



Buckinghamshire Council

Children's & Education Select Committee

Minutes

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHILDREN'S & EDUCATION SELECT COMMITTEE HELD ON THURSDAY 2 NOVEMBER 2023 IN THE PARALYMPIC ROOM, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNCIL, GATEHOUSE ROAD, AYLESBURY HP19 8FF, COMMENCING AT 2.02 PM AND CONCLUDING AT 4.58 PM

MEMBERS PRESENT

J Ward, M Dormer, K Bates, D Blamires, L Clarke OBE, I Darby, S Lewin, Dr W Matthews, A Osibogun, P Turner, Z Williams, T Wilson and A Cranmer

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE

K Dover, Ms S Moore, G Drawmer, C Duffy, Ms C Marriott, Pike, E Albert and W McCulloch

Agenda Item

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllrs Adoh, Jones, Hussain, Kayani and Summers.
Cllr Stuchbury substituted for Cllr Kayani.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 7th September 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- Cllrs Bates, Clarke, Darby, Osibogun and Turner declared a personal interest as a school governor.
- Tony Wilson declared a personal interest as a trustee of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire School Trust.

Zoe Williams declared that she is employed by the Buckinghamshire Educational Partnership and as a Chair of Governors.

4 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

Question by Sarah Hodges and response from the service – October 2023

Could Buckinghamshire Council provide an update on the implementation of an EHC Hub (a digital platform) supporting engagement, contributions and collaboration on EHC assessments,

plans and reviews. Parents/guardians, staff and professionals can spend considerable periods of time chasing information which could be accessed online providing up to date information to all parties?

This question was originally raised by Sarah Hodges in November 2021.

The response to this question was as follows:

The digital EHC system was initiated with schools in 2021 for new EHC assessments; however, the initial launch was not successful and further work on the system was required and as a result, implementation was paused. The remedial work has been completed and the digital platform is due to re-launch with schools in April 2024. If successful, this will then be extended to families by September 2024.

5 BUCKINGHAMSHIRE SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT 2022-2023

Cabinet Member, Cllr Anita Cranmer introduced Walter McCulloch, Chair of the Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership. She explained that the Partnership is a statutory multi-agency body, which oversees children's safeguarding across Buckinghamshire acting both as a critical friend and as a champion for best practice across agencies.

Walter McCulloch summarised the annual report and highlighted the following points:

- The Safeguarding Partnership concentrated on four domains:
 - Using data to evidence the impact of the work done
 - Ensuring qualitative assessment
 - Listening to the voices of staff
 - Bringing the voices of those with lived experience to the forefront
- There had been good examples of lived experience contributing to case reviews. At multi-agency events, presentations made as personal testimony, giving specific examples of lived experience had been very powerful and valued highly.
- In children's safeguarding, there has been an issue about how incoming concerns are handled collectively by the different agencies. The use of data evaluation had led to the development of a challenge event focussing on the use of the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub. This had been subject to difficulties around staffing levels and unprecedented levels of work in the last year
- There was an acknowledgment that there should be a work focus to improve continuity between services for 16 to 25 year olds
- There is good evidence that cross border work happens effectively – neighbouring local authorities and police forces are working well together
- A revised business plan for the Safeguarding Partnership is being signed off in December. This would cover the four domain areas as well as further development of the partnership, strengthening the initial triaging of cases, bringing to the forefront the use of information from the "lived experience" and ensuring evidence of the impact of case review work.

The Chairman invited Members' questions. In response to questions and during subsequent discussions, the following main points were noted:

- There is a need for analytical work on child death figures by the Child Death Overview Panel. The figures for child deaths during the pandemic had been submitted as part of a

three-year catch-up report to the Partnership and had been correctly analysed. The figures for 2021 to 2022 were now required to complete the picture for previous years. The child death overview panel covers the ICB area and has data from this geographical area.

