



Minutes

CHILDREN'S SELECT COMMITTEE

Minutes from the meeting held on Wednesday 27 November 2019, in Mezzanine Room 1, County Hall, Aylesbury, commencing at 10.34 am and concluding at 12.30 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, Mrs I Darby, Mr D Dhillon (Chairman), Mr M Hussain, Mr N Hussain, Mrs W Mallen, Ms J Ward (Vice-Chairman) and Ms K Wood

CO-OPTED MEMBERS PRESENT

Mrs C Pease and Mr M Skoyles

GUESTS PRESENT

Mrs A Cranmer and Mr W Whyte

OFFICERS PRESENT

Mrs K Collier, Mr G Drawmer, Mrs M Moss, Mr R Nash, Ms P Thompson-Omenka and Jack Workman

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Mr Roberts, Mr Collingwood and Mr Brown.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST



Mr N Hussain declared that he was a contractor for bus and taxi services for BCC and worked with a number of Home to School transport companies in Buckinghamshire therefore he would not participate in the Home to School item.

3 MINUTES

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed as a correct record. There was a discussion about the assigned RAG status of the permanent exclusion item from the last meeting. Members requested an update on three of the recommendations in order to agree the RAG status which had been awarded for them. These items were covered under Cabinet Member's Question Time.

A Member asked for an update on the 11+ testing remedial actions which followed the recent testing incident. Mrs Cranmer, Cabinet Member for Education & Skills, advised that GL Assessment accepted all responsibility. Mr Drawmer, Head of Achievement & Learning, told the Committee that there had been a recent presentation to Head Teachers to brief them on the solution which would be applied to ensure fairness. GL Assessment had offered unreserved apologies and were working with Buckinghamshire Grammar School Head Teachers and Statisticians to ensure a valid approach had been taken. The solution would not be made public as it could unfairly advantage children who took the test in future.

In response to Member questioning about the responsibility of the tests, Mr Drawmer reiterated that Buckinghamshire Grammar Schools commissioned the test. The Council managed appeals, but was contracted to do so by Buckinghamshire Grammar Schools.

Mrs Cranmer offered apologies and sympathised with parents and children but she was confident that the solution would be fair.

4 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no public questions.

5 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Members requested that the visit to Social Workers in High Wycombe was rearranged, which was agreed by Mr Whyte.

ACTION: Democratic Services to arrange visit with the Service Area

6 CABINET MEMBER'S QUESTION TIME

Mrs Cranmer asked the Committee to present their questions from the earlier permanent exclusion item. In response to questioning, Members were informed that:

- Mr Morgan, Head of Early Help, would continue to be the representative on the Bucks Inclusion Hub. He would deliver an update on Early Help at the next Select Committee meeting

- Details of the dates for the workshops and past attendance figures at network meetings and workshops would be sent to Members via email after the meeting
ACTION: Ms Thompson-Omenka
- The audit of Secondary Schools would be discussed within the side-by-side item

A Member asked for a follow-up update from the last meeting, where the Service area had been asked to provide details of current programmes which would raise standards and performance of non-selective children across Buckinghamshire. Ms Thompson-Omenka, Service Director Education, advised that an analysis of the attainment figures could now be undertaken as they had been validated. A report would come to the Committee when an Educational Standards item came onto the agenda,

ACTION: Democratic Services to schedule Educational Standards item for 2020

Mr Whyte, Cabinet Member for Children's Services reported that there would shortly be a number of Fostering and Adoption events at various locations across Buckinghamshire and asked members to promote them within their divisions.

He had attended an LGiU Bright Futures conference with his focus on Children's Services and had seen the challenges that children's services across the country were facing, on the 30th anniversary of the Children's Act. During the presentation on draft findings, Mr Whyte was reassured by the fact that everything that other Authorities had been implementing had already been done within Buckinghamshire.

