



# Minutes

## *CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE AND LEARNING SELECT COMMITTEE*

Minutes from the meeting held on Tuesday 17 October 2017, in Mezzanine Room 1, County Hall, Aylesbury, commencing at 10.34 am and concluding at 12.43 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](mailto:democracy@buckscc.gov.uk))

### **MEMBERS PRESENT**

Mrs I Darby, Mr M Hussain, Mrs W Mallen, Mrs L Sullivan, Ms J Ward (Vice-Chairman) and Mr G Williams

### **CO-OPTED MEMBERS PRESENT**

Mrs M Aston and Mr M Moore

### **GUESTS PRESENT**

Mr W Whyte

### **OFFICERS PRESENT**

Miss S Callaghan, Ms J Davies, Ms G Rhodes White, Ms J Shakespeare and Mr C Tribe

### **1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Mr A Collingwood, Mr D Babb, Mr D Dhillon, Mr K Hamblin, Mr B Roberts and Ms K Wood.

### **2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The following declarations of interest were noted:

Mrs M Aston - Director of Carers Bucks

Mr G Williams – On the board of fundraising for Challoner’s School.

Mr Williams also declared he was no longer the Chairman of the Bucks Learning Trust Commissioning Committee.

### **3 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> September 2017 were confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

### **4 PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

The Vice-Chairman welcomed Ms M Jackson to the meeting and invited her to present her question to the Committee. The Vice-Chairman then welcomed Mr Warren Whyte, the Cabinet Member for Children’s Services to the meeting and invited him to respond.

Mr Whyte confirmed that young carers had now been taken out of the Early Help Review and that any future changes to young carer services would be consulted upon at the time.

**RESOLVED: The Committee AGREED that they were satisfied with the response that had been given to the question**

### **5 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

In the absence of the Chairman, this item was deferred until the next meeting.

### **6 COMMITTEE MEMBER UPDATES**

Mrs Darby updated the Committee on her visit to a social work team. Mrs Darby acknowledged the excellent work of the team and sought assurance from Mr Whyte that there was sufficient emotional support available to front line staff dealing with difficult cases.

Mr Gareth Williams updated the Committee on his visit to a social work team in Aylesbury, a visit to a children’s residential home and the Seniors We Do Care Council Focus Group.

Mr Williams re-iterated Mrs Darby’s request to Mr Whyte for good emotional support for staff and also stressed to the Cabinet Member the importance of the role of care home managers in the good running of care homes, particularly in view of the Council’s decision to build additional homes in Buckinghamshire.

Mr Williams had also arranged a meeting with the virtual school and with a Headteacher to discuss the low numbers of Looked After Children in grammar schools.

## **7 CABINET MEMBER QUESTION TIME**

Mr Whyte updated the Committee on progress on care home provision in the County.

Ms Gladys Rhodes White, Interim Improvement Consultant (representing the Executive Director of Children's Services), was also welcomed to the meeting.

Responding to Members' earlier questions, Mr Whyte and Ms Rhodes White explained the arrangements in place to support social workers and the improvements that had been made over recent months.

## **8 EARLY HELP**

This item was presented by Mr Whyte and Ms Rhodes White. The Vice-Chairman also welcomed Mrs Joy Shakespeare, Head of Early Help.

The Vice-Chairman asked the Cabinet Member to take account of a petition that the Council had received against the closure of Children's Centres as part of the consultation and proposals for Cabinet.

Mr Whyte confirmed that the petition would be taken into account. He then summarised the Early Help Review proposals.

Members of the Committee asked questions and sought assurance about:

- Venues for early help services and the geographic approach to the location of hubs.
- How learning would be taken into account from other Local Authorities.
- Timescales for roll-out and success criteria for the new model.
- How current successful services would be maintained.
- The reach and quality of information and questions in the consultation.
- Consultation with service providers.
- Funding of the new service and contracting arrangements.
- The public's perception of Children's Centres currently against how they are actually being used.
- Savings versus achieving outcomes for children and young people.

The following points were made in response to the Committee's questioning:

- It would be important to deliver services across a wide range of venues that families felt comfortable attending.
- The Service had spoken directly to 20 other local authorities to understand their experiences and learning from the Families First programme had also been used to inform proposals.
- Six key success criteria were being developed into key performance indicators.

