



Minutes

CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE AND LEARNING SELECT COMMITTEE

Minutes from the meeting held on Tuesday 5 September 2017, in Mezzanine Room 1, County Hall, Aylesbury, commencing at 10.30 am and concluding at 1.18 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

Mr A Collingwood, Mrs I Darby, Mr D Dhillon, Mr M Hussain, Mr N Hussain, Mr B Roberts, Mrs L Sullivan, Ms J Ward, Mr G Williams and Ms K Wood

CO-OPTED MEMBERS PRESENT

Mrs M Aston and Mr D Babb

GUESTS PRESENT

Mr M Appleyard and Mr W Whyte

OFFICERS PRESENT

Ms S Callaghan, Ms M Edmonds, Mr J Fowler, Ms G Rhodes White and Ms V Trundell

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Mr M Moore, Mr K Hamblin and Mrs W Mallen.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following declarations of interest were noted:



- Mr G Williams - Chairman of Bucks Learning Trust Commissioning Committee and a member of the Fundraising Board at Dr Challoner's Grammar School.
- Mr N Hussain - Board member at Aylesbury College and a Board Member of BEST and the Healthy Living Centre.
- Ms I Darby - Governor at Robertswood Primary and Dr Challoner's Grammar School.

3 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 18th July 2017 were confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

4 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no public questions.

5 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Chairman told the Committee of his attendance at an adoption panel information meeting which had been very useful prior to attending an adoption panel arranged for next month.

6 COMMITTEE MEMBER UPDATES

Mrs Darby, Mr Williams and Mr Collingwood updated the Committee on their attendance at the children looked after and care leavers celebration event which they had found to be a very humbling experience and a good introduction to the work of the Select Committee. They thanked all those concerned.

Mr Dhillon asked Committee Members to let Mr Wright, Committee and Governance Adviser, know if they wanted to undertake any Children's Services work shadowing.

Mr Collingwood updated the Committee on his visit to a Social Worker's team meeting and acknowledged the excellent work of the team. He was due to visit a resource panel and an adoption panel during September.

7 CABINET MEMBER QUESTION TIME

The Chairman welcomed Mr Warren Whyte, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, to the meeting.

Mr Whyte updated the Committee as follows:

- He had undertaken a number of visits to:
 - Front line social work and prevention teams
 - A children's home
 - Children's Court and
 - A Children's Centre

- Two meetings had been held with the refreshed Children's Partnership Board.
- He was now attending the South East Lead Members Forum.

In response to Members concerns around timescales for increasing placements for children and young people within Buckinghamshire, Mr Whyte explained that a two year programme had already commenced, with recruitment for new residential home managers underway with a view to having Managers in place as early as January.

Members queried how the service would prioritise individual cases to bring back into Buckinghamshire. Ms Gladys Rhodes White, Executive Director for Children's Social Care, explained that each case would be looked at individually and an assessment carried out to look at the advantages and disadvantages for each child or young person.

Ms Rhodes White explained that it was sometimes in a person's best interest to be placed a distance away from home, although these cases were not common.

Members asked for a breakdown of the percentage of cases that were placed out of county because it was in a child's best interest compared to the percentage of those cases that were placed out of county because there was no option to place locally.

ACTION: Ms Rhodes White.

8 VOICE OF THE CHILD AND YOUNG PERSON INQUIRY - RECOMMENDATION MONITORING

The Chairman welcomed:

- Mr Warren Whyte, Cabinet Member for Children's Services
- Ms Gladys Rhodes White, Executive Director, Children's Services
- Laura, Guest Young Person
- Eve, Guest Young Person
- Mr James Fowler, Youth Service Manager
- Ms Emily Dover, Youth Worker

Laura and Eve gave a summary of how they were involved in providing the views of children and young people and Ms Rhodes White summarised the progress so far against each of the recommendations from the report.

Members of the Committee asked questions about:

- Transition arrangements for children and young people moving into adulthood.
- Ways of engaging with young children to provide their views.
- The quality and ease of use of the website for children and young people.
- How well children and young people felt they were listened to and whether things were improving.
- Hit rates of the website.

- How the service let children and young people know what they have done to address feedback.

