



# Minutes

## *CHILDREN'S SELECT COMMITTEE*

Minutes from the meeting held on Tuesday 2 October 2018, in County Hall, Aylesbury, commencing at 2.00 pm and concluding at 3.25 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**

Mr D Dhillon (Chairman), Mr S Lambert, Mr B Roberts and Mrs L Sullivan

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

### **GUESTS PRESENT**

### **OFFICERS PRESENT**

Miss S Callaghan, Ms K Collier, Mr J Fowler, Mrs K Sutherland and Mr T Vouyioukas

### **1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Mrs P Birchley, Mr A Collingwood, Mrs I Darby, Mr M Hussain, Mrs W Mallen, Mrs J Ward and Ms K Wood.

The Committee noted that Mrs A Wight was substituting for Mrs P Birchley for the duration of the meeting.

### **2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**



Mrs A Wight stated that she was a member of the Corporate Parenting Panel. Mr S Lambert declared an interest in items 7 and 8 as he was a member of the early help review panel.

### **3 MINUTES**

The minutes of the last meeting held on the 10<sup>th</sup> July 2018 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the chairman.

### **4 PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

There were no public questions received.

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

The Chairman reported that he had presented the Permanent Exclusions inquiry report to Cabinet on 10<sup>th</sup> September and all recommendations were accepted, except Recommendation 6. The Chairman reminded members that the Children's Early Help consultation would be announced soon and encouraged everyone to have their say in shaping this service.

### **6 COMMITTEE MEMBER UPDATES**

There were none.

### **7 CABINET MEMBERS QUESTION TIME**

The Chairman welcomed Mr Appleyard, Cabinet Member for Education & Skills and Miss Sarah Callaghan, Service Director for Education to the meeting. During discussions and in response to Member questions the following main points were noted:

- Mr Appleyard thanked members who had attended his recent Home to School transport briefing and advised that he would hold further discussions with Members over the coming weeks. A public consultation, in various locations across the County, would be launched following discussions at the Cabinet meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> October. Mr Appleyard was keen to reach as many people as possible, who might be impacted by proposed changes.
- A Member asked whether there had been any issues with the recent 11+ exams, as they had been made aware of technical issues. Miss Callaghan stated that officers were investigating whether all students had received fair access and if not, the situation would be rectified. A full resit would be a very unlikely course of action due the stressful effects of re-taking the exams. Members requested an update on the progress in this area.

**ACTION: Service Director for Education**

- The Chairman discussed the Educational Psychologist update report and queried item number 6, due to the fact that a similar recommendation had been rejected at Cabinet. Miss Callaghan stated that there may be a misinterpretation and named Educational Psychologists for Schools would be unrealistic based on pressures on the Educational Psychology service. Instead the new preventative way of working Schools would be to allocate a named SEND officer and Educational Psychologist who they could contact for advice, support and signposting.
- In response to a question about privately employed Educational Psychologist reports not being accepted by BCC's Educational Psychology services, Mrs Callaghan said she would investigate, as these reports should be accepted.

**ACTION: Service Director for Education**

- A member queried why EHCP plans took 20 weeks to issue and why only 32% were issued within the set timeframe. Miss Callaghan advised that a number of different assessments have to take place to be able to effectively issue the plan, that the department were still dealing with the existing backlog of assessments and that visits to the child, to perform the assessments, were not possible during School holidays. It would be expected that the County would be in line with national average, by the end of the year.
- The benefits and reasoning behind transferring locum contracts into associate contracts within the Educational Psychologist service were explained. Miss Callaghan reassured the Committee that quality of assessments would be monitored prior to payments being made. Members were informed that the Senior EP and Head of SEN posts had been filled permanently and the service intended to move towards a preventative model once the back log is cleared and is expected to be sustainable. . A member asked if the timing of assessments could be reduced. Mr Appleyard stated that the overarching assessment must take place to ensure the resulting assessments are the correct ones for each particular child.

The Chairman thanked Mr Appleyard and Miss Callaghan for attending the meeting.

