



## Children's & Education Select Committee agenda

Date: Thursday 24 June 2021

Time: 2.00 pm

Venue: The Oculus, Buckinghamshire Council, Gatehouse Road, HP19 8FF -  
Aylesbury

### Membership:

P Birchley (Chairman), S Adoh, K Bates, D Blamires, A Collingwood, M Dormer, R Gaster, N Hussain, S James, C Jones, S Kayani, R Matthews, A Osibogun, D Summers and P Turner

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<b>Agenda Item</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Page No</b>
<b>1 Chairman's Welcome and Introduction</b>	<b>14:00</b>	
<b>2 Appointment of Vice-Chairman</b>		
<b>3 Apologies for Absence/Changes in Membership</b>		
<b>4 Declarations of Interest</b>		

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|----------|---|--|
| <b>5</b> | <b>Minutes of the Previous Meetings</b><br>To approve as a correct record the minutes of the Select Committee meetings held on 4 <sup>th</sup> March and 26 <sup>th</sup> May 2021.   | <b>3 - 10</b>  |
| <b>6</b> | <b>Priorities for the Year Ahead</b><br>The Committee will receive a report from the Cabinet Member for Education and Children’s Services on priorities for the year ahead.<br><br>Contributors:<br>Cllr Anita Cranmer, Cabinet Member for Education & Children’s Services<br>Mr Richard Nash, Corporate Director for Children’s Services<br>Mr Simon James, Service Director for Education<br>Ms Palvinder Kudhail, Interim Service Director for Children’s Services | <b>14:15</b><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><b>11 - 20</b> |
| <b>7</b> | <b>Work Programme</b><br>An opportunity for Members to discuss possible topics for the future committee work programme.<br><br>Contributors:<br>All Members<br>Mrs Katie Dover, Senior Scrutiny Officer   | <b>15:00</b>   |
| <b>8</b> | <b>Date of Next Meeting</b><br>Thursday 16 <sup>th</sup> September 2021 at 2pm in The Oculus, Buckinghamshire Council, The Gateway, Aylesbury   | <b>15:30</b>   |

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For further information please contact: Katie Dover on 01296 531339, email [democracy@buckinghamshire.gov.uk](mailto:democracy@buckinghamshire.gov.uk).



## Children's & Education Select Committee minutes

Minutes of the meeting of the Children's & Education Select Committee held on Thursday 4 March 2021 in Virtual Meeting via MS Teams, commencing at 2.00 pm and concluding at 3.40 pm.

### Members present

S Adoh, D Barnes, M Collins, E Culverhouse, D Dhillon, B Foster, A Hussain, N Hussain, D Johncock, P Kelly, R Stuchbury, P Turner and J Ward

### Others in attendance

C Pease, M Skoyles, M Shaw, T Vouyioukas, R Nash and A Cranmer

### Apologies

R Jones

### Agenda Item

#### 1 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Cllr R Jones.

#### 2 Declarations of interest

Cllr D Barnes declared that his wife worked for a grammar school in Buckinghamshire.

Cllr P Kelly declared via the Teams chat bar that he worked for Sebmat Academy.

#### 3 Minutes

Cllr D Johncock stated that Item 3 on the previous minutes regarding the exclusion of BAME children needed to be amended to say the information would be included in a future meeting of the Select Committee not the next meeting.

Subject to the above amendment, the Committee:-

**RESOLVED: The minutes of the meeting held on 4 March 2021 were AGREED as an accurate record.**

#### 4 Public Questions

There were none.

## 5 Support for Care Leavers

The Chairman welcomed Cllr M Shaw, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, and Mr R Nash, Service Director for Children's Services. Care leavers were young adults that had been in the council's care and they required a clear strategy to support their outcomes as they moved into adulthood,

A key issue was access to housing. The establishment of Buckinghamshire Council had enabled a closer working relationship with the housing service to identify solutions. The Council currently supported 291 care leavers aged between 16-25 years old and they had a wide range of individual needs. It was important to work on planning for care leavers living independently and successfully within their community. Work had been ongoing in the last 12 months to expand the accessibility of housing and to develop more specialist housing options. The pandemic had slowed progress on some aspects of this and Government guidance issued during the pandemic discouraged housing care leavers on their own. Tenancy training was also in place for care leavers to make sure young people understood the legalities and expectation of tenancy, and where support was available. The service had also set up a system whereby care leavers could register for social housing at an earlier stage and ensured that young people had access to the right housing in the right locations in relation to employment and training opportunities.

