perform less well than girls and whilst ethnicity was also a factor, it was noted that White British FSM pupils had not improved as much as FSM pupils from Pakistani or Black Caribbean backgrounds. Also there was a concern that many FSM pupils had high attainment up to the age of 7 but then their performance dropped by the age of 11. Mr Munday reminded the Committee that the Pupil Premium follows the child so gives schools the opportunity to be flexible in terms of the additional support they provide.

The Chairman asked Mr Munday about the status of the Strand report that Mr Berry had referred to. Mr Munday reported that an updated version had been received. There had been a delay because the local authority wanted the report to incorporate the very latest data. The report would be shared with Schools first via the Bucks Association of Secondary Heads (BASH) and the Primary Executive Board (PEB) and would then become publicly available.

The Chairman asked the Committee if they had any questions. A member asked Mr Munday if he would comment on a recent article he had read which claimed that a child in a local authority primary school had a 20% chance of gaining a place at Grammar School in comparison with a child from a private school having a 50% chance. Mr Munday advised that the final appeals for Grammar School places were being held currently. Once they had been completed the data would be able to be analysed. Mr Munday was asked if he would be able to give this information to the Committee when it was available.

A member commented that he struggled to see how additional money in the form of the Pupil Premium could make a significant difference to an FSM child. He gave the example of being able to use the library to access resources that might not be available at home. Mr Munday explained that it was vital to understand what happened to these children between the ages of 7 and 11 - What activities do they participate in outside of school? Are parents engaged? Also could these children, who represent a fairly tight group, be tracked more effectively? Historically resources have been focussed on deprived areas but actually this was not where the attainment gap was particularly obvious – FSM children did not seem to achieve when they were in the minority in their school.

The Chairman thanked Mr Berry for attending the meeting and thanked both Mr Appleyard and Mr Munday for their response to Mr Berry's questions.

5 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Chairman reported on recent visits she had undertaken as follows:

- Visited the Bucks Learning Trust (BLT) Teaching and Learning Centre at The Mandeville School in Aylesbury to see how Governor Support Services are run.
- Attended training sessions for school governors – one Primary and one Secondary. One session was on internet safety, a topic considered by the Committee.
- Visited Ashmead School where the Chairman was very impressed with the work they have been doing to support the achievements of FSM pupils.
- Met with Mr Raza Khan and Mrs Amanda Hopkins of the BLT.
- Attended the Young Enterprise Awards.

The Chairman reported that the Narrowing the Gap Inquiry Report had been presented at Cabinet and had been well-received with seven of the twelve recommendations agreed and the other five being considered further and agreed in part. Mr Appleyard commented that he would consider the recommendations agreed in part further and report back to the Committee, as he wanted to undertake some further research first. Progress on the implementation of the agreed recommendations would be reported back in approximately six months time.

6 COMMITTEE MEMBER UPDATES

Mr Shaw reported that he had recently visited the Chiltern Hills Academy. They had improved their attainment and last year achieved 51% A-C grades at GCSE. He had found the Senior Leadership team to be highly inspirational.

7 PERSONAL, SOCIAL, HEALTH AND ECONOMIC (PSHE) EDUCATION IN BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

The Chairman welcomed Mr Bill Moore, School Improvement Advisor with the Bucks Learning Trust (BLT) and Kavita Sharma and Tom Pike, representatives from the Youth Parliament to the meeting. Tom Pike explained that he had been a representative for High Wycombe from 2012-14 and Kavita Sharma was a representative for Aylebury Vale 2012-14 and had recently been re-elected to serve another term. Bill Moore advised that he had worked as an RE and

Physical, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) teacher prior to working as an Advisor for the local authority for 15 years and he now worked for BLT.

Mr Appleyard introduced the item by commenting that he had been concerned for some years that the Secondary sector was not taking PSHE seriously. He believed that young people needed preparation for life, university and the world of work and the non-academic side of school life was just as important as taking exams. Mr Appleyard explained that he had championed the expansion of the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme in Buckinghamshire as he believed it enabled young people to learn and demonstrate different but important skills to future employers. Schools must celebrate non-academic success as well.

Mr Appleyard said that he welcomed the Youth Parliament's report as it echoed his own views on PSHE and he believed that it was important that young people should produce relevant and compelling reports such as this.

Mr Moore was asked for his views on the report and he commented that in 15 years as an advisor he believed that there had been little movement in this area. He said that over the years he had spoken to young people with eating disorders, young people who had been humiliated in schools and many children who felt they were simply exam fodder. PSHE is very important but it can be quite difficult for schools. However those working in Education needed to consider what is school for? What do we want for our young people and how can we make a difference?

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

What are the key issues and developments for PSHE both nationally and locally?

