

CHILDREN'S SELECT COMMITTEE



RETROSPECTIVE

FOREWORD



Cllr Dev Dhillon

"I took on the role of Chairman of the Children's Select Committee because I care deeply about children across Buckinghamshire and wanted to ensure that Council services support them to achieve the best outcomes. The Committee considers all areas of the Council's children's services including social care, early years, education, Special Educational Needs and Disability provision, adult learning, child psychology services, youth provision and youth offending. The Committee comprises of 13 Councillors and 2 co-opted Parent Governor Representatives. We meet between 4-6 times a year and we often encourage residents to contact us with any concerns, issues or topics which they feel would be appropriate for the Committee to address, such as Home to School transport and Early Help. Some of the most important monitoring which we undertake is around the Ofsted Improvement Journey, regular Educational Psychology updates and Educational Standards within Buckinghamshire. We hold the Cabinet Member to account and give residents a voice for the issues which matter."

KEY ISSUES CONSIDERED BY THE COMMITTEE OVER THE LAST 2 YEARS

- Early Help services
- Educational Psychology Service performance
- Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board performance
- Preventing bullying in Schools
- Permanent Exclusions Inquiry
- The Ofsted improvement journey
- Support for care leavers
- Development of children's residential care homes
- Elective home education
- Educational Standards
- Home to School transport arrangements
- Autistic Spectrum Disorder service provision
- Fostering and adoption services
- Children's mental health services
- Voice of the Child Inquiry

PERMANENT EXCLUSION INQUIRY

Department for Education data for 2015/16 showed Buckinghamshire as one of the highest permanently excluding authorities in England, which inspired the CSC to carry out an inquiry in December 2017. Following a series of meetings, observations and desk research, working with Buckinghamshire's maintained Schools and education partner agencies, the Committee produced a report to Cabinet.

Cabinet accepted the majority of recommendations which the working group made and, as from October 2019, the Primary School exclusion rate had markedly improved to 33% lower than the national average and the Secondary School exclusion rate had dropped to 30% lower.

EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY SERVICE PERFORMANCE

The Committee have kept oversight of the EPS over the last two years, monitoring the performance and staffing of the service to ensure the children who have additional needs, can receive appropriate services in a timely and effective way. There have been issues nationally with meeting time frames and coping with the demand for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), however, Buckinghamshire County Council is now on track and has caught up with the backlog of these plans.

SOCIAL WORKER ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS

The CSC have hosted a series of drop-in sessions across Buckinghamshire where the focus has been on the well-being of staff based at these locations and also on gaining valuable front-line feedback to assist the service area on their improvement journey. All of these sessions have been well-attended and feedback has been shared with the senior leadership team to inform them of the views gained from staff.

VOICE OF THE CHILD INQUIRY

Using desktop research and an online survey for Buckinghamshire children, the CSC completed an inquiry looking at how well BCC commissioned services, Youth Services and Children's Social Care listened to children's opinions and feedback, and used them to inform services improvements, planning and delivery.

As a result of this inquiry, 18 months on, the Bucks Family Information service now hosts a 'Youth Space' site, where children and young people can freely give their views, including a 'You said, We did' section, where young people can see evidence that they were listened to and clearly signposted services for their information. As corporate parents we value every child and want to improve outcomes for all of them.

OFSTED IMPROVEMENT JOURNEY

It has been important for the CSC to have regular updates on the Council's Ofsted improvement journey on our agendas. It is vital that members have an understanding of both national and local issues and the Committee has taken a supportive approach, as we want to see the Council's Children's Service providing good services for children in Buckinghamshire. Monitoring by the CSC has taken place in a mixture of public and private sessions and the Committee has been able to offer feedback and make recommendations as a critical friend.

'Voice of the child' inquiry makes recommendations to county council

Listening more to the views of young people will enhance the quality of public services in Bucks, according to a County Council watchdog.

The Children's Social Care and Learning Select Committee, made up of Buckinghamshire county councillors from across the political divide, has recommended eight measures to improve the council's engagement with young people.

These include making sure sufficient listening tools such as books, games and toys are readily available to social workers, establishing a participation group for disabled children and creating a specific website providing a way for youngsters to give their views.

The committee's Voice of the Child inquiry found that young people are willing to give their views and generally trust the council to keep those views confidential if required. However, information on how views can be given and how they have been taken into account in shaping services needs to be clearer, it said.

