



Minutes

EDUCATION, SKILLS AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE EDUCATION, SKILLS AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE HELD ON TUESDAY 27 MAY 2014, IN MEZZANINE ROOM 2, COUNTY HALL, AYLESBURY, COMMENCING AT 10.00 AM AND CONCLUDING AT 12.17 PM.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Margaret Aston, John Chilver, Dev Dhillon (Vice-Chairman), Phil Gomm, Paul Irwin, Valerie Letheren (Chairman), Wendy Mallen, Mark Shaw, Robin Stuchbury, David Watson and Katrina Wood

CO-OPTED MEMBERS PRESENT

David Babb, Michael Moore and Monique Nowers

GUESTS PRESENT

Mike Appleyard, Angela Macpherson, Chauhdry Shafique MBE and Professor Steve Strand

OFFICERS PRESENT

Michael Carr, Chris Munday and Yvette Thomas

1 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

It was proposed and duly seconded that Mrs V Letheren should be elected Chairman of the Committee.

RESOLVED

That Mrs V Letheren be elected Chairman of the Education, Skills and Children's Services Select Committee for the ensuing year.

2 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



It was proposed and duly seconded that Mr D Dhillon should be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Committee.

RESOLVED

That Mr D Dhillon be elected Vice-Chairman of the Education, Skills and Children's Services Select Committee for the ensuing year.

3 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Rebecca Burchell.

The Chairman welcomed two new members to the Committee, Mr David Watson and Mr Phil Gomm.

4 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Margaret Aston declared that she was a school governor at Aylesbury High School, Mark Shaw declared that he was a governor of a Skills College in Chesham and Katrina Wood declared that she was a governor at a school in Hazlemere.

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

5 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 22nd April 2014 were confirmed as a correct record subject to a minor amendment in Item 2 Declarations of Interest, as Katrina Wood had also declared an interest as a member of the Corporate Parenting Panel at the April meeting.

The Chairman also reported that she had sent a letter on behalf of the Committee to Graham Stuart MP who chairs the All Party Parliamentary Group for Home Education, raising the concerns expressed by members at the April meeting. She had now received a response and it was agreed that copies of both letters would be circulated to the Committee and if any members had any comments to make they would feed these back to the Policy Officer.

ACTION: Democratic Services Officer

6 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were none.

7 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Chairman reported that she had recently visited Curzon Church of England School which had received a letter of commendation for their Key Stage 2 results for children in receipt of Free School Meals. The Chairman had been impressed by the caring ethos of the school and told members about a blue chair that children could sit on if they were feeling sad or upset and an older child would come over and talk to them and attempt to cheer them up.

8 COMMITTEE MEMBER UPDATES

There were none.

9 THE STRAND REPORT

The Chairman welcomed Professor Steve Strand, University of Oxford and Mr Chauhdry Shafique MBE and Mrs Rashida Kazi, representing the Muslim Parents Association in High

Wycombe to the meeting. The Chairman explained that Professor Strand would give a short presentation summarising the findings of his report 'Mind the gap: An analysis of the Free School Meal gap in Buckinghamshire County Council'. There would then be an opportunity for members' questions and Mr Shafique MBE and Mrs Kazi would also be asked for their views.

Professor Strand gave a PowerPoint presentation and the following main points were noted:

- Professor Strand had a degree and PhD in Psychology and worked in various positions for local authorities and special schools during his career, for example, he had worked at Wandsworth for 10 years. His particular interest was school effectiveness and how children progress through schools.
- As a starting point Professor Strand aggregated the figures provided by Buckinghamshire County Council (BCC) over a three year period as this provided a more meaningful sample of pupils receiving free school meals (FSM) which enabled him to drill down to investigate other factors such as ethnicity, gender etc
- 10 other local authorities were used as statistical neighbours for comparison purposes as well as looking at the national trends.
- The headline findings were that at primary level, 2013 marked a real change with Bucks FSM children achieving up to the national average. This was a positive trend demonstrating progress for primary FSM pupils.
- However at Key Stage 4 (KS4) Bucks has the largest achievement gap. This is partly because the non-FSM pupils in Bucks perform well above the England average but also because in recent years the performance of FSM pupils at KS4 has declined. Between 2007-2009 FSM pupils in Buckinghamshire were achieving the national average, but subsequently their performance has fallen below the average, with a significant drop in 2012.
- In simple terms, primary pupils not receiving FSM are three times more likely to achieve level 4 at KS2 than FSM children and at secondary school, pupils not receiving FSM are five times more likely to achieve five GCSEs at grades A* -C than FSM pupils.
- The gap at KS4 is larger in Bucks than any other comparator, be that national, London schools, across the South East region or against other local authorities with a selective school system. Therefore improving achievements of FSM pupils at KS4 is a key area to focus on.
- It was also noted that boys receiving FSM are at particular risk of low achievement at KS2 and ethnicity was also a factor with particularly low achievement by White British, Black Caribbean, Mixed White and Black Caribbean and Pakistani pupils entitled to FSM.
- Interestingly EAL demonstrates ethnicity but is not a measure of fluency in English. EAL children in receipt of FSM perform better than non-EAL FSM children therefore EAL can be seen as a resilience factor rather than a risk. SEN was also a risk factor but not significantly.
- It was also noted that FSM children performing well at the age of 7 (end of KS1) tended to then have a larger gap at KS2. This suggests that action needs to be taken to ensure that any decline in achievement is identified early and remedial action taken.
- Over and above the factors influencing individual students such as gender, ethnicity etc, Professor Strand also considered whether the composition of their school had any impact on student achievement. Does the composition of a school, particularly the percentage of pupils entitled to FSM, have an impact on overall attainment and progress? Also does the percentage of students receiving FSM have a differential effect on FSM as compared to non-FSM students – does being an FSM pupil in a school with a low percentage of FSM pupils have an increased negative impact on performance and progress than being in a school with a greater concentration of FSM pupils?
- Professor Strand found that being poor in a more affluent school would have a more detrimental effect on achievement than where FSM children were in more concentrated numbers within a school. Ofsted has also drawn attention to this.

- It was also reported that there were four schools where FSM children were achieving better than their non-FSM peers.
- Professor Strand recommended targeting action at the schools with the highest percentage of FSM pupils in order to reach the greatest number of FSM students across Bucks. However alongside this there should be an awareness of the particular difficulties for those FSM students who account for a minority within their school community and schools should be encouraged to offer them further support to enable them to fulfil their potential.
- At KS4 there was a clear gap between the achievement of White British FSM pupils and White British non-FSM pupils. Black Caribbean and Mixed White and Caribbean students in receipt of FSM also performed poorly. However a Pakistani background proved to be a resilience factor for young people in receipt of FSM as their gap was not as significant.
- The prior attainment trend identified in primary FSM children was also seen at KS4. Those FSM students who had high attainment at KS2 were at risk of underperforming in their GCSEs and schools need to be aware of this.
- It was noted that while 40% of secondary students in Bucks attended grammar schools less than 10% of FSM pupils attend grammar schools.

The Chairman thanked Professor Strand for his presentation and invited members' questions.

The Coalition Government has increased the funding for Pupil Premium over the past three years. Although there has been feedback that not all parents who could be entitled have been claiming it, do you think the gap is getting narrower due to better use of the Pupil Premium?

It is very early days for Pupil Premium and it is hard to judge its impact as there has been contradictory evidence. Professor Strand hoped for a positive outcome and he expressed the view that the weighting of £1300 for primary pupils was important, as early intervention was crucial. If a child falls behind early it is then very difficult for them to catch up.

Why are so few FSM pupils selected for a Grammar school place?

The cumulative effect of disadvantage means that by the age of 11 it is harder for these young people to pass the 11 plus. There will be a mix of factors but notably economic hardship may mean that these children will not receive any coaching for the exams.

Do you think that selective education is a negative or positive?

I live in Warwickshire where there are three Grammar schools which take 3% of the secondary school population. One of my children qualified and the other didn't and I could see first-hand the impact on their self-esteem. There needs to be some focussed activity in upper schools to try and address this.

There is no doubt that poverty affects attainment but do you feel that rural and urban poverty are different and could this be masked by selective education?

The main difference between rural and urban areas is the concentration of young people living in poverty. It is easier to target help when you have more FSM children together. Rural poverty is more dispersed – better transport links and peripatetic services are needed to address this.

How can BCC encourage schools to improve attainment for White British FSM children?

This is a national issue and Professor Strand is currently advising a Parliamentary Select Committee on how to tackle the underachievement of White British boys in receipt of FSM.

How can BCC encourage schools to improve the attainment of Black Caribbean FSM children?

The data at KS2 and KS4 is very different. Nationally the gaps are larger at KS4 than KS2. Children don't see school as relevant and schools need to be more flexible in addressing the needs of students from different backgrounds. There are policy implications for all schools as research has shown that even Outstanding schools have attainment gaps.