Action: Walter McCulloch to circulate comparative child death information from the ICB area, statistical neighbours and nationally

- Partnership working across the agencies which help young people is good and will be developed further, for example, by enhancing joint collaboration when the system is under pressure. Walter McCulloch is in regular contact with the Chief Constable of Thames Valley police, the Chief Executive of the council and the ICB Chief Executive to ensure further development of partnership working and to develop the effectiveness of the front door service.
- 170 children are currently missing from education. There is a team dedicated to finding the children who are missing and both housing and health information are used to help find them. In most cases, children are found within two to three weeks but some are absent from education for longer than six weeks. These children stay on the council's list until they are located or reach the age of 18. Many children that had been found had moved schools to out of the local authority area. The vast majority are located.
- There is a risk register for schools where safeguarding needs to be improved. Currently there are only 3 schools on the list. Robust training on safeguarding is being delivered by officers to ensure processes are secure.
- It was noted that there were no figures in the report showing the number of children suffering harm or violence. These figures were presented to a different Select Committee as there is an overlap with community safety. Walter McCulloch noted the need to streamline the governance arrangements regarding the reporting of this information.
- The Safeguarding Partnership can provide more detailed data which compares safeguarding issues, the youth justice system and custody rates across other council areas.

Action: Walter McCulloch to provide information from the modern slavery & exploitation subgroup showing occurrence of harm levels.

- Work is underway to listen to the voice of young people in the "hard to reach" group.
- The services for young people in the 16 to 25 age group are difficult to navigate due to the different age cut-off points for services such as housing and mental health. More work is needed to improve the continuity of provision. Case reviews are being used to help improve the transition from Children's to Adults' services. A report would go to the ICB in the new year to look at the themes in this area of work.
- The voice of lived experience had recently been brought forward to the Partnership by several agencies.
- A piece of work is being undertaken by the Youth Justice area on Buckinghamshire's custody rates comparative to other areas

Action: WM to provide some broader data/performance information including custody rates at the same time as issuing the committee with the new business plan once agreed.

The Chairman thanked Walter McCulloch for the report

6 SEND IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME UPDATE NOVEMBER 2023

The Chairman welcomed Cate Duffy, Interim Service Director, Education, Lucy Pike, Head of Transformation and Improvement and Caroline Marriott, Head of Integrated SEND Services to the meeting.

During the update, the following main points were made:

- The purpose of the update was to report progress and improvements following the SEND inspection of March 2022
- A written statement of action (WSOA) had been made concentrating on neuro-developmental pathways, community paediatricians and therapies with an emphasis on the delays which had been experienced by families to get this provision.
- £4.6 million had been received this year from the ICB (Integrated Care Board) to decrease waiting lists for treatment and increase clinical capacity. Recruitment and retention of staff is a nationwide and ongoing issue.
- An all-age autism strategy was in the final stages of development and would be presented to a Cabinet meeting in January 2024.

Some examples of how the service had improved included:

- A single provider model was being used for 15–19 year olds for ADHD assessment. Digital assessments would be used to offer support for autism more quickly.
- The voluntary sector was helping to support families within the neurodevelopmental pathway
- Community paediatricians were arranging to use other professionals to decrease waiting times
- Prescribing pharmacists had been able to carry out medication reviews and had eradicated the backlog for these reviews
- The “Waiting Well” initiative ensured that support was in place at the right time, aiming for early intervention. Numerous activities included social prescribing, equine therapy and other support offers were used
- The overall quality of new EHCPs (Education, Health and Care Plans) had improved from 11% to 78% graded as good in 2021 and then August 2023 but there was still a significant amount of work needed to improve existing plans. The timelines for producing these needed improvement due to the increase in demand and a shortage of educational psychologists. The aim is to meet the 20-week statutory target
- There had been several new offers which had helped families, including a toolkit giving guidance on EBSNA (Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance), Holiday activity and food programmes, support for children Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) with an increase from 12 to 40 internships provided by the authority for children with SEND.
- Much work had been undertaken to rebalance the system through co-ordination of work at the early intervention stage. A programme called “Delivering Better Value” was in place to make the best use of resources to improve the experience of both children and families.
- There will be a SEND inspection within the next three years which will be carried out under the new framework introduced in January 2023. Preparation for this inspection was under way

In response to Members’ comments the following points were made:

- The All-Age Autism Strategy would be shared with the committee before it is published in January 2024

Action: The new Autism Strategy to be circulated to the committee following Cabinet.

