



Minutes

CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE AND LEARNING SELECT COMMITTEE

Minutes from the meeting held on Tuesday 27 March 2018, in Mezzanine Room 1, County Hall, Aylesbury, commencing at 10.30 am and concluding at 12.40 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

Mr A Collingwood, Mrs I Darby, Mr D Dhillon (Chairman), Mr M Hussain, Mr S Lambert, Mr B Roberts, Mrs L Sullivan, Ms J Ward (Vice-Chairman), Mr G Williams and Ms K Wood

CO-OPTED MEMBERS PRESENT

Mrs M Aston, Mr D Babb and Mr M Moore

GUESTS PRESENT

Mr M Appleyard and Mr W Whyte

OFFICERS PRESENT

Miss S Callaghan, Ms G Hancock and Mr T Vouyioukas

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Mrs W Mallen.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3 MINUTES

The minutes of the Call-In meeting held on 2nd February 2018 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

The minutes of the last meeting of the Committee, held on 6th February 2018 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

A question submitted by a member of the public, Mr Paul Turner, had been included in the agenda pack. In Mr Turner's absence Committee Member Mr A Collingwood read the question to the meeting.

In response to the question Members made the following points:

- It was disappointing that Children's Services had not improved faster but the Committee itself was robust in holding the Service to account
- The Select Committee raised the lack of improvement between 2014 and 2018 Ofsted reports with the Cabinet Member for Children's Services at their last meeting on 6th February 2018
- Following the 2014 inspection assurances were given to the Committee that performance had improved and it was recognised that in some areas this has been the case. However, deficiencies in management oversight had not been tackled quickly enough and there was concern that the Service is not doing the best for children in Bucks.

The Chairman thanked Mr Turner for submitting his question and made the following remarks:

- He was touched by Mr Turner's passion, care and dedication and assured him that safeguarding was a priority for the Committee.
- The Committee is very disappointed with the inadequacies in the delivery of Children's Services highlighted in the 2018 Ofsted Report. They would continue to undertake robust scrutiny work to ensure the Service addressed their weaknesses.

The Chairman invited Mr W Whyte, Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Mr T Vouyioukas, Executive Director of Children's Services, to respond:

In response, Mr Whyte:

- Accepted the findings of the Ofsted Inspection and emphasised that officers had taken immediate action to address urgent safeguarding issues highlighted by inspectors.
- Accepted that the pace of change had not been quick enough and an Action Plan approved by Cabinet was now in place to address weaknesses.

- Stressed that the Council has a committed workforce who wanted to make improvements for the children we serve. The Department for Education (DfE) appointed Commissioner would be working with the Council over the next three months and would be reporting back to DfE in June.

Mr T Vouyioukas added that he believed the balance between challenge and support and performance statistics and quality of care is important.

RESOLVED: The Committee AGREED that they were satisfied with the response that had been given to the question

5 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Chairman informed the Committee that evidence gathering was continuing on the Permanent Exclusions Inquiry. The Inquiry Team had spoken to primary and secondary school headteachers, observed a Fair Access Board meeting and met with both headteachers of the Buckinghamshire Primary and Secondary Pupil Referral Units. He thanked Mrs I Darby and Mr G Williams for their support on the Inquiry Team.

The Chairman reported that he had visited the new children's residential home in Aylesbury (due to open in June 2018) with Committee Member, Mr B Roberts.

6 COMMITTEE MEMBER UPDATES

Mr M Hussain and Mr A Collingwood had attended the first Early Help public meeting on 20th March at High Wycombe Library. They reported a good public turnout. Mr Collingwood emphasised the importance of openness and transparency by officers when answering questions from the public.

Mrs J Ward and Mr S Lambert had attended the second Early Help public meeting on 26th March in Aylesbury. Both expressed disappointment that only a handful of the public had attended and noted that both officers and Members had their part to play in disseminating information about the project.

Mr G Williams had been working with Dr Challoners Grammar School on educational attainment and admissions criteria for looked after children. He would report back to the Committee on progress in due course.

Mrs I Darby had undertaken evidence gathering as part of the Permanent Exclusions Inquiry Team.

7 CABINET MEMBER QUESTION TIME

Education and Skills portfolio

The Chairman welcomed Mr M Appleyard, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills and Ms S Callaghan, Service Director, Education, to the meeting.

Mr Appleyard explained that urgent work is being undertaken to research some tentative savings on home/school transport. The Committee would be updated when that work has been completed.

Ms Callaghan explained the current position around the performance of the Educational Psychology Service.