Mr Whyte informed the Committee that the Early Help item which was planned for January would be a month early, so wouldn't be a full 6 month update. However, as there were no further Select Committee meetings scheduled prior to the formation of the new Council, it was agreed that the item would remain on the agenda at the next meeting.

7 INFORMATION UPDATE ON H2S TRANSPORT

Mr N Hussain left the room for the duration of this item.

Mrs Cranmer told the Committee that she had recently attended a meeting which gave a complete update on remedial actions. Home to School transport would sit within the portfolio of Richard Barker, the new Corporate Director of Communities.

As an overview, Mrs Cranmer told the Committee that:

- Less calls and messages had been received within the service area and those that had been received had been answered more effectively
- They had closed down all extraneous email boxes to reduce the likelihood that messages would get missed or sent to the wrong location.
- Communications had been analysed and improved, with teams given guidance on how to communicate better with stakeholders.
- A new team of people had been established to carry out special educational needs and disability (SEND) mobility assessments on Buckinghamshire students.

- There had been a complete reorganisation of the whole system, with the new Director of Resources holding responsibility for the function.
- The removal of free post-16 SEND travel, which would be replaced by a parental contribution system, had been delayed until the following year. This was to facilitate a robust communications process and to allow parents to apply for the necessary bursaries, confirm college placements and go through the appeals process if they weren't happy with the decision. This was expected to affect 440 children within Buckinghamshire.
- It was stressed that this was not intended to be a cost-cutting exercise but was intended to build resilience for SEND children and enable them to travel independently. An independent travel training scheme had been replicated from the scheme delivered in Nottinghamshire and there would shortly be a large train the trainer session delivered to Schools within Buckinghamshire. This would enable Schools to directly train students from November 2020.

The Chairman told Mrs Cranmer that he believed residents to be happy with the solution and communications as he hadn't heard back from them, but wanted to know that the Service Area would deliver effectively next year. Mrs Cranmer assured the Committee that they were definitely on track and she didn't believe another full system breakdown to be possible.

A Member asked about the likelihood of all of the commercial routes continuing, now that students were reliant on them, and whether there would be contingency measures in place should these stop running. It was hoped that plans would be in place so that their education and School attendance didn't get affected. Mrs Cranmer told the Committee that there were short-term contracts in place and new processes would be rolled out in time for next September. They would look at standards and make any adjustments based on these findings, with the goal to roll all routes out to the commercial sector, providing benefits to residents in rural areas. It was suggested that Mr Robson, Head of Integrated Transport, and Mr Shaw, Cabinet Member for Transportation attend a future meeting to provide technical and operational information.

A Member queried the current position involving taxi provision and associated contracts. Mrs Cranmer said that these were mostly for SEND students. Contracts were in place until 31st December, when they would be renegotiated and recommissioned. Mrs Cranmer expected a seamless transition in January 2020. The Chairman thanked Mrs Cranmer for her update.

8 INTEGRATED SEN UPDATE

Ms Thompson-Omenka, Service Director Education introduced the item and the following main points were noted::

- There had been an improving picture within SEN services and significant progress had been made. The table within the report showed the progress made with education health care plans (EHCPs).
- Integrated SEND had gone live in September. In April 2019, progress had been poor and the Service area felt they were heading in the wrong direction. Average time taken to complete an EHCP had been 31 weeks which wasn't acceptable.

- The national target for EHCP completion was 20 weeks. In order to meet this target the Service Area had to undertake a significant amount of work and issued a significant number of plans.
- There had been a significant number of complaints from unhappy parents who had been waiting excessively for EHCP completion.
- At present over 70% of EHCP's were delivered within the timescale and staff were working to continue to improve this figure. The average time taken to complete an EHCP was 25 weeks in October 2019.
- At the end of October 2019 the cumulative percentage of EHCP's completed within 20 weeks had been 32.8% and the Service area had ambitions to get this to 40% by December 2019.
- Buckinghamshire teams carried an average of 350 individual cases requiring an EHCP, while comparative statistical neighbours had a maximum of 180 individual cases.
- Healthcare Co-ordinators were being recruited to have oversight over the process.
- There had been some vacancies within senior posts within the service, which were due to be filled by January 2020. There would continue to be difficulties hiring workers within the main grades and also associates, but senior managers were working creatively to overcome this.