- To help in the short-term, some associate educational psychologists have been successfully recruited. In the longer term, the aim would be to have a team of educational psychologists working in schools to give a multi-faceted approach, addressing all angles of the current demand
- The first phase of the “Delivering Better Value” project for children with SEND had looked at data, auditing 40 anonymised cases to see if children were in the right provision and if they had received the right outcome. The deep dive phase was now underway and would provide further data. The real focus was improving outcomes rather than reducing costs
- The recommendations of the pathways to SEND review were noted to be embedded as work within the Improvement Programme
- It was noted that there is currently a national shortage of ADHD medication, and this could be a cause for distress for young people. Advisory information had been sent to schools regarding this

Action: Gareth Drawmer to contact Public Health for an update on the timing of the provision of medication

- It is too early to give data on the EBSNA toolkit, but there had been a positive response from schools. Buckinghamshire had a 20% non-attendance rate at school against a national average of 21%. Severe absenteeism was at 1.7% in Buckinghamshire compared with 1.9% nationally.
- More detailed information to give the context to these figures was requested.

Action: Gareth Drawmer to provide further information on the school non-attendance figures

- There are three family hubs and sixteen family centres in Buckinghamshire and these play an important role in early intervention. They formerly concentrated on children under five years old but now have a larger remit. They continue to intervene early for children with speech and language problems and are especially focused on the “Opportunity Bucks” wards
- The over-arching challenges faced in SEND are currently:
 - Meeting the 20-week deadline for assessment
 - The rising demand for EHCPs (a rise of 76% since 2020)
 - Sufficiency of specialist places for children with an EHCP
 - Long waiting times for diagnosis and therapies, including significant waits for ASD assessments
 - Budgetary constraints
 - Recruitment and retention of Educational Psychologists
- Several charities provide valuable early intervention and support for SEND children
- A general point was made that Democratic Services should ensure that reports relevant to the subject of a Select Committee should be provided to that Committee prior to final sign off at Cabinet where possible.

Action: The Scrutiny Officer to raise this issue with the Scrutiny Manager & Directors of items relevant to this committee being reported here

Cllr Stuchbury submitted a question on this Item as follows:

The Department of Education acknowledges the current challenges which local systems are experiencing in delivering special educational needs and disability services. The Delivering Better Value in SEND programme (DBV in SEND) is aiming to support local authorities and their area partners to improve the delivery of SEND services for children and young people whilst working towards financial sustainability.

Paragraph 3.4 states challenging in relations to the provision of therapy for children and young people with an EHP remains significant. The September 2023 figures identified at 24 week wait for speech, therapist and language advice to inform education and health care plans.

My question is considering the OFSTED report and the inspection framework from CQC send being undertaken;

1. What percentage of the £4.600,000 investment to the integrated care board, ICB agreed in April 23 will be available to help to reduce the time that parents and children are waiting to receive their EHCP report, and
2. will this positively impact and enable children with speech and learning difficulties to gain the optimum value from opportunities within the education, and
3. will there be incremental financial support to enable officers working within special educational needs to deliver on their aspirations to improve services in line with the parents' aspirations to have their child specialist needs in respected education, met in a timely fashion?

The response to the questions was as follows:

The £4.6m has been allocated across the 3 Written Statement of Action (WSOA) areas of (a) community paediatrics (b) Neurodevelopmental Diagnosis and ADHD Clinic and (c) the Integrated Therapies Service. All these areas of investment will add capacity to the services in terms of current delivery enabling the required professional advice to be provided more quickly.

It is anticipated that this funding will help to support all children with SEND to gain the right support for their needs, regardless of diagnosis, including those with Speech and Language difficulties.

The £4.6m ICB funding is ongoing beyond 2024/25.

