



Minutes

CHILDREN'S SELECT COMMITTEE

Minutes from the meeting held on Tuesday 12 March 2019, in Mezzanine Room 1, County Hall, Aylesbury, commencing at 10.02 am and concluding at 12.11 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 P Birchley, Mrs A Cranmer, Mrs I Darby, Mr D Dhillon (Chairman), Mr M Hussain, Mr S Lambert, Mrs L Sullivan and Ms K Wood

CO-OPTED MEMBERS PRESENT

Mrs C Pease

GUESTS PRESENT

OFFICERS PRESENT

Miss S Callaghan, Mrs K Collier, Mr G Drawmer, Ms S Tilston, Ms V Trundell and Ms S Turnbull

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Mr Lambert declared an interest as he had been a Member of the steering group for the early help strategy and stated that he would not participate in this agenda item.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/ CHANGES TO MEMBERSHIP



Apologies had been received from Mr Roberts, Mrs Mallen, Mr Collingwood and Mrs Ward. There had been changes to membership as a new Parent Governor Representative had joined. The Chairman welcomed Mrs Pease.

3 MINUTES

The minutes of the last meeting dated 15th January 2019 were agreed to be accurate.

4 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There had been no public questions received.

5 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Chairman reported that the Committee had recently visited social workers at their Aylesbury offices and that there would be a further social worker visit at the Amersham offices. He expressed thanks to Amanda Andrews, Head of First Response for arranging these meetings. He also discussed his recent visit to schools in India and spoke about differences between British and Indian education.

A Member enquired about planned social worker visits to the Wycombe offices and was informed that these had been requested.

6 COMMITTEE MEMBER UPDATES

There were no updates.

7 CABINET MEMBERS' QUESTION TIME

The Chairman noted that Mrs Cranmer – Deputy Cabinet Member for Education & Skills, was attending in place of Mr Appleyard and Mr Williams – Deputy Cabinet Member for Children's Services, was representing Mr Whyte as he was attending a Local Government Association Children & Young People Board meeting in London. He also welcomed Miss Callaghan, Service Director Education.

Mrs Cranmer told the Committee that the changes to post-16 transport arrangements were being rolled out. It was confirmed that new children who had been eligible for free transport would be assessed based on their ability to travel and their family's income. Charges would only be a partial cost recovery with a distance banding rate. Discretionary support to families who needed it would continue.

A Member requested that the excellent education results which had been achieved in Buckinghamshire should be better publicised. This was agreed with the understanding that there would be a time delay while results were validated nationally.

The Chairman asked for an update about the Burnham E-Act Academy. Miss Callaghan told the Chairman that there was a prescribed process set out by the DfE for all school closures. In situations where the school was an Academy, the role of the Council is that of a consultee. In these instances, the Council had not been responsible for the Academy's proposal to consult about potential school closure, but BCC officers had been working cooperatively with the Academy to minimise effects on local children who attended, continuing to fulfil its sufficiency duty.

Miss Callaghan delivered an update about the Educational Psychology service (EPS). Staff shortages had continued and the service area had mitigated this using the associate model and by implementing an improved structure, which facilitated integrated care between SEN, EP and Specialist teaching services. Backlogged cases continued to be an issue but the service area had been working towards clearing them.

The following points were made in response to questions from Members:

- 115 Education, Health, Care Plans (EHCP's) had fallen outside the acceptable timeline of 20 weeks and new requests for EHCP's meant work continued to accumulate.
- The EPS consultation had ended, so a permanent Principal Education Psychologist could now be recruited.
- Timings for EHCP completion had depended on the complexity of each case. The general assumption with relation to the associate model had been that an Associate EP could complete their contribution to a straight forward EHCP within 5 days, which would reduce the number of backlogged cases.
- Nearly 4000 EHCP's had been issued in total in Buckinghamshire, with 115 of these sitting outside of the expected timescale of 20 weeks. The service area had been sympathetic to parents experiencing delays but complex cases would continue to take longer to complete. The service area remained committed to using expertise and placements within Buckinghamshire, where possible, to alleviate pressures on the budget associated with high cost, out of County placements. The priorities for the service had been ensuring children received the right resource, that they had tailored support to a child's individual needs and that they worked cooperatively with parents as this was the objective of the SEND reforms introduced in 2014. In Bucks, there has been a slow response to implementing the SEND reforms which had created pressure on the service to meet statutory timelines. This had been why performance within the service was not as good as it should be.
- The reformed early help strategy would be expected to spot issues earlier and would encourage early work with families before more serious intervention would be needed this will decrease the number of Education Health and care Plans by putting in the support before things escalated to requiring a plan.
- Population growth within Buckinghamshire had resulted in nearly 1000 additional plans requiring completion.
- Buckinghamshire was no longer an outlier with SEND numbers as this had evened out nationally with Bucks stabilising at 3.1%, the same as regional comparators. National SEND policy reforms had increased the age range of children who potentially required an EHCP up to 25 yrs. Buckinghamshire County Council had not responded fast enough to these reforms but had been remedying this situation.