- The Service was keen for residents to be able to see the impact on their children's centres as soon as possible, with the new model being implemented from April 2018.
- Focus groups had been held to engage families who might not respond to an online consultation, as well as seeking professional responses from those dealing with hard to reach groups.
- Assumptions made in the model about location of the hubs would be carefully judged against feedback from the consultation.
- Funding would be £7m per year with some services currently outsourced being brought back in house.
- The Service had to look carefully at outcomes being achieved by the current children's centre provision.
- Outcomes for children and young people were paramount and if savings could be made through better provision, residents would expect that too.

**RESOLVED: That a report on the performance of the new Early Help Service be brought to the Committee at an appropriate time after implementation.**

**Action: Committee and Governance Advisor**

## **9 THE EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY SERVICE ACTION PLAN**

The Vice-Chairman welcomed Miss Sarah Callaghan, Service Director – Education and Mr Craig Tribe, Principal Educational Psychologist to the meeting.

Miss Callaghan and Mr Tribe summarised the key issues facing the Educational Psychology Service and the actions in place to address these issues.

Members of the Committee asked questions about:

- The urgency of recruiting and retaining Educational Psychologists.
- The length of time it was taking to improve performance.
- Monitoring of the action plan and how improvement was being driven.
- The details of the pilot schemes being set up.
- The impact on children and young people currently with no plan or intervention.
- Budgeting for the service.
- How confident the Service was that it could improve.

In response the following points were made:

- There was currently a recruitment programme underway, as well as refocussing the service towards early help and prevention to reduce reliance on statutory interventions later.
- It was important to be child focused and for children and young people to get the right support earlier rather than an isolated focus on the 20 week process of producing a plan.

- Responding to the national Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) reforms had put pressure on the service to reform. It was hoped these current pressures would reduce by April 2018 as the new processes became embedded.
- Other local authorities had fewer SEND plans to convert to Education and Health Care Plans (EHCP) and so had not experienced the same pressures as Buckinghamshire.
- The focus of the Educational Psychology Service was moving to early help and prevention and the service should start to see some easing of pressure from April 2018 once the conversion to EHCPs had been completed.
- The Service was investing money now to allow savings to be made later which would require some re-configuring of the Educational Psychology and SEND services.

**RESOLVED: That a brief report on progress against the action plan be brought to the December meeting.**

**Action: Committee and Governance Advisor and Miss Callaghan**

## **10 PERFORMANCE REPORT - Q1 2017-18**

Mr Whyte and Ms Rhodes White presented the item.

Mr Whyte summarised performance against the key performance indicators.

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**

Members also asked questions on the following:

- The reasons for high levels of repeat referrals.
- The lack of data on improving educational standards for disadvantaged children.
- Caseload numbers and resourcing issues impacting on some areas of performance.

The following points were made in response:

- The Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) referral process was working well.
- Research and case audits had shown domestic abuse to be a key factor in children being re-referred into the service.
- A refresh of the domestic abuse strategy was being undertaken as well as a strategic group being set up to look at how best to work with families dealing with domestic abuse.
- Work was being undertaken with partners to help understand the referral thresholds and work with families that might be close to, but not quite reaching, the threshold for child protection intervention.
- The new Education and Skills Strategy, currently out for consultation, would focus on improving the persistent underperformance of particular vulnerable groups.

- The Service was pro-active in monitoring caseloads on a weekly basis with average caseloads more manageable now that they had been historically. Caseloads compared well to national figures.
- Caseloads had reduced significantly in the looked after children service.
- Caseload and staffing levels were still a challenge in the child protection and court service because of peaks and troughs in demand but the service was getting better at trying to anticipate these.

## **11 INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER**

The Vice-Chairman welcomed Mrs Julie Davies, Head of Children's Quality Standards and Performance to the meeting. The item was also presented by Mr Whyte.

In the discussion the following points were made:

- There was now a stable workforce in place in the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Service which meant that children and young people had fewer changes in IRO and could develop relationships with one person.
- All children looked after had access to an IRO.

## **12 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee noted the work programme and made suggestions for inclusion and amendment.

**Action: Committee and Governance Advisor**

## **13 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Children's Social Care and Learning Select Committee to take place on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2017 at 10.30am in Mezzanine Room 1, New County Offices, Aylesbury.

There will be a private pre-meeting for Members from 9.30am

**CHAIRMAN**