Mr Moore explained that PSHE was not statutory but it was expected that schools would teach PSHE. The 2000 National Curriculum guidance was helpful if used properly. Sex education was statutory in Secondary schools but not in Primary. The main issue is that schools are under pressure to achieve and progress is all. There needed to be a way locally of getting Schools and the BLT to prioritise PSHE alongside academic achievement. Children need to be valued as people.

What flexibility is available to schools in how PSHE should be delivered?

It is very flexible. Schools could do with more networking and support for PSHE. Some schools cover PSHE by holding a dedicated day once a term. Kavita Sharma reported that in Years 7-9 she had PSHE once a fortnight for an hour, but in Year 11 it was dropped altogether to allow students to focus on their GCSEs. Tom Pike reported that he had PSHE for an hour a fortnight but this was from Year 7 right through to Sixth Form. Teachers wanted more time for it and he personally found it helpful, although he believed that some topics which were very relevant were covered very briefly whilst more time was spent on other less useful issues.

Mr Appleyard commented that he would like to see more Government direction to OFSTED to examine PSHE and perhaps Government should be more prescriptive about the delivery of PSHE. He intended to discuss this with colleagues across the South East with a view to lobbying via the Local Government Association.

What guidance and advice can the local authority offer in relation to how PSHE should be delivered?

Not much really. Mr Moore had led the Healthy Schools team but this no longer existed following budgetary cuts, although he did provide some training on PSHE.

What is the Council policy on sex education in independent, church and free schools? How do we ensure that all children in Buckinghamshire have an equal opportunity to sex education?

There is guidance on the grid for learning but it is out of date. There is Statutory guidance for Sexual Education from 2000 which Secondary schools must take account of, although Academies and Free Schools can choose whether to provide this. Mr Moore commented that it is not simply statutory duty – how do we want to prepare our young people and what is our vision for Education? It was important that sex education was relationship education also, as this is the key to human fulfilment.

Tom Pike explained that in his experience relationships were not covered that well in PSHE. He had basic sex education, information on sexually transmitted diseases and contraception but there was nothing on lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender issues or general relationship advice. PSHE was delivered by a Maths teacher who did not seem totally comfortable in the lessons.

Kavita Sharma reported that a teacher had asked the class to write down any questions on a piece of paper for them to answer and had then subsequently refused to answer them. She felt that standard training needed to be given for all teachers of PSHE.

How do schools provide appropriate impartial advice to children of a very young age on sexual awareness and abuse?

This is very difficult. Children need to understand appropriate language and know who to turn to for help. Schools are scared – they do need guidance, support and accountability.

How does the Council and its partners ensure that advice on drugs and alcohol is appropriately informed by experience of the real-life outcomes of misuse? And how do parents and teachers keep up to date on what drugs are available?

Students needed to be asked about what they do and don't know. The focus of drug education is not about drug types per se it is more about why people take drugs, the risks of drug taking and the impact of the drug trade. Drama and distancing techniques can be helpful in allowing young people to explore issues such as drug and alcohol abuse.

Tom Pike commented that outside companies or charities should be used more. Kavita Sharma reported that in Sixth Form there had been more input from outside speakers which she had found very useful.

What are the key findings and recommendations for PSHE that you would like to highlight from the work you have undertaken in investigating this issue with other young people?

There are three key findings to emphasise – firstly teachers require more support for PSHE, secondly regular feedback should be sought from pupils because they know what topics are most relevant and useful to them at the time and this will obviously change and finally, we would like to see high standards of PSHE teaching across the whole of Bucks. Teachers should receive quality training and perhaps a resources hub could be put in place to allow information and best practice to be shared. Young people would be happy to help with training.

The Chairman thanked all the contributors for their time and commended the young people on their report and how articulate they had been in addressing the Committee. The Chairman proposed that the Committee could ask the Cabinet Member to ask the Bucks Learning Trust to work in consultation with the young people to develop some guidance for schools for PSHE. Mr Appleyard said that he was happy with this suggestion, but he also went further by suggesting that the Youth Parliament representatives should present their report to School Governing Bodies, as they determine the curriculum in schools and may well be encouraged to give PSHE a higher priority, as a result of reading the report and seeing the feedback from young people.

Mrs Amanda Hopkins, Director of Education at the BLT confirmed that BLT is committed to raising the profile of PSHE and she commented that it fits nicely with the narrowing the gap agenda already identified by the Committee, as schools with narrow achievement gaps also tended to be good at PSHE delivery. Mrs Hopkins said that the BLT would be happy to publish the Youth Parliament's report and circulate it to all head teachers and governing bodies on their behalf. In addition she would like to meet them to discuss how BLT might link with them to engage the views of young people for other areas of their work.