The following key points were raised in the discussion:

- Apprenticeships were available to care leavers and work streams were in place to make sure apprenticeship opportunities were maximized in the Council, partnership agencies and businesses. Care leavers were supported in achieving their aspirations.
- A Member commented that it was positive to see that the benefits of unitary was being realized through the partnership of the care leaver and housing services. It was also noted that strong working relationships with housing associations were key.
- Financial support was available to care leavers attending other further education establishments as well as university. The amount was subject to each individual's circumstances.
- One Member had been involved in their local Community Board's project whereby care leavers received gift vouchers before Christmas. The feedback on this had been positive.
- Personal Advisers played a vital role in supporting care leavers and the service recruited on an ongoing basis. The current number of Personal Advisors would be checked and fed back to the Committee after the meeting.

**Action: Mr Nash**

- Buckinghamshire Council's performance for care leavers compared well against other local authorities in the key metrics. These would be circulated to members after the meeting.

**Action: Mr Nash**

- Out of the current care leavers, 66% of 17-18 year olds were in employment,

education or training. The figure for those aged 19-21 years was 51%. It was expected these numbers would improve once the pandemic subsided and access to education became more available.

The Chairman thanked Members for their contributions on the item.

## **6 Ofsted Self-Assessment Presentation**

The Chairman welcomed Mr Tolis Vouyioukas, Corporate Director for Children's Services, to the meeting. Cllr M Shaw, Cabinet Member for Cabinet Member Children's Services, introduced the item to the Select Committee and thanked all staff who had worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic. The Ofsted visit had lasted three weeks and was focused on the service's response to Covid-19. Buckinghamshire Council would receive Ofsted's report in April 2021.

Mr Vouyioukas highlighted some key aspects of the report. Ofsted had an interest in understanding the impact Covid-19 had on the delivery of the service which coincided with when the local authority became a unitary council. The lockdown had significantly impacted the service with it being delivered remotely to children, young people and their families. Partnership working had been important in maintaining the delivery of the service and Mr Vouyioukas expressed his gratitude particularly to schools for their responsiveness. The service had experienced an increase in demand which had meant moving internal resources to support the multi agency safeguarding hub (MASH) and Assessment Teams. Regarding children in need of help and protection, the report outlined areas that required further attention and Ofsted had accepted this. The service had clear commitments over the next 12 months which included the need for recruitment.

Following the update, Members raised a number of key points which included:-

- The Committee complimented the officers for how they had adapted their work to continue the service during the pandemic.
- Part of the increased demand was due to the three lockdowns causing a strain on families and parenting.
- There was a discussion around how individual members can support local families in their interactions with social care. Mr Vouyioukas advised that this might not always be appropriate and urged members to raise any specific concerns with him.
- It was clarified that the Director for Children's Services reported to the Members Recovery Board, chaired by the Leader and attended by Cabinet Members, that took place once a week. In addition there was a separate all Member briefing each week during the pandemic.
- There had been benefits to remote working as some young residents had preferred this communication.
- The release of funding for 21 social workers was due to caseload pressures and the need for additional team capacity.
- The SEND progress report had been included to highlight the achievements to Ofsted since 2017, but it was not the focus of this visit.

- It was important that the service supported, nurtured and developed its staff to meet their needs during the pandemic.
- There had not been a significant increase in the number of children entering care due to Covid-19. Instead, the service had seen an increase in more complex cases.
- Covid was leading to financial pressures in Children's Services across the country. The Council had maintained close monitoring and control on the budget whilst being mindful of the impact of the pandemic on vulnerable families.
- It was important to maintain the current standards for adoption and this service had been performing strongly. Adoption timescales were continually monitored (Covid had led to some court delays) and needed to be balanced with the need for a child's permanent future arrangements.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairman thanked all the officers and all the staff for their excellent work, and was pleased that performance had improved.