## **8 CHILDREN'S SERVICES UPDATE**

The Chairman welcomed Mr Tolis Vouyioukas, Executive Director of Children's Services and Mr Gareth Williams, Deputy Cabinet Member for Children's Services to the meeting. During discussions and in response to Member questions the following main points were noted:

- Mr Williams promoted the upcoming early help consultation and encouraged everyone to get involved. He also highlighted recent visits he had undertaken to other Councils to share best practice. An additional children's home would be opened in 2019 and Members were advised that the number of looked after children in Buckinghamshire continued to grow, placing pressure on fostering services and the budget.
- A Member asked how confident the Deputy Cabinet Member and Director of Children's Services were that the Medium Term Financial Plan for 2019/20 would be sufficient, given that the current year's budget was stretched, due to the delay in implementing early help changes and increased numbers of looked after children. In response, the Deputy Cabinet Member emphasised that as the service was demand led it was difficult to predict the largest cost areas, but the management team had budgeted for an increase in numbers for next year, based on an analysis of the cohort of young people currently on Child Protection plans. Mr Vouyioukas assured Members that budgets would not determine the outcomes for any child.
- In response to a question about staffing at the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), the Director of Children's Services explained that there were some vacancies as it was a particularly demanding environment to work in, but managers were supporting MASH staff as best they could.
- Currently Buckinghamshire had 505 looked after children and 634 children with Child Protection Plans. The number of looked after children was below the national and south east average, but the number of Child Protection Plans was higher than expected and this could lead to an increase in the looked after cohort. The Early Help consultation would run for 10 weeks. Independent guidance had been sought on the timing and length of the consultation and consultation documents had been designed to explain three options, with one preferred option clearly stated. Public meetings were also being held to ensure the public could ask further questions.
- A member stated that the percentage of repeat referrals was of concern and asked what actions were being taken to reduce them. Mr Vouyioukas explained that repeat referrals usually happened when a child had particularly complex needs or if a crisis occurred within the family to trigger a second referral. It was noted that there had been an increase in referrals involving domestic violence over the past few months.
- The Chairman noted that some targets in the performance report had been reduced. Mr Vouyioukas explained that whilst key performance indicators (KPI) have their place, both Ofsted and the Commissioner had commented that it was important to strike a good

balance between data and KPI targets the quality of social work practice and improving outcomes for young people.

- A member asked for reassurance that the number of looked after children placed within 20 miles of their original home setting would improve. It was noted that the importance of a child receiving the correct high-quality placement was the prime motivator, and also that some children need to be placed away from the County. To date this year, the demand for placements had been met within the County, but this would not be sustainable going forward.
- A member asked whether the frontline and management staff issues had been remedied. Mr Williams said caseloads were still too high in some teams and would take time to reduce, but he had confidence in the new permanent senior management team of excellent individuals who had the experience and expertise to drive improvements. It was acknowledged that realistically it could take up to three years to turn performance around and get to 'good'.
- The Director of Children's Services commented that the service was on the right track – the improvement plans were ambitious, especially with the changing demographic demands, but the Commissioner had confirmed that the service is moving in the right direction and the new management team would continue to build momentum.
- Members were concerned about frequent changes to foster placements and the effects on children. Mr Vouyioukas said that the service keeps placement moves to a minimum, but some children had special requirements or may display challenging behaviour within a particular setting, which might necessitate a change of placement.

## **9 REVIEW OF PERFORMANCE REPORT - Q1 2018-19**

Items 8 & 9 were considered together, please see above

## **10 VOICE OF THE CHILD AND YOUNG PERSON INQUIRY - PROGRESS ON IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS 18 MONTHS ON**

The Chairman welcomed Mr James Fowler, Youth Services Manager, to the meeting.

Mr Fowler updated the committee on the development of the Youth Voice website, to ensure that the views of young people would be heard. The Chairman and several other members commended Mr Fowler on the comprehensive report and the work on the website, which was visually appealing and easy to navigate.

- Mr Fowler highlighted a national campaign called Make your Mark, where young people were asked to identify and rank key issues or concerns for them as they grow up.
- There was a short discussion about the 'You said, we did' feature on the website. Mr Fowler said it was important to feedback to young people how their views directly lead to changes. The Deputy Cabinet Member flagged that this could be a useful page for the Select Committee to monitor. The Chairman thanked Mr Fowler for attending the meeting and the Committee confirmed that recommendation 4 of the Voice of the Child Inquiry had been successfully implemented.

## **11 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

Members noted the future work programme.

## **12 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting will take place on 27th November at 10:30am in Mezzanine Room 1, County Hall, Aylesbury

**CHAIRMAN**