7 SCHOOLS OFSTED INSPECTION OUTCOMES - ACADEMIC YEAR 2022-2023

Cllr Anita Cranmer welcomed Gareth Drawmer to the meeting and invited him to summarise the report

During the update, the following main points were made:

- The report had been produced in the context of the sad death of Ruth Perry, Headteacher at Caversham Primary School in Reading
- Some schools in Buckinghamshire had moved up to an OFSTED classification "Good", some schools however had declined in category
- There was an increased level of inspection activity, with Ofsted aiming to inspect all schools by 2025
- In schools, issues can arise where there is change in leadership team or where staff recruitment and retention were a challenge

- The curriculum had changed substantially over the last few years and in some cases where schools had been less successful the curriculum changes had not always been fully embedded
- In the last year, no school had been given a limited judgement for safeguarding
- Some schools had improved
- Amendment to the report: New Town School in Chesham was graded “Good” and not “Inadequate” as stated in the report. Gareth Drawmer commended the teachers and pupils of New Town School

In response to Members’ comments the following points were made:

- In relation to the schools where their OFSTED rating declined, Gareth Drawmer noted that Buckinghamshire’s aim was to support schools well, with the relationship and communication between the local authority and school being two way. He acknowledged that Ofsted inspections did induce a level of concern with school leaders which could impede communication. He considered the relationship between the authority and schools however, to be strong
- The system of school risk assessment is very robust
- Pupil Champion support has provided help to schools at no cost. Pupil champion support worked alongside teachers offering coaching and mentoring
- The de-delegation model provides a means for school to benefit from a side-by-side project. Schools would return part of their budget to the council to fund this. The Side by Side Leadership Champion (SSLC) and headteacher would assess what support would be required
- The Business Intelligence Team would look at whether information could be provided on the flow of pupils between wards to attend school
 - Action:** Gareth Drawmer to speak to the Business Intelligence Team regarding what information is available on the flow of pupils outside of their own wards to go to school
- The three schools which had retained their inadequate rating had received standard Section 8 monitoring visits and a change of grade is not made at these. Section 5 visits are those where grade changes can be made
- School leaders were under enormous stress. OFSTED was aware and concerned about the stress faced by teaching staff and has revised its inspection framework this year to increase the accountability of inspectors. Schools help their own staff’s wellbeing and school staff have access to the Buckinghamshire employee assistance service if needed
- The council ensures that all interaction with schools is as supportive as possible. Headteachers can take part in a weekly Zoom meeting to raise any concerns. New headteachers are offered a mentoring programme for their first year in the role to gain support when commencing their role. There is also a coaching service provided by the local authority
- The team would consider whether the levels of stress could be monitored in any way.
 - Action:** Gareth Drawmer to discuss the possibility of monitoring stress levels of education staff during inspections with the Education Team
- The authority met the South East Sector Led Improvement Programme (SESLIP) regularly to map out work on improvement
- There had been a rise nationally in qualifying complaints. Once received, the local authority worked with the school to assist in remedying the issue

- There is a focus on literacy for the “Opportunity Bucks” schools but bespoke work in schools also. There was an Opportunity Bucks Launch for the 40 schools in November to look at what projects would most benefit them
- There are currently two projects running in schools, the Opportunity Bucks Short Film Competition (key stage 2 onwards) and the App Accelerator Project which focussed on tech skills for secondary school children. The council works in partnership with the local film industry to provide learning opportunities for young people. The National Film and Television School in Beaconsfield is also part of this project
- It was suggested that the Member Bulletin could be used to made Members aware of the various Opportunity Bucks initiatives aimed at young people

8 WORK PROGRAMME

The Chairman proposed that the issue of school attendance would be a good subject for a more detailed piece of work. She explained that this issue had not been considered by the committee since before the covid pandemic and non-attendance had increased since then. A report is due to come before the committee in March 2024 and a scope for the review taken to the January committee. The committee agreed to this proposal.

Action: Scrutiny Officer to commence drafting the scope for review work on school attendance

9 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 25th January at 2.00 pm in the Oculus, The Gateway