The Chairman requested to know what was being done differently to recruit Educational Psychologists. Ms Thompson-Omenka explained that they had run the recruitment campaign slightly differently, hosting an informal session and were anticipating applications from most of the individuals who had attended.

In response to questioning, Ms Thompson-Omenka told the Committee that:

- Specific metrics were tracked to identify trends, including children who were home schooled, children under child protection, young offenders, gender groups, children in care and children in need.
- The last 16 people who attended the informal session had been attracted via a creative social media campaign, which had been executed by the Human Resources (HR) team within a tight 3 week timescale. More creative recruitment tactics were planned, including a video which Ms Thompson-Omenka would be featuring in.
- The Service Area would consider handing out leaflets at the local train stations to London workers, as suggested by a Member of the Committee. This had been a successful tactic in the past when recruiting for other roles.
- They expected to recruit all 15 of the required Educational Psychologists from the last recruitment drive. If they managed to gain 12 new staff then caseloads would reduce to 150-180 per staff member. The service had been understaffed for a significant amount of time which had led to the backlog of work.
- Buckinghamshire was not thought to be unusual statistically in terms of the Educational Psychology and SEND services - it shared current national challenges.
- The success of the Service Area was attributed to the new Head of Service within integrated SEND and the support of their team. Improving the quality of the service and of reports had been high on the agenda. They always used parental views to critique the service and to feed into the care plan for their own child. The final EHCP's

contained the views of a range of relevant professionals, parents and often the child's own views.

The Chairman thanked Ms Thompson-Omenka for her update.

9 SIDE BY SIDE PROJECT UPDATE

Mr Drawmer, Head of Achievement and Learning, gave an update about the Side by Side School Improvement project. The following points were made:

- There was a modest amount of funding available for this project which had been allocated to Schools based on their level of need. If a School wanted to use additional support but wasn't identified as having a need for it, they were able to pay for the support.
- Schools were divided into three categories; Intervention Schools who had up to 18 funded days per annum, Prevention Schools who had up to 6 funded days per annum and Enhancement Schools, who didn't require much support but could access support if they funded it themselves.
- Schools could access group work and prevention conferences throughout the year.
- There was a current audit taking place across Buckinghamshire Secondary Schools. Furzedown and Chiltern Wood had been carrying out audit work to support teaching assistants. The council had been funding this work so that the Schools could release their staff to complete the audit.
- Across Chiltern and South Bucks, Stony Dean School had been carrying out work which focussed on reintegrating pupils into mainstream schooling. It was anticipated that this work would get broadened out into a wider SEND programme over time.
- Inclusion work and work to reduce permanent exclusions, while identifying best practice, had been taking place across the County, led by the Head Teacher at Aspire Secondary PRU.
- There had recently been a 2 day leadership conference at Bucks Academy for Head Teachers. This had been vital in supporting School leaders to develop the quality of their work and form networks of support.
- The Council had focussed on creating teacher networks so that they had been able to become ambassadors for the side-by-side project. 18 liaison groups were looking at running small research groups and would receive seed money so that they could improve performance across the County.
- All side-by-side project work was managed by the Council, through a small grant of £650,000 per year.
- Schools were prioritised based on the distance until their next Ofsted inspection and their last result. They were well-supported in the process leading up to an inspection. Larger schools also required additional support.
- Support was always tailored to each School's needs. The Council ensured that the right people were mentoring each School and that they had a thorough and correct understanding of the context of the School and the problems which it faced, to be able to assist effectively

- The success of the project had been measured through key performance indicators which included higher performing attainment 8 results, differences across selective and non-selective performance and Ofsted gradings, which were good or better.
- A Member suggested that it would be helpful to hear accounts from Schools who had been involved in providing support and those who had been supported. It was agreed that this could be brought to a future meeting.
- A Parent Governor Representative suggested that particular Schools within the enhancement group had not been getting support, despite paying into the budget. They wanted to know who they should contact as these Schools had been unable to find contact details for main project officers. Mr Drawmer advised that every Enhancement School could come through to the School Improvement Team to request support. School grading and allocation to the prescribed categories was fluid and could be assessed again when a School neared their Ofsted inspection cycle. Schools could request that the Council revise their categorisation once they have analysed their risk assessments and looked at data and vulnerability.