- Home-educated children had been able to gain an EHCP and had been entitled to the same support as children within an educational placement, depending on their needs. Information to assist parents with the process and setting out the local offer was available on the Bucks Family Information Service (BFIS) website.

The Chairman requested that the EPS update continued in future meetings and that data would be clearly stated within tables. This was agreed by Miss Callaghan.

ACTION: Service Director Education/Committee & Governance Advisor

Mr Williams presented apologies on behalf of Mr Whyte. He told the Committee that they had recently attended the opening of a new Buckinghamshire children's home and that the new fostering offer had been working effectively since it had been reformed. The service were still looking for more adoption and fostering placements.

Members requested a visit to the new children's home and asked about ongoing vetting processes for foster carers after they had commenced fostering. Mr Williams reassured Members that foster carers faced continuous assessment to ensure they remained suitable and that they had been subjected to a fostering panel as well as independent reviewing officers.

A Member asked whether a suitable site for a new children's home had been identified in High Wycombe. Mr Williams said that a site had been found and the required work to make it fit-for-purpose would be costed up. The service area would involve the local Member in the process and keep them updated.

Mr Williams informed Members that the national trend over the past few years had been for local authorities to outsource children's home provision, but recent spikes in supply and demand had resulted in the necessity for the Council to invest in their own children's homes. This ensured that the Council retained oversight, control and management of the homes and also of the children who had been placed within the homes. It was explained to Members that children placed within the provision had to get along for placements to work. Mr Williams reported that there had been no complaints about Buckinghamshire children's homes and the newest children's home was awaiting approval from Ofsted.

8 EARLY HELP CONSULTATION REPORT

The Chairman welcomed Ms Turnbull, Early Help Transformation Manager and Mr Morgan, Head of Early Help. Mr Lambert left the room for this item. The Chairman commended Ms Turnbull and Mr Morgan for their completed consultation and for listening to responses. During this item, another Member complimented the recent consultation and said it should be used as a model template for future consultations within the new council.

Mr Williams updated the Committee about the outcome of the consultation. He said 16 children's centres would now stay open, following feedback from residents. Nationally, a family-centred approach had been proving successful. He told Members that three key improvements of the more targeted support would be:

- Service users would only have to tell their story once due to inter-agency data-sharing.
- Self-referral would now be possible and the BFIS website would contain updated information on how to do this.
- The Council would be working more closely with Schools and service users would also have a named link family support worker.

Mr Morgan added that the new model would change the way Early Help operated, making it more responsive, flexible and accessible.

A Member asked about the intended use of vacant children's centres and whether the service area had confidence that the new council would continue working with partners to manage local offers. Ms Turnbull said that several partners had come forward and that property services would draw up details of new leasehold arrangements. Appendix 4 of the Cabinet papers contained details of potential interested parties. The service area had ensured that joint working with health services had continued.

In response to further questions it was confirmed that:

- The Council would not be continuing financial help for the closed children's centres which are located on School sites. Lease arrangements would be handed to them, but the early year's team would continue to work closely with Schools to ensure quality and sufficient provision. Schools had community funding sources which they would be encouraged to bid for.
- Members would be able to influence the offer within their local areas to ensure it reflected resident needs, working within available resources.
- The 16 centres which remained would be directly operated by BCC would be staffed by trained and DBS checked BCC employees. The Council would also ensure that other centres which continued to offer care would be safe, secure and appropriate for children.
- Coordination of care, early response and partner-working would improve under the new model.
- Early help for young people would tend to be focussed on one-to-one and small group mentoring, not through youth clubs

Several Members of the Committee requested that key performance indicator (KPI) measures would be reported back to the Committee at 6 monthly intervals. The Committee was advised that Early Help would be implemented from 2nd September and the service area would report back before the unitary formation in March.

The Chairman thanked the service area for their update.

9 CURRENT AUTISTIC SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD) SERVICE PROVISION

The Chairman welcomed Ms Tilston – Designated Clinical Officer SEND and Mr Drawmer – Head of Achievement & Learning, who delivered a presentation about current ASD service provision.

