



Minutes

CHILDREN'S SELECT COMMITTEE

Minutes from the meeting held on Thursday 3 October 2019, in Mezzanine Room 1, County Hall, Aylesbury, commencing at 1.01 pm and concluding at 2.30 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, Mr N Brown, Mrs I Darby, Mr D Dhillon (Chairman), Mr M Hussain, Mrs W Mallen and Ms K Wood

CO-OPTED MEMBERS PRESENT

Mr M Skoyles

GUESTS PRESENT

Mrs A Cranmer and Mr W Whyte

OFFICERS PRESENT

Mrs K Collier, Mr R Nash, Ms P Thompson-Omenka, Ms V Trundell and Mr T Vouyioukas

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Mrs Ward, Mr Hussain, Mr Roberts, Mrs Pease and Mr Collingwood.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.



3 MINUTES

The minutes of the last meeting held on 6th September 2019, were agreed and signed.

4 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

In response to public questions which had been put forward by Lionel Barber, Foster Carer, Mr Whitley Head of Children's Care Service told the Committee:

- There hadn't been any children or young people referred under the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) Scheme. Any future referrals would be well vetted prior to being considered by Buckinghamshire County Council. They would all require an age assessment and would be likely to be placed in semi-independent accommodation, based on the results of their independent skills and risk assessment. Social workers had been specially trained to carry out these assessments.
- The wellbeing and care of the council's foster carers was the concern of several different agencies. Initially a family would be assigned a qualified and experienced Social Worker to work with them. Foster Carers could then access specialist support and advice from Education and Health Services, through Social Workers. Child and Adult Mental Health Services (CAMHS) support had been embedded within the service, which had not only given Carers insight into the children they were working with but also skills to protect their own health. Additionally there were extensive support structures in place, including countywide carer support groups and an online portal for those who couldn't physically attend. Training had been utilised well over the last year, so the service had increased the offer and tailored it to requirements.
- Foster Carers were not employed by Buckinghamshire County Council in legal terms; they had a unique status. Carers received other rewards and support, such as complimentary clubs and discount shopping.

In response to further questioning from Members, Mr Whitley, Mr Vouyioukas Executive Director Children's services, Mr Nash Service Director for Children's Social care and Mr Whyte Cabinet Member for Children's Services stated:

- Foster Carers received an allowance as remuneration for their services. Foster Carer's employment status was similar to that of Buckinghamshire County Council's Members.
- When Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) made themselves known to Buckinghamshire County Council, they would usually not have any documentation and would need to self-report their status, age and needs. It had been the council's duty to assess them over a number of days or weeks to look at their needs and risks to the child, or risks to potential carers. Decisions about the type of care which they required would then be made on a case-by-case basis. The most frequent outcome had been that these children's needs could be met through semi-independent accommodation.
- At various points during the year, Buckinghamshire County Council would receive invitations to take on children under the NRM Scheme.
- It was not possible to say whether young adults were being trained to present themselves as underage so that they would get a better deal, but the council had been trained to assess this situation.

- Carers could access CAMHS support through self-referral and through the single point of access route through the council. The support through the Council would include support for the Carer as well as the child, which would not be the case if self-referred.
- Positive feedback about Carer's access to support had been received through the Corporate Parenting Panel in recent months.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their contributions.

5 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

There was no update as the space between meetings had been short. The Chairman requested an update about the Committee's potential to visit Social Workers within the Wycombe area office.

6 CABINET MEMBER'S QUESTION TIME

Mrs Cranmer, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, delivered her update. She reminded the Committee that there had been Home to School transport issues and assured them that the Service Area had been completing a rigorous piece of work to improve the situation. Officers had reduced enquiries from 2000, down to just 160 outstanding enquiries. In response to Member's questions, the following points were noted:

- Officers had identified vacant seats on some home to school transport services, due to procurement issues. These would be offered to children who didn't get their expected travel arrangements.
- Outstanding bus passes were already in the process of being printed and sent out, as the replacement printing machines had already arrived. Children should expect to receive them by 11th October.
- Parents had been working together to assist each other in getting all children to School.
- If Members were aware of any families who hadn't received a response from the Service Area, they were encouraged to report back to Mrs Cranmer.
- The planned route optimisation, which had been due around 4th November, and the new routes which this would create had not been confirmed. Daily meetings were being held to ensure that transport issues were fixed and that communications were clear.
- A total of 5 major issues had resulted in the significant level of dissatisfaction and Mrs Cranmer assured the Committee that this wouldn't happen again.