The Chairman thanked Mr Drawmer for his update.

10 CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

The Chairman welcomed all contributors who were in attendance and acknowledged that they represented a range of partner organisations who were involved in providing mental health services to children and young people.

Mr Workman, Specialist Commissioning Manager, told the Committee that the provision of effective mental health services and widening access for people who wanted to access these services was a nationally mandated expectation. Buckinghamshire had been fortunate enough to be one of the first 50 sites to be included in the trailblazer project (implementing mental health support teams in schools and improving waiting times for young people accessing CAMHS services).

Dr Connolly, Consultant Clinical Psychologist at Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust, discussed new services for looked after children and the fact that Oxford Health had good working relationships with Buckinghamshire Social Care. Social Care and CAMHS had developed a working party that meets regularly to review the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (a statutory mental health screening tool for Looked After Children). This was to ensure children received the right support at the right time.

The Chairman asked about actions which had followed the increased drive to improve access to NHS-commissioned services and whether the prevalence of mental health issues had increased nationally. Ms Clarke, Service Director at Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust told the Committee that routes of access had been opened up to allow children and parents to self-refer. Mr Workman said that the service had increased the percentage of people who were able to access services and this was monitored at a national level, based upon the local prevalence to ensure they could meet service demands.

A Member questioned how open and honest parents had been when referring their own child and whether they tended to hide problems. Ms Clarke assured the Committee that they usually received good quality referrals from parents and parents tended to accurately predict the main areas which children would need help with.

A Member asked for an update about waiting times for eating disorder appointments and specialists as they had experienced issues 10 years ago. Ms Clarke told the Committee that 2015 had been a transformational year for CAMHS services, as it had been identified nationally that young people with eating disorders had been poorly served. The waiting times to see patients within the eating disorder service were accurate, with 100% of urgent referrals receiving assessments within a week and 84% of non-urgent referrals receiving an assessment within 4 weeks.

Dr Roberts, Clinical Director for Mental Health Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) informed the Committee that a patient would initially be able to access an urgent same-day appointment with their registered Doctor and that a referral would go in straight away with no delays. Dr Rowsell, Head of Psychological Therapies – Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust, said that the number of patients accessing the CAMHS eating disorder services had grown but this hadn't led to delayed referrals.

Dr Connolly told the Committee that the service carefully triangulate data about each child within a range of different settings including home, educational and clinical. This builds up a full and complete picture of child behaviour and needs from a range of reliable sources.

A Member asked about how the service quickly supplies help to schools before problems escalate and pupil behavioural issues set in. Dr Connolly told the Committee that the Looked After and Adopted Children Team tended to action referrals within 5 working days, but they faced some challenges as more than half the looked after children population had been placed outside Buckinghamshire.

Ms Hadwin, Head of Service for CAMHS, reported that they were a provider of mental health training for professionals and that the single point of access had a qualified clinician on hand to provide assistance to referrers. There had also been direct provision into Schools who had requested support and there was a vision that additional support would be rolled out to all schools as highlighted in the NHS long-term plan for mental health.

Mrs Moss, Head of Integrated Commissioning, informed the Committee that actions which were taking place within mental health services in Buckinghamshire mirrored the actions timetabled within the NHS long-term plan and that funding for these initiatives was being issued in waves. They would always bid for funding for the voluntary sector and prioritised the recruitment of staff who could work effectively with individual pupils and children with high needs.