RESOLVED

That the Cabinet Member request the Bucks Learning Trust to develop, in consultation with young people, guidance to schools to encourage best practice and greater standardisation of PSHE delivery in Buckinghamshire.

8 FAMILIES FIRST

The Chairman welcomed Mrs Angela Macpherson, Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Joy Shakespeare, Head of Family Resilience and Families First Programme Lead to the meeting. Mrs Macpherson began by giving the Committee an overview of the Families First project. Families First is Buckinghamshire's response to the national Troubled Families agenda which is looking to turn around the lives of families where there are multiple issues, such as truancy or exclusion from school, crime, addiction and worklessness. Buckinghamshire County Council (BCC) has deliberately chosen to use the government grant to work through partnership with other agencies to help families in order to create a sustainable model for the future.

Phase 1 ends in March 2015 with Phase 2 of the programme starting in April 2016. Government are running an Early Starters cohort which BCC hope to apply for if the minimum criteria can be achieved. Early starters are required to demonstrate a robust business case and must be working with at least 90% of identified families in their area (which BCC is already) and must be achieving outcomes for at least 50% of those identified – BCC is not quite there yet but hopes to achieve this in time.

Mrs Macpherson concluded by commenting that she was aware that the Committee would be interested in any financial savings as a result of Families First but this was difficult to quantify at the moment.

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

What are the key issues for Families First? What are the savings so far to the Council from the Families First programme and are the annual reductions in funding from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) likely to undermine planning for Families First and BCC's ability to continue to deliver the service?

We are currently working with our whole cohort of identified families in Bucks – 545 families. 182 have been 'turned around' according to strict national criteria. Families First is making good progress and is on track with what DCLG are expecting. BCC hopes to apply for early starter status for Phase 2. In order to qualify BCC need to demonstrate that 50% of the cohort has been 'turned around' by June 2014 and it is likely this will be achieved.

In terms of whether reduced funding is compromising our ability to deliver the service, this remains to be seen, but BCC have invested in helping existing staff to work together in a smarter way in order to make the programme sustainable. The vast majority of funding has been directed at this. A key element to Families First is that the families have a single worker who can gain their trust. Previously some of these families were being visited by 18 different agencies, each with their own plan to support them which made it very confusing. Workers use a Family Star Plus Outcomes Chart to help families work through their problems and now

Probation, GPS and Health Visitors are also starting to use this approach. Joy Shakespeare distributed a copy of the chart for members and some case studies which highlighted the outcomes that had been achieved for families.

With regards to savings a Fiscal Return on Investment (FROI) was undertaken on a small sample of 10 families who had received support. This demonstrated that for every £1 spent there was an average benefit return of £4.30. However the sample is very small so a more rigorous assessment will be undertaken once the Government's own FROI tool is available.

Aiming to make the service sustainable is laudable but is payments by results a good way to plan a public service?

Joy Shakespeare did not want to comment on whether payment by results was a good way to operate public services although she acknowledged that it was an increasing trend. As a result of the outcomes achieved for 182 families to date, Buckinghamshire has claimed payment by results amounting to £115,000 during 2013/14. Currently outcomes are easy to measure – for example through school attendances and whether someone has reoffended or not. It is harder to quantify the resolution of other issues within a family such as incidents of domestic violence or an improvement in mental health outcomes. In Buckinghamshire, prosecutions for non-attendance at school have definitely fallen so a financial saving has been achieved there.

As there is no one size fits all approach to troubled families, how can the Council plan a service which is so reliant on results for its core income and anticipate future demand?

The Cabinet Member expressed the view that BCC always had to be mindful of resources but sometimes a target driven approach can help to focus the mind. Joy Shakespeare agreed, commenting that partners are more driven to engage fully in this process due to the payment by results approach.

RESOLVED

That the oral evidence be noted.

9 FOSTERING

The Chairman welcomed Mr David Martin, Deputy Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Mr Stephen Bagnall, Service Director – Child and Family Service and Mr Steve Tanner, Head of Children's Care to the meeting. It was noted that Mrs Macpherson had asked Mr Martin to take a particular responsibility for Fostering and Adoption.

The Chairman asked Mr Martin if he could provide an overview of the key issues and developments for fostering. Mr Martin reported that there were currently 456 children in care. This figure had increased by 20% over the past three years, but this increase mirrors the national trend. 64% of children in care were placed with foster carers, 37% were placed with independent foster carers, which was more expensive than using in-house foster carers and 50% of all children in care were currently placed out of county. The Council needed to increase the number of foster carers available in Buckinghamshire. BCC were very good at retaining foster carers once recruited and foster carers valued the level of training and support provided to them.

BCC had a difficult balance to strike between trying to reduce the number of children in care, whilst also maintaining our safeguarding duties towards children and young people.