Factors at home are important. If you can achieve a synergy between school, family and the young person this can be invaluable. Some ethnic minorities value education highly. Sometimes ethnic groups that have been in the UK longer, for example, Black Caribbean may no longer believe that education is a way out of poverty.

Mike Appleyard, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, commented that it was important to recognise that parental ambition and the home environment is paramount. Once pupils reach secondary level it is too late to intervene. BCC is investing in Children's Centres and Early Years in order to improve school readiness and give children a good start.

The Cabinet Member also expressed the view that there needed to be a significant change in Government thinking with regards to improving Education. Currently the emphasis was too much on academic performance – if you could improve the outlook of young people they will then improve their attainment.

There has been an improvement in attainment in Maths and English in disadvantaged pupils from 2011 to 2013. What do officers put this down to? More importantly, why were disadvantaged children falling behind in the first place?

The Chairman invited Mr Chris Munday, Service Director, Learning, Skills and Prevention to respond to this question. Chris Munday advised that he was very pleased with Professor Strand's report and his team have been working closely with the Bucks Learning Trust in an Action Plan. The notion of 'relative poverty' was particularly interesting and the report had provided the local authority with very useful information around this issue.

With regards to the improvements in English and Maths results, the trend was stronger at KS2 than KS4. It was important to give children all the tools they need to thrive in schools, which is why BCC were investing in the early years. It was hard to explain why performance had dipped in the first place, but possibly it could have been that the distraction of changing government arrangements meant that there had been less focus on teaching and learning. Also sometimes a dip or an improvement in performance might be cohort specific, so this will need to be monitored over the next few years.

It was noted that over the last four years Bucks had increased their primary places to accommodate an additional 2,400 pupils. The changing demographics of the county, mainly in areas of deprivation would present a further challenge to performance.

Why has the Committee not received Professor Strand's report earlier?

Mr Munday explained that the report was initially received in January 2014 and then Professor Strand was asked to include the latest schools data, so the report was revised and came back to BCC in March. It was felt that the report should be shared with schools via the Primary Executive Board (PEB) and Bucks Association of Secondary Heads (BASH) prior to being presented to the Select Committee. However Mr Munday had reported the headline findings to the Narrowing the Gap Inquiry so there was no suggestion that the report had been withheld. Mr Appleyard, Cabinet Member reiterated that it was only courteous to share the report with school professionals first.

The Chairman asked Mr Chauhdry Shafique MBE and Mrs Rashida Kazi of the Muslim Parents Association (MPA) in High Wycombe for their views on the report. Mr Shafique advised that he was pleased to be invited to hear Professor Strand's presentation and his report echoed what the MPA already knew. The MPA was established 25 years ago to work

with schools in High Wycombe and with the local authority to improve the attainment of Muslim children (in Wycombe this was mainly the Pakistani community) The MPA also recognise the difficulties of other deprived groups. Mr Shafique commented that he was encouraged to see the local authority focussing on this issue and he was keen to see what actions would follow in response to the report, which itself had raised awareness of the issue more widely.

Mrs Kazi explained that she was a teacher and although she currently worked in Watford she had previously taught in schools in Aylesbury and High Wycombe. She believed that the selective system could be very damaging for those children who are not selected for grammar school, as it affects their self-esteem which in turn damages their learning in the early stages of secondary school. It was important to raise the aspirations of children in KS3 and KS4.

Is FSM the correct measure to use?

Mike Appleyard, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills accepted that this could be seen as a proxy measure, but as there are a wide range of factors which can result in a child receiving free school meals, it was the best current proxy available. Professor Steve Strand confirmed that whilst it was perhaps a proxy measure it was the best available and could be easily verified.

Mr Munday mentioned an Action Plan in response to Professor Strand's report. When would this be available?

Mr Munday asked Mrs Amanda Hopkins, Director of Education at the Bucks Learning Trust to give a brief overview of strategies that were being introduced to address the issues raised by the report.

Mrs Hopkins explained that the Bucks Learning Trust (BLT) were developing strategies to support schools in narrowing the gap via three projects – one for Early Years, one for Primary and one for Secondary. In Early Years, the BLT were working with SureStart and other professionals to link them with schools, in order to assist with clear strategies for school readiness. At Primary level, BLT had identified the highest performing schools who have very narrow attainments gaps and have linked them with schools with larger gaps. BLT are also looking at a project linking in with the wider community and have investigated best practice in other local authorities which might be effective in Bucks, particularly in relation to how best to spend Pupil Premium funding.

