



Minutes

CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE AND LEARNING SELECT COMMITTEE

Minutes from the meeting held on Tuesday 20 September 2016, in Mezzanine Room 2, County Hall, Aylesbury, commencing at 10.30 am and concluding at 12.57 pm.

This meeting was webcast. To review the detailed discussions that took place, please see the webcast which can be found at <http://www.buckscc.public-i.tv/>
The webcasts are retained on this website for 6 months. Recordings of any previous meetings beyond this can be requested (contact: democracy@buckscc.gov.uk)

MEMBERS PRESENT

Mrs M Aston, Mrs P Birchley, Ms J Blake, Mr D Dhillon (Chairman), Mr P Gomm, Mr P Irwin, Mrs V Letheren, Mr R Stuchbury and Ms K Wood

CO-OPTED MEMBERS PRESENT

Mr D Babb

GUESTS PRESENT

Mr N Brown and Lin Hazell

OFFICERS PRESENT

Ms K Dolton, Mr D Johnston, Ms G Shurrock and Mr N Wilson

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were none.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.



3 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 5th July were confirmed as a correct record. Members noted that the Appointment of Vice-Chairman had been deferred from the 5th July meeting and the Chairman confirmed the appointment of Miss Katrina Wood.

RESOLVED

That Miss K Wood be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Children's Social Care and Learning Select Committee for the ensuing year.

A Member asked that in future any public question submitted to Committee should be included in the minutes of the meeting in full, alongside the Cabinet Member's response, to ensure clarity. This was agreed to be good practice.

4 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were none.

5 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Chairman welcomed Mrs Rachael Shimmin, the new Chief Executive of the County Council to the meeting. Mrs Shimmin explained that she was attending as an observer and was interested to gain insight into the work of the Select Committee.

The Chairman reported that he had attended an interesting workshop session on how Children's Services dealt with complaints.

6 COMMITTEE MEMBER UPDATES

Mr R Stuchbury reported that the Buckingham Youth Group had moved to charitable trust status and was continuing to provide a service to young people in the area. Several Members advised that they had visited their local Children Centres and had been impressed with their work, particularly in supporting school readiness in 4 year olds.

Mr P Gomm reported that the issues with communications with his local Children's Centre had now been resolved.

7 CABINET MEMBER UPDATES

Lin Hazell, Cabinet Member for Children Services provided an update on the following:

- A 2 day monitoring visit had been undertaken by OfSTED during August. This had focussed on quality of management decision making, multi-agency safeguarding, missing children and CSE and assessment and planning processes. OfSTED's findings were now published on their website and the Cabinet Member highlighted a number of

improvements that had been recognised, together with some key areas that remained outstanding.

- The Committee welcomed the news of these improvements but the Chairman expressed disappointment that the letter had not been circulated to Select Committee members ahead of the meeting. The Cabinet Member agreed to liaise with her officers to ensure timely communication with Members.

ACTION: Cabinet Member for Children's Services

- The ongoing issue of out of county placements was noted and the Cabinet Member explained that this had been considered as part of the Looked After Children Strategy.
- It was noted that OfSTED had made criticisms around follow up interviews with young people who have been missing from care. Mr D Johnston, Managing Director of the Children's Social Care and Learning Business Unit explained that this service was being recommissioned and the new contract would set out explicit timing standards for return interviews, which would usually be within 24 hours of a young person's return.
- Members were reminded that under the new OfSTED arrangements a further monitoring visit which would focus on Looked After Children was due to take place at the end of November/December 2016, although OfSTED could choose to reinspect at any time.
- A Member raised concerns that the fostering service were providing inadequate support to foster carers and losing a significant number as a result. A specific case had been reported in the media. The Cabinet Member agreed to look in to the particular case, but commented that she was not aware that the number of foster carers had fallen dramatically in recent months. The Committee was advised that during 2015/16, there had been a high number of foster carer resignations. Exit interviews were conducted with these carers and insight gained was used to inform an improved support offer for foster carers, provided by an independent improvement partner.

Mr N Wilson, Service Director Education provided an update on behalf of Mr Z Mohammed, Cabinet Member for Education, in his absence.

- Work was focussing on the changes to the Schools Funding Formula timetable. These proposed changes would have addressed the historical underfunding of Bucks Schools, but had now been delayed by a year, creating uncertainties in the schools budget. The Leader of the Council had lobbied ministers for transitional funding.
- The High Needs funding block, central to SEND had also been delayed. The High Needs block was £74million – modelling based on the first consultation indicated Bucks could lose £5m per year, as it was based on proxy indicators, rather than actual children or schools.
- Currently the High Needs block was forecast to be overspent by £3million. Mr Wilson was having discussions with Schools Forum and School leaders about contingency plans.
- Members were advised that the Government had published a Green Paper on proposals to introduce new Grammar schools and the County Council's response would be shared with the Committee.

8 VOICE OF THE CHILD AND YOUNG PERSON INQUIRY

The Committee agreed the scope for their Inquiry into the Voice of the Child. Mr P Irwin voiced concerns that the Inquiry would focus solely on Looked After Children, as he believed that it was important that Children in Need should also be included. Following discussion, it was agreed that the Inquiry would encompass Children in Need.

