



Buckinghamshire Council

Children's & Education Select Committee

Minutes

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHILDREN'S & EDUCATION SELECT COMMITTEE HELD ON THURSDAY 24 JUNE 2021 IN THE OCULUS, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNCIL, GATEHOUSE ROAD, HP19 8FF - AYLESBURY, COMMENCING AT 2.00 PM AND CONCLUDING AT 3.30 PM

MEMBERS PRESENT

P Birchley, S Adoh, D Blamires, A Collingwood, M Dormer, S James, C Jones, R Matthews, A Osibogun, D Summers, P Turner and R Stuchbury

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE

A Cranmer

Agenda Item

1 CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Councillor Birchley welcomed the Committee Members to the first meeting of the Select Committee for the 2020/21 municipal year and the Committee Members introduced themselves. The Chairman noted her aim was that the Committee would work alongside the Council's Officers to support them in their work, helping to provide children's and education services to Buckinghamshire.

2 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

The Chairman appointed Councillor Mark Dormer as the Vice-Chairman of the Children's Services and Education Select Committee for the 2020/21 municipal year.

RESOLVED: That Councillor Mark Dormer be appointed as Vice-Chairman of the Children's Services and Education Select Committee for the 2020/21 municipal year.

3 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP

It was noted that Councillors Bates, Gaster, Hussein and Kayani had given their apologies for the meeting.

It was noted that Councillor Stuchbury was attending as a substitute for Councillors Bates and Kayani.

4 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following declarations of interest were made:

Councillor Matthews – School Governor and Volunteer at a Charity “Transitions UK”

Councillor Blamires – parent of a SEND child and works in a school

Councillor James – school governor

Councillor Adoh – school governor

Councillor Summers – school governor

5 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 4th March and 26th May 2021 were reviewed. Councillor Stuchbury noted that a detailed conversation that he had on the subject of Ofsted was not included in the March minutes, although it would be viewable on the webcast of that meeting.

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meetings held on 4th March and 26th May be AGREED as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

6 PRIORITIES FOR THE YEAR AHEAD

Councillor Cranmer introduced the priorities for the Children’s Services and Education Select Committee for this municipal year, noting that there are 84,000 children in Buckinghamshire and that the council’s services for them covered many different areas of work.

Mr Richard Nash, Corporate Director for Children’s Services, introduced both service Directors; Palvinder Kudhail for Children’s Social Care and Simon James for Education. Mr Nash noted that Children’s Services is heavily regulated through the work of Ofsted, the registration of children’s homes and in terms of special education and disability inspections.

Palvinder Kudhail, noted that the priorities for the Children’s Social Care service area were as follows:

- Service Improvement; ensuring that quality of front-line services impacts positively on outcomes for children. Quality assurance was highlighted with a focus on implementing various quality assurance activities and learning from them.
- Responding to the growing demands on the service as a result of COVID 19. For example; there had been a 24% increase in contacts referred from partner agencies since last year and a 47% increase in contacts that resulted in referrals.
- Recruitment and retention of social workers. This is a national and local issue. The focus is on reducing the agency workforce via various mechanisms such as the social work academy and media campaigns.
- Recruitment of in-house foster carers. The number of looked after children has increased and those looked after by foster carers.

Simon James, Service Director for Education outlined the service priorities as follows:

- SEND delivery and improvements; noting that the area is subject to inspections by Ofsted and CQC. 85% of all new assessments are completed within 20 weeks where the national average is 65%. Children with education, health and care plans; increasing quality assurance and audit work to ensure plans are received quickly and are of good quality. The focus is on working with families and understanding their needs. Another focus is on transitions into adult services and preparing for adulthood.
- Improving educational provision and outcomes. 95% of early years providers and 90.3% of schools were noted to be good or outstanding. Schools were being prepared for Ofsted visits. Work had focussed on ensuring that vulnerable children were supported with schooling through lockdowns with good attendance. Focus on narrowing the

attainment gap for disadvantaged children. The service was supporting schools on the academic and mental health catch up project. School buildings were being built in Kingsbrook to give 60 primary places and 180 secondary school places. 36 places would be provided for children with mental health issues.