Members sought clarification and assurance on the following:

- Why the Service had not yet come to a decision on school transport
- Resourcing and recruitment of permanent staff, in particular to the Principal Educational Psychologist post and retention of trainees and likelihood of increasing the number of Educational Psychologists
- The backlog of outstanding Education and Health Care Plans (ECHPs)
- The timescale for the SENDIAN pilot
- Budgeting of the Service and timescale for the commissioning document

In response, Mr Appleyard and Ms Callaghan explained the following:

- With the exception of 8 complex cases the Service was on track to have all Special Educational Needs Statements converted to ECHPs by 31st March 2018 and be in line with national turnaround figures by the end of 2018.
- The interviews on 21st March 2018 for the Principal Educational Psychologist post had not resulted in an offer. Officers were working with recruitment agencies to deliver a much more targeted and directed campaign for the third attempt.
- Early feedback from the SENDIAN pilot was positive.
- One of the Interim Senior Educational Psychologists would continue to cover the role on a 4 day week until the end of the Summer Term 2018
- The budget commissioning document is being drafted and would include an assessment of whether resources were in the right place and would also take account of capacity once the conversions and backlog had been dealt with.
- The Educational Psychology Service was on an improvement journey; the focus had been on dealing with the ECHP backlog and now that had been tackled other areas could be given higher priority.

Children's Services portfolio

The Chairman welcomed Mr W Whyte, Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Mr T Vouyioukas, Executive Director Children's Services.

Members asked questions and sought assurances around:

- Progress against the Ofsted Action Plan and whether Co-opted Members of the Committee could have sight of a copy.
- The ongoing Early Help project, public meetings and plans for the 35 children's centres sites

In response, Mr Whyte explained that:

- The DfE Commissioner would be arriving imminently; he had nothing to add to previous statements until the Commissioner completed his work.
- The Early Help Team was in the middle of public meetings and would be working on specific sites in due course.
- The Ofsted Action Plan was a public paper which could be sent to the Co-opted Members of the Committee

Action: Committee and Governance Advisor

Mr Whyte also thanked Mr G Williams for his work on looked after children and the Chairman and Mr B Roberts for their visit to the new children's residential home.

8 CHILDREN'S SERVICES PERFORMANCE REPORT - Q3 2017-18

Mr Appleyard, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills and Mr W Whyte, Cabinet Member for Children's Services presented their respective reports.

During discussion of the Red risks relating to SEND data and attainment gaps the following points were made:

- A number of activities were in place to address these issues, including the Side By Side initiative, currently in pilot form. The Committee would be updated when the model was rolled out across Buckinghamshire

Action: Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

- The SEND restructure consultation would go ahead when ready.
- The KS2 attainment gap could be due to differences in external versus internal moderation and transition between key stages.

- The Fair Funding Formula did not significantly increase the budgets of schools as their lump sums were reduced simultaneously.
- Changes in demographics made it difficult to predict needs.

Following questions from Members, it was agreed that it would be helpful to have an update on the Fair Funding Formula at the next Committee Meeting.

Action: Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

Committee Members Mr A Collingwood and Mrs I Darby left the meeting at 11.30am

- During discussion of the Red risks relating to re-referrals of children for child protection plans Mr T Vouyioukas advised that this was due to a combination of de-registration, non-implementation of actions, wrong decisions by caseworkers, child neglect cases and domestic abuse.
- Ms G Hancock, Interim Service Director, Children’s Social Care, explained that a task and finish group of managers has been established to review management practice and effect change.
- Conversations with partner agencies that were referring and re-referring were taking place and the domestic abuse triage function was being re-established in first contact; this would also address other thematic issues alongside domestic violence including substance abuse and mental health.
- Members raised concerns about the 45 days’ assessment dropping quarter by quarter. Mr Vouyioukas advised that he could not say with certainty when the performance would improve, but was hopeful it would begin to turnaround in June 2018 (end Q1 2018/19).

9 SUPPORT FOR CARE LEAVERS

The Chairman welcomed:

Robin, We Do Care Champion

Mr W Whyte, Cabinet Member, Children’s Services

Mr T Vouyioukas, Executive Director, Children’s Services

Ms G Hancock, Interim Service Director, Children’s Social Care

Robin explained his role as a We Do Care Champion. He spoke about his own experience of the leaving care process and views he had gathered from 30 young people about their experiences of the process. In summary, Robin reported that:

- Feedback was not all positive. There are serious issue of concern about Personal Advisors (PAs) not being able to give relevant information to care leavers – in some cases the young person had no information at all.