The main points were noted as follows:

- There had been an increase in Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) diagnosis which had placed pressure on the number of mainstream, additional support units and specialist support units available.
- Speech and Language needs had increased significantly since 2014.
- There had been an increase in demand for Education, Health & Care plans (EHCPs) in the post-16 age group as some children had been able to access under 16 placements without additional help, but had required an EHCP when they had entered a new educational placement.
- Children who had been home-educated had the same access to support and EHCP's as children who attended an educational placement. Information about the application process had been published on the BFIS website.
- The presentation of ASD was very varied across different children, which caused challenges for diagnosis. The most challenging issues for Schools and Councils had been the need to reduce children's anxiety, which was a product of the disorder, and the requirement to provide the right learning environment and placement.
- Girls had been under-diagnosed and tended to present later as they internalised and masked symptoms. The standardised test for autism had been very boy-focussed, but it was confirmed that CAMHS had been aware and had remedied this.
- There would be a newly developed ASD toolkit to assist parents, teachers and professionals to identify ASD and access support services. This had been promoted to parents through SENDIAS, FACT Bucks, SENDCOs and Schools.
- The waiting list for 0-4 years support and diagnosis was currently short. Where a parent and GP suspected a child who is under 5 years old had ASD, paediatricians could hold off diagnosis but would still offer support.
- Adults who are over 18 years and newly diagnosed could access a great service through the Whiteleaf Centre.
- Help for 5-17 year olds had recently improved with children no longer being batted between CAMHS and paediatrics.
- Waiting lists for children aged 5-11 years had been too long. CAMHS had received funding to bring them down, but there had been no funding for paediatrics. The new single point of access would be expected to bring improvements.
- New post-diagnostic SENDCO support in the form of a Specialist Teaching Service drop-in had brought positive improvements to the service
- The service area intended to keep as many children in mainstream provision as possible. They had initiated side-by-side partnerships between special and mainstream schools to facilitate this.
- A recent development within the service meant that the Specialist Teaching Service would now support children with ASD who did not have an EHCP.
- There would be an increase in social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH) provision, due to an increase in prevalence in Bucks. This would be delivered through adaptations to whole School behaviour management strategies, where support staff would be taught to de-escalate challenge, reduce tension and support SEMH pupil needs.

- There had been an increased requirement for Schools to evidence the support they have been providing ASD and SEMH pupils.
- Some Academies chose to use the SEND/ASD help and assistance provided by BCC, however larger chains tended to have their own in-house provision. BCC had approached all academies and tried to ensure the correct provision was being offered.
- Prosecution for non-attendance wouldn't happen if the parent continued to work cooperatively with BCC and CAMHS. Parents should ensure they had communicated difficulties with attendance to the service area.
- The number of home educated children had increased but as there had been no national reporting criteria, BCC had no insight as to whether this was ASD-related. Although, there are mechanisms in place to ensure all home-educated children had been visited so the service area had been reassured that the education provided is appropriate, there were no national comparators for BCC to make with other Council's data on this.
- Transitions to adult services were being evaluated and a big piece of work to make support better and smoother was due to commence.
- High Needs Block funding had been available to Schools, where a child's needs had been higher than School SEN funding allowed for.
- CAMHS services had been divided into different pathways to improve waiting lists for particular high-need groups.

It was agreed that Members would revisit this topic in a future meeting to enable a deep-dive approach into more focussed aspects of ASD provision.

10 WORKING TOGETHER TO REDUCE THE NUMBER OF PERMANENT EXCLUSIONS FROM SCHOOL - 6 MONTH RECOMMENDATION MONITORING

The Chairman welcomed Viv Trundell, Education Entitlement Manager, and requested an update about permanent exclusions in Buckinghamshire. The Committee was informed that although permanent exclusions were up slightly from last year, they had been radically down from previous years. Mrs Cranmer thanked the Committee for undertaking the inquiry, as she felt that the situation had improved.

Committee Members requested that despite Cabinet's rejection of the recommendation for clusters of Schools to have access to an Educational Psychologist, that the service area would look at improving School access to the EPS. Miss Callaghan confirmed that although there was a clear need for preventative work to take place in Schools, this was a challenge when the current performance for the statutory Appendix D assessments had been so low. Members felt that preventative work for the EPS would assist with retention rates within the service as it provided more varied workloads.

Members were concerned that the Summer conference only had a 50% attendance rate by Buckinghamshire Schools. The service area advised that they had reached out to all Schools and that they'd received a better take-up from Primary Schools, than Secondary Schools.

The Committee agreed that the Chairman could assign a RAG status to all recommendations after the meeting ended.

11 PLACEMENTS INQUIRY SCOPE

The Committee agreed the placements inquiry scope but told the Chairman that Members would need dates and times to fit around busy schedules, particularly due to the new unitary council workload. The Chairman informed that Members of the FPR Select Committee would be co-opted onto the inquiry. Mrs Darby, Miss Wood, Mr Hussain and Mrs Birchley agreed to participate in the inquiry.

12 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Chairman informed the Committee that upcoming items for future meetings included:

- Educational standards update
- Side-by-side project update
- Joint scrutiny of mental health services

As a work programming meeting was taking place, the Chairman asked Committee Members whether they had any item preferences. A Member requested an in-depth review of current School curriculums. Miss Callaghan agreed to scope and support the item for Members.

13 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is due to be held on 11th June 2019, at 10am, in Mezz 1, County Hall, Aylesbury.

CHAIRMAN