A Member questioned the proposed solution for the recent 11+ testing incident and wanted to understand how the testing anomalies would be remedied. Mrs Cranmer advised that the council had no influence over 11+ testing and that it remained the responsibility of GL Assessment. Schools would all receive an update by the end of September 2019; however there would be no retesting and statisticians were working on a solution. Mrs Cranmer reminded parents of their right to appeal and said she was confident that the situation would be resolved fairly.

The Chairman thanked Mrs Cranmer for meeting with parents about Home to school transport issues and thanked staff within the Service Area for dealing with the situation.

Mr Whyte, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, gave an update about adoption and fostering events under Items 7&8.

7 ADOPTION ANNUAL REPORT

Mr Whyte gave his thanks to everyone who had come forward to be considered as adoptive parents and also thanked Social Workers for their part in the process. He stressed the importance and the transformational change that a good adoption placement had on children within the system.

Two information evening events for potential adoptive parents were being held on:

- 6th November in Aston Clinton
- 5th December in Chesham Town Hall

The public were encouraged to check the Council website for updates.

Mr Whitley highlighted the main points of the report including:

- A new website was being developed in collaboration with the digital board. The website would be fully functional from 7th October and could be found at www.adoption.bucksc.gov.uk
- Children who were older or who had more significant needs, such as where they were poorly, had been difficult to place with families for adoption.
- There had been 29 children placed for adoption between April 2018-19
- Mr Whitley commended the work of the Post Order team who had helped the Service Area to access £500,000 through the adoption support fund. This had been used to improve the service, particularly through the provision of therapeutic support for adoptive and special guardianship families. The Post Order Team had also managed contact between children and their birth families.
- Over the next year the focus would be on improving recruitment, creating more homes which could lead to adoptive placements and strengthening the collaboration with other local authorities and regional adoption agencies

Questioning from Members was invited and in response Mr Whitley, Mr Vouyioukas and Mr Whyte made the following main points:

- It was not easy to compare the Council with other authorities due to differing circumstances or demographics. The number of adoption breakdowns had been a good indication of the quality of the council's decision-making.
- Adoption services had been judged as good at the last inspection.
- Although the speed of placing a child had been slow, the quality and success of placements had been high. Adoption teams could not rush a decision which would potentially affect a child for 18 years of their life.
- All children were well-cared for and would remain in a good quality care placement until a suitable adoptive match could be made. No child would be left without support.

- The service had tried to ensure that all under 5 year olds were living with and adopted by in-house carers to encourage permanence.
- Fostering and adoption placements were decided using a trained panel. The decision making process was very complex and taken very seriously.
- There had been a small number of children who had been hard to place for a variety of reasons, however the Service Area were liaising with voluntary adoptive agencies who provided specialist placements. They were also intending to perform additional recruitment drives. The availability of specialist placements had been a national issue.
- Members felt that graphical data and comparative data within the adoption report could have been displayed in a more accessible format.
- The Service Area had a focus on permanence for children which could also be achieved through family and friends adoptions and special guardianship orders (SGO)
- Life story work referred to an essential therapeutic tool which trained social workers had used to help children to understand their past, their journey into adoption and why particular decisions had been made on their behalf.

The Chairman thanked all contributors.

8 FOSTERING ANNUAL REPORT

Mr Whyte began the item by thanking the staff who had worked hard to recruit new foster carers. He thanked everyone who had shown an interest in becoming a foster carer and thanked all the new carers who had been recruited over the last year. He publicised a number of fostering information events, there would be one held on 18th December in Buckingham and they would continue across various locations in the New Year.

Mr Whyte complimented the fostering service, saying he had been impressed by the level of care, guidance and attention which carers had given to the children. There were many events which celebrated the achievements of foster carers and children who had been in care. The annual report which was being presented went from April 2018-2019, but he informed the Committee that figures for children in care had remained stable over the last 6 months. All of the hard work which the service had put in last year was being realised this year.

