



Minutes

CHILDREN'S SELECT COMMITTEE

Minutes from the meeting held on Tuesday 15 January 2019, in County Hall, Aylesbury, commencing at 10.30 am and concluding at 12.37 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 A Collingwood, Mrs I Darby, Mr D Dhillon (Chairman), Mr S Lambert, Mrs W Mallen, Mr B Roberts, Mrs L Sullivan, Ms J Ward (Vice-Chairman) and Ms K Wood

CO-OPTED MEMBERS PRESENT

GUESTS PRESENT

OFFICERS PRESENT

Miss S Callaghan, Ms K Collier, Ms J Davies, Mr R Nash, Ms J Stephenson and Mr T Vouyioukas

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Mr Babb and Mrs Mallen. There had been a change of membership as Mr Babb had stepped down from the committee. The Chairman thanked Mr Babb for his contribution to the work of the committee.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST



Mr Lambert declared a non-pecuniary interest as he was part of the early help review and Home to School transport working groups.

Ms Ward declared a non-pecuniary interest as she was part of the early help review working group.

3 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 27th November 2018 were agreed as a correct record subject to the following amendments:

- p4 – Mrs Wood should read Ms Wood
- p4 – Principle should read Principal

4 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

None were received.

5 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and advised that the Children's Select Committee would start at 10am in future.

Members were asked to attend upcoming meetings with front-line staff within the social care teams.

The Chairman welcomed applications for committee members who could provide representation for maintained School Parent Governors and Roman Catholic Schools. Members of the public who would like to provide representation were able to express an interest by emailing democracy@buckscc.gov.uk.

The Chairman said that he had been reassured at a recent budget scrutiny meeting that children's welfare had been prioritised and money had been spent wisely.

6 COMMITTEE MEMBER UPDATES

There were none.

7 CABINET MEMBERS QUESTION TIME

The Education performance under item 10 was covered within this session.

Mr Appleyard, Cabinet Member for Education & Skills, informed Members that the Home to School Transport consultation had finished and the outcome would be reported to Cabinet shortly.

Miss Callaghan, Service Director, Education gave an update about Education, Health Care Plans (EHCP's) and the Educational Psychology (EP) service. Up-to-date figures reflected a cumulative increased score of 52.8%, which she felt Ofsted would agree indicated that the service had been progressing on its improvement journey. She informed Members of two new appointments – a permanent Head of SEN and an interim Principal EP. Both appointments would provide oversight of the allocation of cases and performance in the area.

In response to questions, Members were informed that:

- The service was processing 95 more assessments than this time last year. This increased figure of completions within the statutory time demonstrated an improved performance.
- There would be no further permanent appointments in the Service area until the restructure consultation with staff had been completed.
- The service area would provide a chart which had a yearly comparison and demonstrated the pattern of referrals.

ACTION – CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION & SKILLS

- The transfer of locums to the associate model would reduce costs and increase performance.
- Though the level of EHCP's in Buckinghamshire had been high, when compared nationally, this had now stabilised as there had been a national increase.
- The SEN strategy and improvement plan had a core aim of providing SEN support without the reliance on children going through the 20 week EHCP process.
- Caution should be exercised with national averages and the service area would be looking into causation behind the current figures.
- There had been a regular thematic audit cycle which quality- checked the EHCP's and improved management oversight would ensure fair distribution of workload based on staff specialism and capacity. The oversight would introduce a balanced support and challenge culture.
- There had been no known issues with the quality of EP's work; instead there had been issues with the pace at which work had been completed. The service area would have to strike a balance between quality and speed of completion.

A Member advised the Cabinet Member that she had received letters from Buckinghamshire Head Teachers who had enquired about the availability of 'Healthy Pupils Capital Funding'. She asked whether Schools had been involved in decision-making about how funding would be allocated and asked what decisions had been made.

In response, it was reported that the funding had been awarded to the Local Authority and that the Cabinet Member had decided that the best use of funding, which would produce long-term larger effects, would be within School's scheduled maintenance programmes which were in line with grant criteria. This would be communicated with Schools at the Schools Forum, Primary Executive Board (PEB) and Buckinghamshire Association of Secondary Head teachers (BASH). It had been a challenge to decide how to distribute the money fairly while pleasing all Schools who had differing views on how it should be spent.