## **7 Update on Children's Services Improvement Plan**

Cllr M Shaw, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, introduced the improvement plan update to Members and highlighted areas of the report. Covid-19 had impacted the delivery of the plan and had led to an increase in the complexity and seriousness of situations that children and young people found themselves in. The report had been discussed by the Improvement Board in January 2021 and had been questioned by Hampshire County Council; the Council's improvement partner. The RAG ratings had all initially been red and changes were only made to the rating when the service was confident that the correct standards were being achieved consistently and had evidence to demonstrate this. Improvements had still been delivered despite the pandemic.

The Committee had questions following the update and were advised that:-

- The Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) initial strategy meetings with colleagues in health, education and police were well-attended. Sometimes there was a need for subsequent strategy meetings on open cases which involved different contacts and attendance at this stage needed improvement.
- A member asked if timelines could be added to the improvement plan. Mr R Nash explained that timelines had been included previously however it was felt this was not helpful and instead the focus should be about achieving the right standard. There was also a need to continually evaluate green ratings to ensure these were being maintained. The last 12 months had prioritized the Covid response which had slowed some progress. Recruitment continued to be a focus so that the service would be maintained and that red/amber ratings would be addressed.
- Items marked red could be due to a lack of consistency for their outcome.
- There were two ways the service worked with unaccompanied young people: either through being found in Buckinghamshire or through the national dispersion scheme. The service had worked with five unaccompanied young people so far this calendar year.

- Performance management reports went to Cabinet and additionally, Cllr M Shaw, Cabinet Member for Cabinet Member Children's Services, was part of the Improvement Board which scrutinized the improvement plan in detail.

Members of the Select Committee raised the following points during the discussion:-

- The Chairman was pleased to see improvements with some ratings green and amber.
- One Member felt these reports should have come to the Committee prior to going to Cabinet.
- A Member suggested that a timeline for reds to ambers and ambers to greens may be useful but appreciated that the plan was an evolving document.
- Consideration should be given to more detailed data and metrics being scrutinised by the Select Committee in future.

The Chairman thanked the officers for the update.

## **8 Date of next meeting**

This was the final meeting of the Select Committee before the elections in May. The Chairman advised that a proposed inquiry on social worker retention and recruitment last year had been postponed due to the pandemic. It was hoped this inquiry could be revisited in the future. The Chairman also welcomed ideas for the future work programme after the elections.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairman thanked all officers, democratic services and webcast technicians for their support. The Chairman also thanked teachers, social workers, all Councillors and co-opted Members for their work during the pandemic.

Mr Vouyioukas thanked the Committee and all elected Members for their support, attention and contributions to the service.

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# Buckinghamshire Council

## Children's & Education Select Committee

### Minutes

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHILDREN'S & EDUCATION SELECT COMMITTEE HELD ON WEDNESDAY 26 MAY 2021 IN MAIN SPORTS HALL, STOKE MANDEVILLE STADIUM, GUTTMANN ROAD, AYLESBURY HP21 9PP.

#### MEMBERS PRESENT

S Adoh, K Bates, P Birchley, D Blamires, A Collingwood, M Dormer, N Hussain, S James, C Jones, S Kayani, R Matthews, Z Mohammed, D Summers and P Turner

#### Agenda Item

##### 1 APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from Councillors R Gaster and A Osibogun.

##### 2 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

**Resolved:** that Councillor P Birchley be elected Chairman of the Children's and Education Select Committee for the ensuing year.

##### 3 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

The appointment of Vice-Chairman will take place at the next meeting of the Committee on 24 June 2021.

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# Children's Services Priorities Select Committee

Richard Nash, Executive Director Children's Services

June 2021

# Priorities – Children’s Social Care

## 1. Service Improvement

Since the November 2017 ‘Inadequate’ Ofsted re-inspection, Ofsted have completed 4 monitoring visits (July 2018, December 2018, May 2019 and October 2019), the fifth was due in May 2020; however, all planned inspection activity was cancelled due to COVID-19. In February 2021, Ofsted remotely completed a Focused Visit that evaluated our response to the pandemic. In summary, improvements have been made to date and the overall progress has been acknowledged by inspectors. That said, the quality of practice in some teams still remains inconsistent. All reports following each visit have commented on the strong political support, the leadership teams accurate understanding of what needs to be done, and that our improvement activity is appropriately targeted. In addition, all our self-assessments presented to Ofsted have been accepted in full and Ofsted have not identified any areas of concern the service was not aware of and had not identified already.