In response to questioning, Mr Whitley, Mr Whyte and Mr Nash made the following points:

- The staying put arrangement had meant that children were able to access support post -18 years old, with the families they knew and trusted when they had been going through key transitional phases.
- There had been an increase in children in care last year but this had now stabilised.
- Over the last year, the offer for foster carers had been improved, reducing the Council's reliance on independent fostering agencies
- Children were now more likely to be placed locally which meant they would benefit from being closer to their social worker, health appointments and their educational placement. This also meant improved collaboration between all of these agencies.
- The fostering service had moved to a more efficient business model, which was likened to that of independent fostering agencies.

- At the time of the meeting an additional 21 applications had been received from people who were interested in becoming new foster carers.
- For each child who entered the system, the service would always prioritise permanence by exploring whether there would be an option of a family and friends connected carer placement. 20% of children within the fostering service had been placed with family and friends.
- The service now offered more training opportunities for Foster Carers and had increased the location, frequency and varied the times when training was delivered, to try to be as inclusive as possible.

The Chairman thanked Mr Whitley for the quality of the report presented. He commended staff within the service for their hard work, for increasing fostering enquiries and for delivering the recent award ceremony for children in care and their Foster Carers.

In response to questioning, Mr Whitley, Mr Whyte and Mr Nash informed the Committee that:

- Foster Carers played a very important role in informing the care requirements of a child and reviewing how their needs changed due to the amount of time they spent with them. They would attend all education appointments and have close positive working relationships with Social Workers at regular intervals.
- Connected Carers received the same allowance as unconnected Foster Carers in Buckinghamshire. This differed across local authorities. The website contained a chart which broke down the allowances paid to all Foster Carers.
- There were not many supported lodgings in Buckinghamshire, they tended to be in more urban areas, however the service would be looking to increase these so that children who didn't need much care could access this facility. There had been trials with other providers to test whether delivery of the service would be achievable.
- Within year 1 and 2 of the recruitment strategy, the service had focussed on in-house recruitment and setting up a new team. Within year 3, there would be a focus on recruiting specialist placements which had been hard to recruit for, such as parent and child placements. The service had commissioned specialist placements out effectively, to ensure they met the needs of the children within the service.
- Fostering and adoption information events could be found on the updated website and on social media. Mr Whyte requested that Members promoted local events through their Local Area Forum (LAF) and sent the following links after the meeting:

Fostering events - <https://www.buckscc.gov.uk/services/care-for-children-andfamilies/fostering/fostering-information-event/>

Adoption events - <https://www.buckscc.gov.uk/services/care-for-children-andfamilies/adoption/becoming-an-adoptive-parent/>

- 16-18 year old children within the fostering service had received a lot of guidance and information about their options post-16, which had included choices to go to University, to access apprenticeships or to go into other non-academic routes. This had been supported by celebration events, through the use of inspirational care leaver speeches,

and through the Virtual School to help children overcome any barriers to their success. The Fostering Service had a very low number of children who were Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) compared to statistical neighbours.

- Buckinghamshire had been affected by County Lines; however the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and all partner agencies had worked hard to encourage children and young people to keep themselves safe, particularly those who had been identified as being at risk or within scenarios which could result in exploitation.
- Central Government had designated another £20 million of funding nationally for disrupting County Lines activity and for protecting young people at risk of being drawn into these activities.

Committee Members commended the Fostering Service and their achievements over the last year and the Chairman thanked all contributors.

9 12 MONTH RECOMMENDATION MONITORING OF PERMANENT EXCLUSIONS INQUIRY

Mrs Cranmer introduced the item saying that this inquiry had been commissioned before her time in post. At the time, Primary School exclusions had been 25% higher than national average and Secondary School exclusions had been 20% higher than national average. This had now been remedied as the Primary School exclusion rate was 33% lower and Secondary School exclusion rate was 30% lower than national average.