9 THE SEND REVIEW AND STRATEGY

The Chairman welcomed

- Mr N Wilson, Service Director Education
- Mrs G Shurrock, Head of Special Educational Needs

Mr Wilson explained that there had been a number of SEND reviews since 2009, with the last resulting in the SEND strategy 2013-2016, which bridged the change from Statements to the new Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP). Buckinghamshire had some excellent schools and practice but faced real challenges going forward including children being diagnosed with increasingly complex needs, the rising costs of EHCPs and an increasing number of children who required an EHCP. Members considered the SEND strategy consultation document and during the discussion the following points were noted:

- A key area of work was looking at how to improve provision for SEND pupils in mainstream settings. The SENDCO network had grown over the past decade but Bucks lacked a strong support system for SENDCOs, who faced challenges on a daily basis. It would be helpful to have an additional level of support of Educational Psychologists Specialist teachers within mainstream schools to provide more confidence.
- There was a very robust system for allocation of places in special schools. Mrs Shurrock chaired a meeting of professionals and special school representatives to consider all requests individually and this process had led to a reduction in the number of Bucks children going to independent schools outside the county. Children were always allocated to their nearest appropriate school to try and reduce their travelling time.
- The SEN team worked very closely with Health colleagues and a joint strategy on Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD), including Aspergers had been developed with Adults Services. This reflected the national year on year increase in the number of people being diagnosed with ASD. An EHCP had to identify a primary need and the number of EHCPs with ASD or Aspergers as the primary need was increasing.
- A Member expressed the view that, whilst he recognised the Council's budget pressures, the word 'cost' should be replaced with the word 'investment' within the SEND strategy. It was vital that money spent on the education of young people was viewed as an investment, when difficult decisions had to be made in order to balance the budget. Other Members agreed with this comment and the Deputy Cabinet Member accepted that this wording might be more appropriate.

- The consultation document would be circulated next week and responses would be invited to be submitted by October half term, to enable the final draft strategy to be developed by December 2016.

10 CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION SERVICE

The Chairman welcomed

- L Hazell, Cabinet Member for Children's Services
- Mr D Johnston, Managing Director of Children's Social Care and Learning (CSCL)
- Ms K Dolton, Service Director, Early Help, Care & Quality Assurance

During the discussion the following points were noted:

- The Swan Unit was a great example of multi-agency collaborative working and feedback from young people and their parents who had received support from the Unit had been very positive.
- It was emphasised that the issue of CSE needed continuous commitment across all agencies involved with children and as awareness of CSE was raised, demand for this service was likely to increase.
- A Member expressed concern at poor attendance at recent events held across the county, highlighting the issue of CSE. The Cabinet Member agreed that this had been disappointing but that it was important to continue to raise awareness.
- Children's Services had delivered training to taxi drivers around CSE which was received very positively. A member welcomed this initiative with local licensing companies but cautioned that taxi drivers could get licensed elsewhere and still operate in Bucks. The Managing Director for CSC&L suggested that the issue should be raised with the government via the Local Government Association and Association of Directors of Children's Services.
- Concerns were also raised about protecting refugees who may come into care in future. The Managing Director advised that such young people would be treated with considerable care and would be assessed by skilled professionals, who would build trust in order to develop a picture of their background and to encourage them to share their experiences.

11 LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN STRATEGY

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services introduced the new Looked After Children Strategy, a document which outlined the service's vision and actions which need to be taken to address ongoing issues.

During the discussion the following main points were noted:

- An issue of prime concern in Buckinghamshire was the high number of children placed out of county. This was not ideal for the children and could also lead to increased care costs. In addition, Bucks had more children in residential care than would be expected for a county of its size.

- Over the past 18 months, there had been a focus on improving outcomes for children placed out of county, which included ensuring that initial health checks were completed within statutory timelines and improving the quality of schools attended by out of county children.
- Early help was a key priority to help to keep families together where it was safe to do so. If children did come into care and remained for the long term, it was vital that a plan was put in place to ensure they received the best possible care to suit their needs.
- Over the past two years, data analysis had developed which would enable better planning for future needs.
- An improvement partnership had been established with Core Asset, a national fostering provider, which had a good reputation for recruiting foster carers and also offered strong support to foster carers on an ongoing basis. An improvement partnership had worked very well in the Adoption service and it was hoped this would be replicated for fostering with Core Asset.
- It was noted that 29% of Looked After Children were from BME backgrounds. Ms Dalton advised the Committee that Corporate Parenting Panel had commissioned a report into this statistic, which was relatively high.
- Concerns were raised about the level of attainment by Looked After Children at Key Stage 2. Members were reminded that the figures included for 2015-16 reflected one particular cohort. The Virtual Headteacher tracked each child and could demonstrate the progress achieved with tailored support. The Cabinet Member also emphasised that for some children, educational achievement was a secondary consideration to their emotional resilience.
- The Cabinet Member advised that a business case was being developed for a new residential facility to be built in Bucks.

12 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

Members noted the future Work programme.

13 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 6th December 2016 at 1.30pm in Mezzanine Room 2, County Hall, Aylesbury

CHAIRMAN