## Priorities – Children’s Social Care

### **2. Responding to the growing and unpredictable demand as a result of COVID 19**

The impact of COVID-19 has led to a significant rise in demand both locally and nationally. This coupled with an increase in the complexity and seriousness of situations that children and young people find themselves in, is having a substantial impact on workloads and our workforce. The service’s focus remains on ensuring children and young people are kept safe; however, the unpredictable and unknown longer term and lasting impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on families will no doubt present further risks.

## Priorities – Children’s Social Care

### **3. Recruitment and retention of social care workforce**

One of the main contributing factor which is hindering the pace of progress in some teams is the significant difficulties in recruiting high quality, experienced social workers and managers. A clear priority for this year is to increase the number of permanent social workers and managers, in turn reducing our reliance on agency staff.

Retention is just as important as recruitment, and we should not underestimate the impact of the pandemic on our front-line staff. It is clear that the combined impact of working remotely for a significant period, the increased exposure to disturbing scenarios involving children and the increases in demand all have an impact on our staff. Staff support continues to remain extremely important.

# Priorities – Children’s Social Care

## 4. Recruitment of in-house foster carers

As shown in the table below, over the last two years we have made good progress in relation to fostering placements for our looked our children. We want to build on this success and further increase our in-house capacity to improve local placement choices for looked after children, reducing our reliance on independent and more costly placements.

	31-Mar 2019	31-Mar 2020	31-Mar 2021
Number of looked after children	513	492	512
Number and % of children in care living with foster families	342 67%	350 71%	360 70%
Number and % of children placed with a Buckinghamshire /in house carer	155 45%	189 54%	186 51%
Number and % of children placed with an Independent Fostering Agency	187 55%	161 46%	174 48%
Number and % of children in care living outside the local authority area	272 53%	227 46%	270 53%

# Priorities – Education

## **1. SEND Delivery and Improvements**

In preparation for our local area SEND inspection, we have an Improvement Plan in place to improve our SEND service and in particular, the quality and timeliness of Education, Health and Care Plans. A priority for this year is to continue to improve the service to ensure that children and families received the help and support they need. A key priority in this area is the Preparing for Adulthood agenda.

In the early part of this financial year, the SEND Sufficiency Strategy will be consulted on and published.

# Priorities – Education

## 2. Improving Education Provision and Educational Outcomes

It is our ambition to provide all children and young people with access to a high quality, inclusive education by adopting an all age approach, from supporting access to early years provision through to the delivery of a diverse curriculum offer for young people post 16. Currently over 95% of early years providers are rated good or outstanding by Ofsted, and 90% of Buckinghamshire pupils attend a good or outstanding school. Our priority is to support those providers and schools that are not yet good or who need support to remain good in order to realise our ambition of the highest quality education for all children of Buckinghamshire.

In order to narrow the attainment gap between the most vulnerable and their peers, we will also continue to focus on improving the educational outcomes for disadvantaged children, especially those in care, those eligible for free school meals, those with special educational needs and those from minority ethnic groups and traveller heritage. This is an even greater priority post COVID.

## Priorities – Education

### **3. Work with schools to ensure that young people have access to good mental health support**

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected everyone's mental wellbeing, particularly vulnerable groups such as children. It is difficult to gauge the full impact on children and young people's mental health and wellbeing; however, we know that pupils' experiences of the pandemic have been very varied. Some, despite restrictions, have felt safe and mostly enjoyed their time. For others, it has been challenging and in some cases traumatic. Schools and teachers are used to supporting their pupils through challenges that they face in life, but the current situation has and will continue to amplify those situations many times over. Throughout the course of this year, it is vital that we continue to support our schools via specific and sustained training in this area so that good mental health and wellbeing becomes embedded into the culture of every school.

# Priorities – Education

## 4. Early Help

The Early Help Strategy and Improvement Plan will be refreshed this year. There will be a greater focus on the whole system including partnerships in schools and health.

Outcomes for children and families as a result of involvement from the Family Support Service will be important as part of preparation for the Children's Services Ofsted Inspection.

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