Mrs Trundell, Education Entitlement Manager, Ms Thompson-Omenka, Service Director Education, and Mr Vouyioukas made these points in response to questioning:

- At the time of the meeting a Special Educational Needs (SEN) audit had been taking place within Primary Schools. A particular Head teacher had been instrumental in completing this work for the side by side project. Secondary and Primary Schools had very different support needs for SEN children.
- Earlier identification of problematic behaviour achieved better outcomes and this work began within preschool groups, continuing through all educational phases.
- Improvements and strengthening of web content had been carried out almost immediately and had been reviewed regularly in comparison to other authorities.
- Some of the recommendations and actions from the inquiry would have been clearer if they had been timetabled or if the service area had given a clearer indication of the frequency in which they were reviewed. Ms Trundell assured the Committee that recommendations had been monitored on a regular basis.
- There had initially been a poor take-up of the workshops offered to Primary Schools, however the team had called Schools directly to ask for their engagement and there were now 30 Primary Schools who had been fully engaged.
- The team were always available to answer questions and offer advice to Schools on the topic of permanent exclusions. As these permanent exclusion figures had been low, the team had also monitored fixed term exclusions.
- As a variety of issues often fed into the problem of permanent exclusions, families were also signposted to family support services and external agencies who could support them.

- One of the side by side projects objectives had been to provide peer challenge and alternative strategies to deal with challenging behaviour and avoiding permanent exclusions.
- There hadn't been any challenges in providing placements for permanently excluded children and the team strived to reintegrate children quickly back into a school setting.
- There had not been an identified need for a new SEN School at the Penn site as the placement uptake hadn't justified the cost of the site.
- Schools had been approached by a liaison group and discussed the option of collectively commissioning Educational Psychologist Services, but had chosen not to explore that option. Reasons had varied from having an existing arrangement within the Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) which they had been part of, to having differing requirements which would make the arrangement unfit for purpose
- Workshops were not being run until 9th December, as the side by side project had put such a large amount of pressure on School's time and resulted in an additional workload for the team. They would continue to be offered to meet demand.

The Committee agreed for the RAG rating to be delegated to the Chairman after the meeting. A copy of the document containing the RAG rating would be attached to the minutes of this meeting.

The Chairman thanked all contributors.

10 WORK PROGRAMME

Members were asked to note that an update about Buckinghamshire's mental health services and an update about the side by side project would come to the next Committee. The Ofsted Monitoring Visit update would not be ready by the time of the next meeting.

11 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on 27th November 2019 at 10.30am, in Mezz 1, County Offices, Aylesbury.

CHAIRMAN

Response to Select Committee Scrutiny Inquiry

Inquiry Title	Working Together to Reduce Permanent Exclusions in Schools
Select Committee Owner	Chairman, Children's Select Committee
Date agreed by Cabinet	10 th September 2018
Lead Cabinet Member	Mike Appleyard
Lead Senior Officer (Director)	Tolis Vouyioukas

VERSION CONTROL

Version No.	Changes	Name of response author	Date
Draft Final	Agreed by Cabinet Members	Chairman, Children's Select Committee	Sept 2019

Recommendation	Agreed Yes/No	BCC Cabinet / Partner Agency Response including proposed action	Responsible Cabinet Member (for BCC recs)	Senior Responsible Officer Owner	Twelve month progress update	RAG status
1: It is recommended that: Early Help representation should be part of the Bucks Inclusion Hub to ensure families and pupils experiencing difficulties or needing access to additional services get the early help they need	Yes	Cabinet accepts this recommendation and view it as a positive step. The Head of Early Help, Gareth Morgan, will identify a representative to become part of the work being undertaken by Buckinghamshire Inclusion Hub.	Cllr Mike Appleyard	Gareth Morgan Head of Early Help	Gareth Morgan has been added to the attendee list but we are currently reviewing the most effective way of managing this workload	
2: It is recommended that: a. A series of workshops 'Towards Better Behaviour, Sharing Best Practice' should be offered on selected INSET days during the academic year 2018/19,	Yes	a. Cabinet accepts this recommendation. Officers will pilot a workshop on 'Towards Better Behaviour, Sharing Best Practice' in December. A decision will be taken on future events once	Cllr Mike Appleyard	Viv Trundell Education Entitlement Manager	a. A work shop to disseminate good practice will be scheduled towards the end of the year.	