Members were invited to ask questions. The questions and answers are summarised below:

Independent foster carers cost almost twice as much as the rates we pay our in-house fosterers. How can we recruit more in-house foster carers?

We need to attract more families to fostering. Members as corporate parents can play their part by promoting fostering or adoption when they are out speaking with people.

Should we increase the rates paid to our in-house foster carers?

BCC cannot afford to get into a bidding war with independent agencies. Our retention level is higher due to the quality of support given. People must of course be properly compensated but we cannot double our rates. We have had a significant increase in Adoption enquiries following a recent marketing campaign and it is hoped that Fostering Fortnight, which will run in late May will also lead to more enquiries from potential foster carers.

How much money would be saved if children placed out of county could be brought back into Buckinghamshire?

It is important to remember that some children do have to be placed out of county for good reasons – for example there is no secure accommodation available in Bucks. Holistic care can be more difficult for children placed a long distance away and therefore the Council's objective is to place children as near to home as possible, provided it is safe for them. If in-house fostering could be increased then more children could be accommodated within the county. Although we do place out of county, a measure of 20 miles from home is used as an indicator and often this means children are placed just over the county borders in Oxfordshire or Bedfordshire for example.

RESOLVED

That the oral evidence be noted.

10 ADOPTION

The Chairman asked for an update on the results of the recent Adoption campaign. Mr Martin reported that there had been so many enquiries that additional staff had been brought in to deal with the resulting assessments. Mr Martin had given his personal assurance that he would intervene if any potential adopters had issues with the speed of the response to their enquiry. In 2012-13 the average period of time for a successful adoption was 647 days. In 2013-14, in response to the drive from Government to speed up the adoption process, BCC had reduced this time to 474 days and had now set a target of 420 days.

BCC had been averaging 18 adoptions per year but this year it was anticipated that 26 would be secured and next year the target would be 40. Specialist staff have been appointed to deal with the application process and the government grant has helped to fund this. Adoption is a long and complex business and it was important that it was right, first time and every time. Mr Martin suggested that members should observe an Adoption Panel meeting to see first hand the amount of work that goes into ensuring that this is achieved for every child who is adopted.

Members asked questions and the questions and answers are summarised below:

Will the new Children and Families Bill help children in need of adoption to be placed with families of different ethnic backgrounds?

Traditionally some local authorities have waited too long to try and get a child matched with a family of the same ethnic origin. However in Buckinghamshire there have not been massive delays by being bound by a 100% correct ethnic match. It was noted that ethnicity and age are by no means a bar for people wishing to adopt.

RESOLVED

That the oral evidence be noted.

11 THE MUNRO PROGRAMME

The Chairman welcomed back Mrs Angela Macpherson, Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Mr Stephen Bagnall, Service Director – Child and Family Service. Mrs

Macpherson provided the Committee with an update on the progress of the Munro Programme. The programme was introduced in September 2011 and included six workstreams, namely Social Work Practice model, Provider Services review, Modernising Practice, Financial Management, Understanding Performance Data and Internal Providers. BCC was still in the process of delivering the programme but the new practice model was well embedded now. However with increased levels of demand, it was acknowledged that some of the teams were under strain.

Mrs Macpherson recognised that the Committee would be interested in savings achieved through delivering the recommended changes of Munro. She reported that in 2012-13 the service had over-achieved delivering savings of £1million and in 2013-14 there was a slight underachievement in terms of anticipated savings, but overall this was a good result.

The Chairman asked if there was still a shortage of social workers. Mrs Macpherson advised that whilst additional social workers had been recruited they tended to be newly qualified workers, so it would be helpful to recruit some more experienced social workers to work alongside them.

RESOLVED

That the oral evidence be noted.

12 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the proposed updated Work Programme for 2013-14. The Chairman asked Mr Raza Khan, Chief Executive of the Bucks Learning Trust and Mrs Amanda Hopkins, Director of Education, Bucks Learning Trust if they had any comments on the Work Programme and if there were any other key issues that they would like to suggest for the Committee to investigate.

Mrs Hopkins commended the Committee's work on Narrowing the Gap and offered to put the Committee in touch with other professionals with expertise in this area, including the Head Teachers at Ashmead School who had come up with bespoke solutions for the children in their school. A member commented that receipt of Free School Meals (FSM) was often still seen as a stigma. Other members commented that access to the Pupil Premium for these children should be seen as an entitlement rather than a benefit and then perhaps more people would come forward to claim this additional support.

Mr Raza Khan suggested early education as a key issue as there was now more emphasis on early years and new children's centre guidance.

RESOLVED

That the updated Work Programme for 2013-14 be agreed.

13 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To note the next meeting of the Education, Skills and Children's Services Select Committee on **22nd April 2014**, 10am, Mezzanine Room 2, County Hall, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire.

CHAIRMAN