For Secondary schools, the BLT has invited each school to bid for additional funding to support their Pupil Premium students and BLT is developing a project to encourage improved engagement with parents. Grammar schools are also working more closely with upper schools.

In addition the BLT recognise that the changing demographics in Bucks and the increasing rural and urban divide poses a challenge for school leaders, so they have brought in professionals from other areas of the country to support Bucks head teachers.

Mrs Hopkins reported that whilst FSM was a useful measure, head teachers were now saying that any child not fulfilling their potential should have an intervention put in place and BLT are encouraging this cultural change.

Mr Munday advised the Chairman that he would be happy to present a further update to the Committee in October 2014.

The Chairman asked Professor Strand if he would like to conclude the item and he commented that although the attainment gap had been a longstanding issue for Bucks, it was a hopeful time and the clarity of Pupil Premium arrangements was helpful. He hoped that this would have a demonstrable impact in the future.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their contributions to the meeting.

RESOLVED

That the evidence provided be noted by the Committee as part of its ongoing review of the attainment gap between socially and economically deprived pupils and their peers in Buckinghamshire.

10 THE MUNRO PROGRAMME

The Chairman welcomed Mrs Angela Macpherson, Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Mr David Johnston, Interim Head of Service to the meeting. Mrs Macpherson advised the Committee that Mr Johnston had been in post for 4 months and had been looking at ways to improve service, as well as leading the preparations for an Ofsted inspection which was due to take place shortly.

The Cabinet Member reminded members that Munro was a long term work programme which was introduced about 18 months ago and encompassed six workstreams. Overall results would probably not be realised until three to five years' time, but already the changes introduced by Munro were embedding into the workforce. A rolling programme of training was ongoing to upskill social workers.

The Cabinet Member commented that it was like trying to turn around a huge tanker in trying to shift the emphasis away from the demand for acute interventions, to more of a focus on early intervention and prevention.

The Chairman asked how many other local authorities had really taken on the recommendations made by Munro and would children be safer as a result of the changes. The Cabinet Member explained that it was hard to measure the effects of the changes so far as the introduction of the Munro programme in Bucks had also coincided with an increase in demand and therefore the number of children now in care. The Family Resilience preventative approach had actually stimulated more referrals.

David Johnston reported that Cambridgeshire were the only other local authority which had implemented the Munro recommendations on a large scale and like Bucks, had restructured as a result. Hampshire were running a pilot project in a small area before deciding whether to commit to wholesale changes. Other local authorities were taking forward the themes of Munro, but within their traditional structures. In Bucks the model was not fully up and running, but it had reached the transition stage where social workers were practicing slightly differently and were believing in the benefits of a new system.

A member asked if the programme was sufficiently resourced and whether the appropriate social workers had been recruited into the new model. The Cabinet Member acknowledged that resources in Children's Services were strained. Extra resources had been committed by bolting on an additional two social work teams, however it was proving difficult to recruit additional social workers. This was a national trend. David Johnston reported that the salary being offered by Buckinghamshire County Council was similar to neighbouring authorities but of course social workers could commute from Bucks into London to receive slightly more. There simply was a shortage of qualified social workers and some local authorities were now offering incentives such as cars or relocation costs in an attempt to recruit them.

A member commented that the high profile cases of Victoria Climbié and Baby P would discourage young people from considering social work as a future career. The press coverage only served to highlight how demanding a job social work is, with lots of difficult decisions to be made. The Cabinet Member agreed and explained that universities were now offering incentives to young people to study social work and there was also a Graduate scheme called Frontline to encourage new graduates into the profession. In addition it was recognised that

there is a 'burnout' of staff in social work – many professionals only want to work in the frontline for a finite period of time because the work is so intense. The Cabinet Member was aware that in some of the social work teams there was an imbalance of newly qualified social workers and more experienced professionals. The Chairman suggested that it might be useful to promote social work as a career in local schools.

Given the shortage of social workers, a member asked for reassurance that the situation which had recently been publicised with Birmingham's Children's Services where cases were closed without any investigations taking place, would not happen in Buckinghamshire. David Johnston reported that he had recently audited the First Response team and he assured members that they never close a case without it being reviewed and assessed first. The Cabinet Member reiterated that in Birmingham cases were closed without any work being undertaken on them. Whilst in Bucks there have been some delays in dealing with referrals, partner agencies are informed in writing to explain the delay.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member and Mr Johnston for their update and commented that she hoped that the commitment to the Munro programme might help to make Bucks a more attractive prospect for social workers.