- A 'Welcome to Bucks' pack should be made a priority so young people are informed what their PA can do.
- Transitions from looked after to care-leaving must be explained clearly by the PA; too often this does not happen.
- Education and employment assistance by the PA was also a high priority – giving young people a goal of working towards something and contributing to society.
- Urgent priority should be given to ensuring PAs were supporting looked after young people with accurate and timely information with the emphasis on putting much more effort into the pre-transition stage.

In response to Members' questions Robin confirmed:

- His Stay Put Plan was unclear and he had not been given the right information. This had made the experience hectic and stressful. He agreed that other young people who did not have opportunity to stay would struggle with transition.
- The general consensus among the care leavers was negative. The process of transitioning to independent living was extremely stressful due to poor or no information from PAs. Some young people had not been told who their PA was and were left in limbo.
- Care leavers were not receiving consistent support from their PA and as a result depression and anxiety were common issues. Some care leavers were not given any information about where they would be living.

Mr Whyte added that he understood that the Staying Put Policy had recently been re-drafted to make it easier to understand. He welcomed Robin's constructive comments and would be exploring with him outside the Committee meeting whether the restructure of the Service had made any difference to care leavers' experience.

Members made the following points:

- children should be free from fear and anxiety when they are in our care.
- PAs should have the skills and the time to identify a young person's need and then signpost to organisations that can help them transition to adulthood.
- An assessment should be undertaken to determine the effectiveness of the individual PAs
- A caseload of 20 young people for each PA seemed high – could this be reduced?

In response Ms Hancock confirmed the PA's role was advisory but also to coordinate, engage and direct towards all the support for the young person.

Mr Whyte advised the Committee that the organisation of social workers and PAs had changed during last year, and hoped that many of the issues raised by the We Do Care Champion would already be improved due to better team working.

Mr Vouyioukas explained that the Leaving Care Team were working hard to put things right; it was important that Robin and others care leavers were fully supported, however an increase in resources was unlikely, therefore smarter working was key.

The Chairman thanked Robin for his honesty and openness which was very much appreciated. On behalf of the Committee he wished Robin very well with his future and hoped the Cabinet Member and Executive Director would follow up on the issues which had been raised.

10 CHILDREN'S RESIDENTIAL CARE HOMES

The Chairman welcomed Mr W Whyte, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Mr T Vouyioukas, Executive Director, Children's Services and Ms G Hancock, Interim Service Director, Children's Social Care.

Introducing the item, Mr Whyte confirmed:

- The budget for the project was (prudentially borrowed) maximum of £2 million, agreed by Cabinet in April 2017
- 20 additional in-house residential care beds to be delivered, reducing the number of out of county placements
- The first children's residential care home of the project, in Aylesbury, providing up to 5 beds, would be delivered in June 2018 – Ofsted registration is awaited.
- The second residential care home project (also in Aylesbury) was proceeding.

Members made the following points:

- The Chairman and Mr B Roberts confirmed that impressions from their recent visit were very favourable and they looked forward to seeing how the project progressed
- How involved have looked after children been in the decoration and layout design of the new homes?
- Were there any plans in place to deal with any slippage in delivery?

In response, Ms G Hancock confirmed that:

- The We Do Care Champions were working with the management group and would continue to play an integral part for the whole of the rest of the project.
- Colour schemes, furniture and lay out of the bedrooms had been discussed with the We Do Care Champions and the individual children living in the homes would also be encouraged to contribute to its development.
- Management were actively encouraging Ofsted to confirm registration.
- All staff for the first home had been recruited and trained and were currently undertaking outreach. Social Workers would introduce children to the home at the pace that suits them.

Following discussion it was agreed that Members of the Committee should visit the first new children's residential care home in Aylesbury on a date to be confirmed.

Action: Committee and Governance Advisor

11 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee noted the work programme. The Chairman informed Members that the Permanent Exclusion Inquiry was now likely to report in June/July and the entry on the Forward Plan would therefore be amended.

Action: Committee and Governance Officer

Members requested the following be considered for inclusion:

- Update on improvements made against the Ofsted Action Plan
- An update on child sexual exploitation (looked after children) and associated safeguarding policies paper

12 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Children's Social Care and Learning Select Committee was confirmed at 10.30am 15th May 2018, Mezzanine Room 1, New County Offices, Aylesbury. There would be a private pre-meeting for Members at 9.45am for a 10am start.

The Chairman and Members thanked Mr M Moore, who was retiring from the Committee, for his work and support and wished him well for the future.

CHAIRMAN