In response to Members' questions, the following main points were raised:

- Many behavioural escalations could be dealt with within school settings. Dr Rowsell informed the Committee that mild to moderate anxiety and depression could be dealt

with effectively in Schools. Mr Workman reported that mental health awareness training was being rolled out to staff within Schools, which provided a toolkit for providing support to children and young people once they had been discharged from the CAMHS service.

- Ms Hadwin said that there was a co-funded post in the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) so that children were able to get immediate help and to support children to get back into mainstream school as soon as possible.
- Dr Rowsell discussed the age range and types of behaviour which were prevalent in the CAMHS service. A child of any age could be seen if there was evidence that an intervention was required. Very young children would usually only receive a service if they displayed moderate to severe mental health issues. Ms Hadwin said that nobody would be turned away from the service. Through the single point of access, if CAMHS services were not appropriate for a child, it was possible to receive signposting, advice and support from reputable third parties.
- Dr Connolly told the Committee about a recently established service called ReConnect within CAMHS which had received national acclaim. The service was created for parents who have neglected or abused their children and had the main aim of stopping children going into care. This service was specifically for parents of children under the age of two years.
- A Member congratulated all partner agencies and commended the enthusiasm of all contributors. When asked whether there was thought to be any gaps in service provision, particularly for looked after children (LAC) who had been placed out of County and the usual protocol, Dr Connolly said that the child's social worker would assess the situation, phone the single point of access for consultation. CAMHS would in the first instance support access to local CAMHS services, if there were long waits or difficulties then CAMHS would travel out of county to ensure the assessment took place. Dr Connolly informed the Members that CAMHS had placed a Psychologist within the main social care building which had helped to improve outcomes and co-ordination of care.
- Mrs Moss said that the long-term plan would be to widen access to mental health services nationally and to improve working with children who had very complex needs by giving them the right type of placements. Dr Roberts said that there was also a vision to extend the service so that it catered for young people up to 25 years old.
- Ms Hadwin reported that the main way in which they wanted to make improvements to the service was by combining pathways, to create a more efficient patient journey and improve outcomes for children. They wanted to look at partnership working to make all pathways into the service more efficient
- Mr Nash, Service Director Children's Social Care, said that the service faced challenges rather than having significant gaps. There had been more challenging demographic issues in Buckinghamshire and the children and young people who had been placed outside the county had more needs, were often at crisis point and would respond detrimentally to frequent changes of address. He felt that they were now better informed about how to deal with children who were at crisis-point.
- A Member asked about what restrictions had been placed on social media access for children within residential homes. Dr Connolly said that there were challenges with

restricting children's Wi-Fi access but that they were strict about the types of media accessed.

- Ms Hadwin said that they had been utilising School staff well and ensuring that they had the right skills to deal with complex issues. Training had already been delivered to 1197 professionals and was also being offered out to about 360 parents who had expressed an interest. A lot of bespoke training had been offered to parents on the topic of anxiety. Feedback from schools had been largely positive.
- Ms Bark told the Committee that an SEN lead within a setting would tend to identify any issues and quickly source a solution - providing the right thing to the right person at the right time, as timing was crucial. Mr Whyte told the Committee that they had been working with staff and children as early as possible, to provide an early intervention. Dr Rowsell said that Kooth had been crucial in providing an early source of support for all children over the age of 11 and had been implemented successfully across the county.

The Chairman thanked all contributors.

11 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee's work programme was discussed. The next meeting would be the last meeting before the new Council was formed and would include:

- Ofsted monitoring visit update
- Early Help - 5 month update
- Bucks Safeguarding Children Board Annual update
- Ofsted improvement plan progress

The Chairman hoped to include an update from a visit to social workers within the High Wycombe office. A Member requested that the Select Committee included an item which looked at the work programme and monitoring which would be carried across to the new authority.

12 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting will be 24th January 2020 at 10 am in Mezzanine Room 1, County Offices, Aylesbury.

CHAIRMAN