RESOLVED

That the Committee considers that the Munro Programme has been successfully integrated into practice within the delivery of Children's Services provision.

11 OFSTED INSPECTION OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

The Chairman invited Mr David Johnston, Interim Head of Service to give members an insight into the new Ofsted inspection regime. Changes were introduced in September 2013 and since January 2014 there had been increased activity in terms of inspections on the ground. A call will be received by the local authority by 9.30am on a Tuesday morning to advise that Inspectors will arrive the following day. The inspectors undertake 10 days of preparatory work followed by two weeks intensive field work. They will spend 5% of their time speaking to Senior Managers and 95% of their time interviewing frontline staff, parents, families and partner agencies.

To date the inspection judgements appeared to be quite harsh. BCC officers were liaising with colleagues in other local authorities in preparation for the inspection. The Chairman asked if the new Ofsted inspections would be more accurate. In response David Johnston explained that judgements must be based on evidence not a sense or a feeling and Inspectors would have to justify their conclusions. Previously Inspectors spent more time with Senior Managers and Cabinet Members than with frontline staff.

Angela Macpherson, Cabinet Member for Children's Services advised members that the preparation work that Mr Johnston had undertaken was needed and she hoped it would stand the authority in good stead when the inspection was undertaken.

RESOLVED

That the evidence provided be noted.

12 SELECT COMMITTEE ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME 2014-2015

Members considered a revised list of priority topics for the Committee to investigate over the forthcoming year. The Chairman reminded members that there would be an increased focus on Children's Services. The proposed work place included two in-depth Inquiries.

One of the proposed topics was Children's Voices – how the Council and its partners listen to children and young people and take their views into consideration in how they deliver services.

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Mrs Angela Macpherson said that she would support the Committee in investigating how the local authority can best hear the voices of children in care and children in need. An inquiry could consider the extent to which services meet the needs of these children and how effectively their views are gathered during the whole process of coming into care and then whilst they are in care? The Cabinet Member suggested that it could also include looking at the Pledge which Buckinghamshire gives to all children in care as a guideline to what the local authority will provide.

A member suggested that it would be useful to scrutinise the placements for children in care – how does the Fostering and Adoption process work? The Committee should also consider residential homes and children being placed outside of the county. Another member reported that he and another member of the Committee had visited some care homes as members of the Corporate Parenting Panel and had found this experience very useful.

A member agreed that it was important to look at the quality of services being offered to children in care but cautioned that it was important to qualify the role of the Committee and how far it could effect change on their behalf. It was also important not to be swayed by one person's experience. How could the Committee compare what happens in Bucks in comparison with other local authorities? Michael Carr, Policy Officer suggested that the scope of the Inquiry could be how do the Council listen to children in the care process and how can they effect changes to the service.

Another suggested topic for investigation was Internet Safety and what policies and measures could be put in place to protect children from dangerous influences on the internet. This could encompass cyber bullying, but also 'sexting', exposure to pornography and the use of the internet and social media in child sexual exploitation. Yvette Thomas reported that she had recently hosted two anti-bullying conferences, one for primary teachers and the other for secondary school students which was attended by 130 young people. She was now in the process of analysing 1500 response to an anti-bullying survey which was aimed at 10-13 year olds locally, which might inform the Internet Safety work. Whilst there is a lot of national data this would also provide some local data on bullying. David Johnston, Interim Head of Service commented that it was very important to help children understand the impacts of their behaviour on others.

Michael Carr, Policy Officer asked if there was anything further that the Committee could do to help BCC's preparation for the Ofsted inspection of Children's Services. David Johnston commented that engagement and involvement of members and senior managers was noted in every good inspection, therefore it might be useful for the Committee to raise the profile of Corporate Parenting. The Cabinet Member reported that a Corporate Parenting training session for all members of the Council was being arranged to take place in the Autumn.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their contributions to the discussion.

RESOLVED

That the priority topics for the Education, Skills and Children's Services Select Committee Work Programme 2014-2015 be agreed.

13 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To note the next meeting of the Education, Skills and Children's Services Select Committee on Tuesday 1st July 2014 at 10am in Mezzanine Room 2, County Hall, Aylesbury.

CHAIRMAN