Education figures from within the Q2 performance report were then discussed:

- Updated figures for permanent exclusions, for the academic year to November 2018, were provided. The new figures were 0.01% for primary Schools, 0.05% for secondary Schools and 0% for special Schools. Members agreed that lags in national figure provision had been unhelpful and resulted in delays when tracking the recovery journey.

The Chairman thanked Miss Callaghan and Mr Appleyard, and then welcomed Mr Whyte, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, for his update.

Mr Whyte updated Members about the progress of the newest children's home, which would open in Spring, and that the project team had been working hard to identify new opportunities for children's homes within the Wycombe area. He told Members that the early help consultation had closed so they would review the current strategy and service proposal ready for a March Cabinet decision. The Cabinet Member also thanked Members for their support and contributions to the successful Christmas present appeal for looked after children. Lastly he reported that the new looked after children strategy had been agreed at the last Cabinet meeting.

When questioned about the looked after children placed over 20 miles from their home key performance indicator from the Q2 performance report, Mr Whyte informed that improving this figure would be challenging due to the shape of the county, the fact that some children had to be situated further away for safeguarding reasons or to be placed with family and friend connections. A request was made and subsequently accepted for a breakdown of these figures to be provided to the committee.

ACTION – EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

A Member asked whether there had been any analysis of where looked after children were coming from and where foster placements were situated. Mr Vouyioukas, Executive Director for Children's Services, asked the committee to refer to the recent Placement Sufficiency Strategy as all data would be contained within that document. Quality, stability and competence of placement would always be prioritised over geographical location.

8 BUCKINGHAMSHIRE SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN'S BOARD UPDATE

The Chairman welcomed representatives from the Bucks Safeguarding Children's Board (BSCB) who introduced themselves as:

- **Kevin Brown** - Superintendent Commander Wycombe LPA- Thames Valley Police
- **Gilly Attree** - Designated Nurse Safeguarding Children and Looked After Children, Buckinghamshire Clinical Commissioning Group
- **Fran Gosling- Thomas**, Independent Chair (BSCB)
- **Julie Davies** - Head of Quality, Standards and Performance – BCC Children's Services

During the presentation the following main points were noted:

- There had been a requirement for all local areas to have a safeguarding board which had representation from a number of key groups and individuals. Each of those partners had their own duties and requirements and the role of the Board was to ensure these

were well-coordinated, that partners had worked well together and effectively delivered the Board's aims.

- An annual report which would focus on safeguarding children and children's welfare would continue to be produced under the new arrangement. This would provide a thorough assessment of the effectiveness of local services, areas of weakness or blockages and orchestrated actions, from all partners, to remedy these.
- The Board had been meeting 6 times a year but the majority of work had been carried out within associated sub-groups and task and finish groups
- There had been a number of effective subgroups which dealing with a range of pertinent issues. The Board had been particularly proud of their work and progress with e-safety across the educational sector
- They believed the workload is now more evenly shared between key partners than it had been 4 years ago
- The largest task and finish group and workload in recent times had been the reshaping of safeguarding arrangements
- As there had been legislative changes and an inadequate Ofsted rating within Buckinghamshire, the safeguarding board had used this as an opportunity to make improvements. The new safeguarding arrangements would support the council's improvement plan and change the way that child death and serious case reviews were undertaken. BSCB would improve working between the three identified strategic partners.
- The Board would have an executive group made up of police, local authority, the clinical commissioning group (CCG) and education. Education had been chosen as a strategic partner due to the fact they had the most access to children across a broad spectrum of ages. This group would meet quarterly.
- The current Independent Chair would be stepping down and an advertisement for her replacement would run until the end of February. This would provide a fresh perspective for how the safeguarding board would operate
- Five subgroups would sit below the executive group; each with their own terms of reference. The Board would review which partners sat on each subgroup to ensure the right specialists would be represented.
- Working groups would come out of the subgroups and would involve partnership working with agencies not involved with the Board, which would be put together on an ad hoc basis
- There would be a safeguarding conference, twice a year, for all agencies working with the Board. This would provide updates, next steps and be a chance to gain feedback for improvement.
- All key issues of focus would remain the same but the Board would look at the whole family and implications, instead of focusing on just the child.
- New arrangements and priorities would be finalised in June 2019 and would be in place by September 2019.
- Improving outcomes for children was the overarching priority

In response to questions, representatives of the board made the following main points:

- In response to the rise in neglect cases the Board had implemented a graded care tool, developed by the NSPCC, which had reduced the incidences of neglect and helped to deliver a multi-agency approach to families. The neglect strategy would be reviewed for effectiveness.
- Board meeting attendance rates had not been reflective of partnership working or contributions. A lot of good work had happened away from formal Board meetings. The Board had been proactive in ensuring partner contribution and commitment.
- There had been positive multi-agency working with children's homes which had reduced incidences of children reported as missing from care. They had ensured the safety of these children through innovative measures and risk-based approaches, such as drawing up extended curfew contracts.
- There had been extensive ongoing work which ensured children were safe from all forms of exploitation, including 'County Lines'. All agencies had used preventative measures and fast response to flag issues.
- Coordinated working and joint strategies had improved. Partners contributed their part when solving issues and nothing would fall between the gaps
- The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) had undergone a comprehensive review which had improved the service and ensured good partnership working. Digital solutions introduced provided partners with rapid, remote access to any shared information, necessary for them to carry out their duties.
- Private fostering arrangement numbers had remained low and were known to be underreported. A campaign had taken place to highlight the importance of making these arrangements known to the authority. There had been an increase in reported cases in the last two years.
- E-safety campaigns had been rolled-out across Schools and had been well-received by staff and children. There had been specific sessions for parents and children who were home-educated. Schools had been known to deliver e-safety sessions to parents during well-attended, unrelated events, to ensure they received the information
- A draft of the next annual report would be available in July 2019

The Chairman thanked representatives of the BSCB for attending and thanked the Independent Chair for her hard work over the four years of her term.

9 OFSTED MONITORING VISIT UPDATE

The Chairman asked Mr Whyte and Mr Vouyioukas for an update about the most recent Ofsted monitoring visit. Mr Whyte highlighted that Ofsted had recognised the shift from quantity across to quality outputs, which had negatively affected some performance data, but had been necessary to improve social work practices. The Cabinet Member also reported that Ofsted had recognised that the whole Council, including all Members, had been committed to supporting the improvement journey.

Mr Vouyioukas made the following points as an overview:

- The December visits had focussed on child protection plans

- Ofsted had agreed with the senior leadership team's (SLT) self-assessment. They believed that they had a clear focus, an accurate assessment of the challenge and a realistic improvement plan
- Management oversight had improved, which provided social workers with better direction and improved working
- Front-line staff morale had remained positive, despite pressures on the service
- There would be a clear focus for improvements going forward with several important areas identified. The service would take all measures necessary to ensure that they successfully got to where they needed to be.

In response to Member's questions, the following main points were noted:

- Social worker recruitment and capacity had been a national problem, however, the service area were confident that their recruitment and retention strategies had been successful in recruiting experienced and skilled social workers into available posts within the council.
- Vacancies and agency staff within social care had not been particularly high. The service area had managed to convert some agency staff into permanent staff within the Council.
- Consistency of social work reporting styles had been ensured using templates and conversations with managers about expected quality.
- Although the Committee had been concerned about the fact that in some cases Senior Managers had been acting down, it had been deemed to be necessary at this stage of the improvement journey, as a temporary measure. Over time and after staff consistently performed at the appropriate standard, this would not be expected to continue.
- Ofsted concerns about the lack of evidence of advocacy support reflected the fact that these services had only been recently introduced and the service were confident that benefits would be realised after a short time. Take up of public law outline advocacy had been working well.
- Concerns about strategy meeting actions and timetables had been addressed immediately, often by Senior Managers acting down to remedy the situation
- The number of children who came under each Manager had reduced since the monitoring visit and there had been some cases where the correct action had to be taken immediately which required Managers to act down. Complex cases being assigned directly to Managers was standard practice.

10 REVIEW OF PERFORMANCE REPORT - Q2 2018-19

Mr Whyte updated the committee with the fact that there had been significant improvements since the time of reporting. Adoption placements were described as a complex area where children often required placements out of county, so there had been some dependency on neighbouring counties and their activities. The new season of adoption events would commence shortly and were expected to produce good results. Marketing had targeted both residents within Buckinghamshire and neighbouring Counties.

The delays in the adoption key performance indicator had been impacted by a small number of complex cases, which had suffered delays in court proceedings and had also required intensive work to ensure that the children would thrive within these placements.

11 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The committee's future work program will investigate:

- The early help consultation consultation
- 6 month permanent exclusion monitoring
- Current provision of services for children and young people who have ASD
- The provision of mental services for children and young people

12 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be at 10am on Tuesday 12th March 2019 in Mezzanine 1, County Hall, Aylesbury.

CHAIRMAN