- Access to Good Mental Health Support – The service is working with Aspire, working with headteachers and with Bucks Mind; some commissioned by community boards. The service was ensuring children were referred quickly. Supervision for headteachers was being provided.
- Early Help – ensuring children and families have support as soon as it is needed. The interface between early help and children’s social care is assessed weekly. The Early Help strategy is being reassessed and brings in the work of several partners.

The following key points were raised during discussion:

- The importance of special educational support as demand is increasing in this area, and Councillors mentioned autism and dyslexia issues. It was noted that the SEN report had now been published. SEN support looked after 8500 children. The service screens for their needs as early as possible.
- Children in special schools can be left behind educationally. £6million had been received by Buckinghamshire schools so far and it was for the schools to decide how to use the funding. The service is helping schools decide how best to use the funding; the aim being to guide the funding to help the most vulnerable. The “Quality First” teaching project gave support to teachers as to how to help children with additional needs. Through this project, work is evidence based and monitored.
- The Ofsted improvement journey was documented. Since the 2017 inspection an Improvement board had been put in place and met to discuss improvements on a regular basis. Another Ofsted inspection was expected soon. The improvement plan report from the improvement board was reported to Cabinet on a regular basis.

It was noted that the Ofsted report and the last monitoring visit report was available online. The service would provide a link to the report and a summary of success rates.

Action: Mr Nash

- There is a national context regarding the recruitment of social workers. A new cohort of social workers would be starting at the council’s academy in September. The service was looking at how to increase the academy in the future. The management team were working hard to provide support and connectivity to the social workers. The aim was to provide a career pathway for social workers with opportunities to apply for other roles within the service. The service currently has 350 qualified social workers, with unqualified social workers also employed. At the ASYE Academy social workers were given work in controlled circumstances while they were training so that skills were gained in the appropriate way. Immersion in the service occurred gradually over time and under supervision. Recruitment packages were not a barrier to recruitment.
- Work on engaging with young people was ongoing to assess the right services were being provided to them. The Corporate Parenting Panel was the body responsible for this area of work.
- Formal graded visits from Ofsted would resume from September. Results were collated from each school. It was requested that a summary of attainment would come to a meeting of the Select Committee.

Action: Mr James

- Different teams had different capacity for case work, depending on their role. The average social worker caseload would depend on where the social worker was based.

- The Multi-Agency Support Hub (MASH) was working well; reacting to risk and concerns over children in a timely way. It was noted that between 1 April and 31 May 2020, the service received 2299 contacts compared to 2771 contacts during the same period in 2021. In addition, referrals also increased from 1410 to 2072 during the same period. Mr Nash noted the need to support the MASH staff well.
- Councillors wished to receive training on their role in corporate parenting.
- **Action: Mr R Nash to provide training opportunities for Councillors on corporate parenting.**

7 WORK PROGRAMME

The Senior Scrutiny Officer, Mrs Katie Dover introduced the work programme item. The Committee considered ideas and suggestions for areas of the service's work to be examined by the Select Committee over the forthcoming municipal year. The following suggestions were made for the work programme:

- Mental health issues; and how schools and partners work together on these
- Ofsted – the implementation plan and gaining understanding of the process before and after the inspection.
- SEND – understanding the range of issues and how all the services work together to help families and the timeframes involved. Possibly a subject for a working party.
- Transitions, preparing for adulthood for care leavers
- Fostering and adoption

Mr Nash stressed the need to avoid duplication and to inform Councillors at the outset of discussions as to how far progress had been made on each of these areas of interest.

The suggested items would be brought back as a work programme item to the next meeting of the committee.

8 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting would be Thursday 9th September 2021.

CHAIRMAN