The following points were made by Laura and Eve in response to the Committee's questioning:

- Transition arrangements e.g. from school to college were good with support provided by schools and youth workers in a number of ways.
- Laura was the joint chair of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) forum which helped to ensure all SEND children and young people's voices were heard
- There was work going on to promote Youth Voice in schools e.g. publicity through assemblies and poster campaigns but there was still more to do.
- Laura had worked on developing the "local offer" web pages but both Laura and Eve thought the websites for children and families could still be made easier to use particularly for providing feedback.
- The Children and Adolescent Mental Health (CAMHS) website was good but needed to be publicised to children and young people more.
- Some children and young people did not have internet access and so this needed to be taken into account when provided information and opportunities to feedback.
- Eve and Laura felt that they personally were listened to but that they did not always know what had happened as a result of their feedback.

Mr Fowler advised that if children and young people were asked to contribute to service improvement work, they would be given IT equipment to help.

Ms Rhodes White confirmed that she would provide data on how often the children's services website was used including data to show trends over time.

ACTION: Ms Rhodes White

Ms Rhodes White also explained the process for transition planning for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities into adult services.

Mr Whyte confirmed that advisers and social workers were now working jointly on transition planning and that the "Staying Put Policy" was being refreshed to make pathways clearer.

Members of the Committee asked the service to engage the help of the Director of Technology Services and involve children and young people in further developing a website hub - (recommendation 4).

ACTION: Ms Rhodes White

RESOLVED: The Committee AGREED to delegate the RAG rating of the recommendations to the Chairman with the ratings being shared with the Committee after the meeting.

9 CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME ACTIONS - RESPONSE TO THIRD OFSTED MONITORING VISIT.

Mr Whyte and Ms Rhodes White presented the report.

Mr Whyte made the following points:

- Ofsted's 4th monitoring letter had been received since the report was written.
- He shared Ofsted's concerns about the pace of improvement and had made it clear to the management team about focussing on the pace of change.

Ms Rhodes White explained that the last 2 monitoring visits had focused on children looked after and those leaving care and that the next Ofsted intervention would be a full 4 week inspection starting sometime between September and December 2017.

Members questioned Mr Whyte and Ms Rhodes White on:

- Why weekly performance and improvement monitoring had ceased only to have to be re-instated later.
- The availability of the Improvement Plan to the Committee.
- Being able to evidence improved outcomes for children and young people.
- Involving children and young people on the Corporate Parenting Panel.
- Managers' misunderstandings around practice processes.
- The need to increase the pace of improvement.

The following main points were made in response to the questions.

- Following improvement in some areas initially, the service may have taken its focus off these areas too early before improvement processes had been embedded and so it had been necessary to re-instate increased monitoring.
- Ofsted had commented on some sustained improvement in some areas e.g. in return interviews for children going missing.
- Mr Whyte held Officers to account through quarterly performance reviews to ensure stable improvement.
- The Improvement Plan would be provided to the Committee

- **ACTION: Ms Rhodes White**

- A "so what" column would be added to the Improvement Plan to help measure the outcome of improvement actions on children and young people.
- The best way to measure outcomes was to ask children and young people themselves and also monitor "negative" key performance indicators (e.g. "Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)").
- The timings of the Corporate Parenting Panel would be reviewed to start later so children and young people could attend.

- **ACTION: Mr Whyte**

- A young person would be appointed as a member of the Corporate Parenting Panel and be a champion for children looked after and care leavers.
- There was a process of self-evaluation being undertaken by the service to identify any misunderstandings around social care practice processes by managers and staff.
- The pace of improvement had been a concern but was being addressed with renewed focus; through improved recruitment, the Cabinet Member challenging middle management and a new Director of Children's Services due to start in October.

10 PERMANENT EXCLUSIONS

The Chairman welcomed:

- Mr Mike Appleyard, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills
- Miss Sarah Callaghan, Service Director Education and
- Mrs Vivian Trundell, Education Entitlement Manager

The Cabinet Member and Officers:

- Acknowledged that the level of permanent exclusions was not acceptable.
- Outlined the need for a robust response which would include a strong focus on prevention and early help.
- Focussed on the need for strong partnership working with schools and learning from good practice and expertise within Buckinghamshire and elsewhere.