It found examples of good practice, such as the Mind of My Own app which makes it easier for young people to communicate with social workers. The committee said that officers who worked with young people understood the importance of listening to their views and found examples of where this had led to changes, such as to mental health services, care plans and the quality of accommodation.

But it said there were inconsistencies in the way views were recorded and shared and a lack of specific resources which would help engage children.



EARLY HELP SERVICES

Children's Services took the decision to redesign their early help services at the end of 2017, as they wanted to improve the effectiveness of the service and ensure it was targeting the right people. This led to a public consultation with Buckinghamshire residents to help shape the new service. Unfortunately, residents questioned the validity of the consultation and this led to a call-in which was considered by the CSC. After hearing evidence from members of the public and the service area, the CSC made recommendations to run a modified consultation, which was then accepted

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

The CSC held a themed meeting with partners, to look at developments and changes to mental health services since the government's green paper had been introduced. This had been identified as a key area of importance nationally and would have a huge impact on future outcomes for children within Buckinghamshire. The meeting addressed any barriers to accessing the services and looked at the success of partnership working

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Public questions are encouraged at the start of each meeting and Members of the public are invited to attend and personally ask their questions directly to Cabinet Members. The Chairman also regularly actively encourages residents to suggest any pertinent topics for scrutiny at future meetings. Questions can be submitted through the Council website or emailed directly to the Committee. Over the past 12 months there have been questions on issues such as Home to School transport, foster carer safety and consultation accessibility.

ONE COUNCIL, NEW OPPORTUNITIES

The launch of Buckinghamshire Council in April 2020 provides opportunities for the Select Committee to reflect on the achievements of the Committee over the last few years and to make suggestions for future areas of work for the new authority.

Home to School Transport cuts criticised by parents



Published by Local Democracy Reporter Jasmine Rapson at 2:32pm 3rd December 2018.



A council consultation into plans to cut school transport has been criticised for not being accessible for parents who have children with special educational needs (SEND).

Mum, Sarah Hodges, told members of Bucks County Council's (BCC) children's select committee (November 27) that she struggled to attend the evening consultation sessions as it is difficult to arrange care for her daughter.

BCC launched a consultation on the overhaul of the service in October after growing pressures saw the authority bust its school transport budget by £1.3 million.

The cuts could mean parents of young people aged 16 to 18 with special needs may have to pay for their child's travel.

Other potential changes include scrapping free transport arrangements for pupils travelling from Iver to The Chalfonts Community College and Ivinghoe to Cottesloe School, in Wing, as well as using more public transport services.

UPDATED: Challenge to Bucks Children's Centre closures rejected



Published by the Mix96 News Team at 5:39am 2nd February 2018. (Updated at 2:02pm 2nd February 2018)



UPDATE

A Buckinghamshire County Council committee has rejected a challenge over plans to close children's centres.

The call-in has been discussed for over two hours today, mostly around the process the Council took when consulting people on their early help plans.

This means the plans will now go ahead, but with some recommendations to change things slightly it appears.

EARLIER

Bucks County Council is today responding to a challenge of their decision to close 35 Children's Centres around the county.

Earlier this month proposals for an 'early help service' run from up to 9 hubbed centres was approved.

Three councillors called that decision in - which means the decision could be reversed.

What's going on?

If you've not been following the big proposed changes to Children's Services in Buckinghamshire, here's the story so far...

Last year, Bucks County Council proposed a major shake-up of Children's Services. They released proposals

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Plan to tackle social care recruitment crisis in Bucks



Published by Charlotte Fisher with contributions by Local Democracy Reporter Jasmine Rapson at 7:50am 20th January 2019.



The director of the county council's children's services has assured councillors there are robust plans in place to hire social care staff to tackle challenges recruiting in the department.

This week children's social care leaders were grilled on Ofsted's latest monitoring report for the failing service - which found current social workers have been left with large caseloads due to a high turnover of staff.

Reducing exclusions of vulnerable groups in schools a priority, says BCC



Published by the Mix96 News Team at 5:45am 19th October 2017.



Bucks County Council say reducing the number of permanent school exclusions is a key priority for their education strategy over the next four years.

They added that there will be an increased focus on positive outcomes for vulnerable groups.

It's after government stats revealed the number of permanently expelled black and mixed ethnicity students is about three and a half times higher than for white kids.

The stats

Percentage of permanent exclusions by ethnicity for Buckinghamshire (%)