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<p>to be attended by all head teachers, their INCOs/SENCOs and chairs of governors with the possibility of rolling out the programme on a wider basis; and</p> <p>b. Senior leadership teams across all schools in Buckinghamshire should be strongly encouraged to attend BCC-commissioned behaviour training (for example, Behaviour Network Meetings) and to include low-level disruptive behaviour training as a standard element in their school.</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>this has been evaluated.</p> <p>b. Behaviour training workshops were initiated and financed by BCC as an exception for this academic year due to the importance of promoting a school led model for the future (an approach that is supported and driven by the DfE). Attendance at the Behaviour Network meetings has been inconsistent and therefore a comprehensive Communications Plan is being developed to ensure good attendance at the meetings in the next academic year (Primary Schools).</p> <p>The secondary sector will receive training as part of the 'Towards Better Behaviour, Sharing Best Practice' workshops, which will also be promoted in the Communications Plan.</p> <p>We will continue to work with schools directly and as part of the Inclusion Hub work to prevent exclusions and encourage inclusive practice. The development of an Inclusion Charter will assist this culture change.</p>			<p>b. These workshops took place and received positive feedback.</p> <p>The primary PRU are targetting individual schools to offer whole school behaviour management training.</p>	
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<p>a. Education Service officers more effectively promote and signpost guidance to schools to help them to identify, within statutory requirements, how much information and evidence to include on Education Health and Care Plan forms ; and</p> <p>b. Education Service officers review communications to head teachers concerning alternative provision opportunities through the SEND Local Offer to ensure all avenues are being explored when pupils are in imminent danger of being permanently excluded</p>		<p>Offer is hosted on the Buckinghamshire Family Information Service Website. It has a wealth of information on EHC processes and 'the SEN support' offer. EHC plans should be specific to a child's needs and therefore it would not be appropriate to publish a 'good example' generic document. BCC officers will review the published Local Offer to ensure it offers leading edge advice.</p> <p>b. BCC officers will work with Buckinghamshire Family Information Service to ensure that the current menu of alternative provision accurately reflects the alternative provision on offer to schools.</p>	Appleyard	Education Entitlement Manager and SEN Manager	<p>a. and b.</p> <p>The Local offer continues to be hosted on Bucks Family Information website and includes alternative provision. Education Services officers continue to advise schools on alternatives to permanent exclusion.</p>	
<p>6: It is recommended that: As part of the review of the outcomes of SENDIAN pilot, the Education Service should also review the impact and value of a 'named' Educational Psychologist for schools and explore ways in which mixed primary and secondary school clusters could be set up to achieve this objective where budgets allow</p>	No	<p>Cabinet is unable to support this recommendation. There is a national shortage of Education Psychologists and recruitment in Buckinghamshire is difficult. Existing BCC Educational Psychology resource is focused on meeting our statutory duties. When there is capacity preventative work will be delivered and this approach will be included in our review</p>	Cllr Mike Appleyard	Katherine Wells Education Officer	<p>The primary PRU were provided with support from the EPS.</p> <p>Schools are familiar with and well practised in privately commissioning EP advice and support</p>	

		and restructure of SEND. As an interim action the School Liaison Officers will discuss with schools the possibility of collectively commissioning a private Education Psychologist to support the schools in the Liaison Group area				
7: It is recommended that: As part of its work on the Inclusion Hub, officers should facilitate formal locally-based networks of head teachers to support each other on permanent exclusion issues	Yes	Cabinet accepts this recommendation and officers will use the established School Liaison Groups to facilitate this. The School Liaison Officers will include on September meeting agendas.	Cllr Mike Appleyard	Katherine Wells Education Officer	We continue to support this peer to peer approach. In addition put Headteachers in touch with colleagues on a case by case basis	
8: It is recommended that: The BCC website is further strengthened to make it more user-friendly for parents. This should include: a link to a permanent exclusion Q&A format or leaflet for parents whose child has been permanently excluded; and signposting to a range of advocacy services to help parents negotiate the permanent exclusion process, an approach which is favoured by other local authorities	Yes	Cabinet accepts this recommendation and will ensure that the public website is updated and improved.	Cllr Mike Appleyard	Viv Trundell Education Entitlement Manager	This is reviewed on a regular basis	

	<i>Recommendation implemented to the satisfaction of the committee.</i>		<i>Committee have concerns the recommendation may not be fully delivered to its satisfaction</i>
	<i>Recommendation on track to be completed to the satisfaction of the committee.</i>		<i>Committee consider the recommendation to have not been delivered/implemented</i>