Members questioned the Cabinet Member and Officers on:

- The speed of the response by the service so far.
- Schools reporting a lack of support to manage the issue.
- A lack of communication between schools and the local authority.
- The sudden rise in numbers of permanent exclusions in 2014/15.
- The need to act quickly to make improvements so as to positively impact on children and young people affected.
- Partnership working, including working with the NHS in responding to the issue.
- Access to better quality data and analysis to help understand the key issues and timelines.

The following responses were made by the Cabinet Member and Officers:

- It was imperative that the issues that were leading to children and young people being permanently excluded were identified much earlier and needed to be linked to the Early Help programme.
- Prevention and support panels were being piloted to help support schools by bringing together expertise where good practice was identified and an Inclusion Charter was being developed.

- Children's Services had not always acted as quickly as it should have and had been too reactive. The push to address the issue through the Early Help process would aim to address this.
- There was a wish to bring Educational Psychologists into schools to provide support earlier but the focus had been on Educational Psychologists doing statutory assessments. The new Early Help approach aimed to reduce the need for statutory assessment by intervening earlier.
- A number of issues had contributed to the large increase since 2014/15 including:
 - changes to Central Government guidance in 2012.
 - issues relating to children's mental health impacting nationally.
 - reduced resourcing.
- There needed to be a culture change and a new approach between schools and the local authority through better joint working and communications which was starting to happen.
- Central Government policies were making it essential for schools to also take increased responsibility in preventing permanent exclusions.
- There was recognition that the situation needed to improve quickly with the Cabinet Member and Director of Children's Services keeping pressure on officers to show numbers reducing.
- Early identification of issues should happen at a number of points where families interacted with the Council and partners including, pre-birth services, first point of contact, Children's Centres, pre-schools and nursery schools.
- Once issues were identified it was important to wrap relevant services around the family to provide support.
- It was important that children entered education with the ability to deal with social situations and curriculum expectations that they would be faced with.
- Although the Early Help programme approach may result in fewer Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) assessments, where appropriate, EHCP would still be used.
- It was recognised that the current set of data on exclusions and analysis still needed to be improved and work was underway. Any new data would be shared with the Committee.

ACTION: Ms Rhodes White

RESOLVED: The Committee AGREED that:

- **a further in depth review by the Committee would be undertaken on the issue.**
- **the Committee would scrutinise the outcomes of the prevention and support panels once the pilot had been completed.**

11 EDUCATION STRATEGY

The Chairman welcomed Mrs Maria Edmonds – Education Strategy Manager to the meeting.

Mr Mike Appleyard, Miss Sarah Callaghan and Mrs Maria Edmonds presented the report and summarised the key points.

Members of the Committee asked questions about the following:

- The quality of secondary education for children and young people in Aylesbury.
- Whether the strategy would still include as a driver, central government's policy of increased selection, now that this appeared to have been dropped
- The Buckinghamshire Learning Trust's (BLT) involvement in the strategy.
- How the strategy would manage the increased independence of academies from local authorities and pastoral care issues.

During discussions, the Cabinet Member and Officers made the following points:

- Reducing the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers would be an important part of the strategy and there would be key performance indicators included so that the issue could be monitored.
- It would be important to tackle the underperformance of some vulnerable children and young people in helping secondary schools in Aylesbury improve.
- Once completed, the results of all consultations would be analysed and developed into a draft strategy which would be brought back to the Committee

Action: Committee and Governance Adviser

- The new strategy would be more specific about actions for Buckinghamshire Learning Trust to help improve areas of underperformance.
- The level of engagement between academies, grammar schools and the Council was strong and there had been positive feedback about pastoral care.

12 CHILDREN'S WORKFORCE INQUIRY- RECOMMENDATIONS MONITORING

The Committee reviewed the actions being undertaken to implement the two recommendations still outstanding

The Committee questioned the low level of participation in exit interviews and asked whether these could be undertaken by an independent officer rather than the line manager of the person leaving.

ACTION: Ms Rhodes White

RESOLVED: The Committee AGREED to delegate the RAG rating of the recommendations to the Chairman with the ratings being shared with the Committee after the meeting.

13 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee noted the work programme and requested that an item on the Early Help Review be added.

ACTION: Committee and Governance Adviser

14 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Children's Social Care and Learning Select Committee will take place on 17th October 2017, Mezzanine Room 1, New County Offices, Aylesbury. There will be a private pre-meeting for Members from 9.30am

CHAIRMAN