



Children's & Education Select Committee agenda

Date: Tuesday 29 September 2020

Time: 2.00 pm

Venue: Virtual Meeting via MS Teams

Membership:

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

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Agenda Item	Time	Page No
1 Apologies for Absence/Changes in Membership		
2 Declarations of Interest		
3 Minutes		5 - 12
To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 4 th June 2020 as a correct record.		

4	Public Questions Public questions have been submitted for this meeting and can be found in Appendix 4.		13 - 14
5	Chairman's Update For the Chairman to update the Committee on Children's Services and Education scrutiny activity since the last meeting.		
6	Covid-19 Update The Committee will receive an update on the continued impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Children's Services and Education.	14:20	15 - 20
	Contributors: Mr Mark Shaw, Cabinet Member for Children's Services Mrs Anita Cranmer, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills Mr Tolis Vouyioukas, Corporate Director for Children's Services Mr Richard Nash, Service Director, Children's Services Mr Simon James, Service Director, Education		
7	SEND Improvement Plan The Committee will receive an overview of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Improvement plan and an update on progress to date.	14:55	21 - 28
	Contributors: Anita Cranmer, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills Tolis Vouyioukas, Corporate Director for Children's Services Simon James, Service Director, Education		
8	Draft Work Programme Members will consider and agree the forward Work Programme, which has been drafted on the basis of Members' suggestions at the June meeting and subsequent feedback from Cabinet Members and the Corporate Director. There needs to be an element of flexibility in the work programme so that the Committee can respond to any urgent issues that might arise, therefore the work programme may evolve and will be reviewed at every Select Committee meeting.	15:55	29 - 30
	Contributors: Chairman and all Committee Members		

Kelly Sutherland, Committee & Governance Manager

9 Date of Next Meeting

16:10

Thursday 5th November 2020 at 2pm

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For further information please contact: Kelly Sutherland on 01296 383602, email democracy@buckinghamshire.gov.uk.

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Children's & Education Select Committee minutes

Minutes of the meeting of the Children's & Education Select Committee held on Thursday 4 June 2020 in Virtual Meeting - MS teams, commencing at 2.04 pm and concluding at 4.30 pm.

Members present

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

Agenda Item

1 Election of Chairman

Kelly Sutherland, Committee and Governance Manager, welcomed everyone to the meeting and called for nominations for Chairman. Dev Dhillon was nominated and seconded and in the absence of any other nominations was declared Chairman of the Children's Services and Education Select Committee.

RESOLVED: That Mr Dev Dhillon be elected as Chairman for the ensuing year.

2 Appointment of Vice-Chairman

Mr Dhillon thanked all the staff in Children's and Education Services who had faced an extremely challenging period due to the coronavirus pandemic. A large number of services were provided by frontline staff; the officers and senior management team had worked tirelessly to provide the best service possible.

Mr Dhillon proposed Mrs Julie Ward be appointed as Vice-Chairman; Mr Arif Hussain and Mr Niknam Hussain seconded the proposal.

RESOLVED: That Mrs Julie Ward be appointed as Vice-Chairman for the ensuing year.

3 Apologies for Absence/Changes in membership

It was noted that Mr Robert Jones had sent his apologies for the first part of the meeting and joined the meeting at 3.00 pm.

The Chairman advised that the Select Committee was able to have parent governors as co-opted members; Mrs Sutherland explained that she would contact the Legal team to clarify the process and update the committee.

The committee members introduced themselves and stated the area they represented.

4 Declarations of Interest

The following declarations of interest were made:

- Mr Arif Hussain - governor of the Royal Grammar School, High Wycombe.
- Mr Dominic Barnes – his wife worked in the Education Department at Buckinghamshire Council.
- Mr Niknam Hussain – advised as a consultant on a number of home to school transport companies.
- Ms Sally-Ann Jarvis – worked for an academy school.
- Ms Emily Culverhouse – helps run the Chesham Youth Council.
- Mr Brian Foster – director of Haddenham Youth and Community Centre.

5 Covid-19 Update

The Chairman explained that a Covid-19 update would be provided at this meeting; however, there would be further opportunities to scrutinise the Council's response to the pandemic. On behalf of the whole committee, the Chairman extended his thanks to all staff in Children's Services and Education who had been working extremely hard on the front line during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Mr Mark Shaw, Cabinet Member for Children's Services stated it had been an extremely challenging time for the Service as the officers had to be set up to work from home, in a very short space of time, to enable continued contact with vulnerable children via Face time, texting and WhatsApp; these methods had proven to be an efficient, effective and accepted means of communication for the children. The Service had kept the Department for Education (DfE) and OFSTED informed throughout. The planned OFSTED monitoring visit in May 2020 would be rearranged for when it was safe to do so.

Mr Shaw commended the whole team, in both education and children's social care; he particularly thanked the staff who had been working in the schools which had remained open during the pandemic and the officers who had undertaken home visits under extreme circumstances. Mr Shaw was confident that the senior management team knew what needed to be improved upon and that there was an improvement plan in place. Regular contact had been made with approximately 80% of the known vulnerable children but the team were aware that the real challenge would be the children who were not known to the service and it was anticipated that there could be a rise in the number of referrals when more children returned to school. In addition, recruitment of social work staff continued to be a priority.

Mr Tolis Vouyioukas, Corporate Director, Children's Services, referred to the detailed report provided in the agenda pack and emphasised that following the lockdown announcement; immediate action was taken to ensure all teams were able to work remotely. Mr Vouyioukas praised the schools which had accommodated the children of key workers and vulnerable children. The Service had achieved contact

with over 96% of cases (paragraph 1.6) and Mr Vouyioukas stressed the importance of ensuring the momentum of improvement continued. A recent staff survey had shown that over 88% of staff in Children's Services were happy and felt supported. The senior management team had been in touch with DfE at least three times a week to understand the guidance and expectations. Regular meetings with the chairs of school partnerships had also taken place. It was anticipated that 80% of primary schools would be open by week commencing 8 June 2020, in accordance with public health guidance.

The following key points were raised by the Select Committee members during discussion:

- A member commented that the Children's Centre programme had not been implemented due to the pandemic; however, Mr Vouyioukas clarified that the Family Support Service (para 1.9 of the report), which included Early Help, actually went live in September 2019 and he was confident that families had been receiving support throughout the crisis, albeit in different ways.
- In connection with schools reopening, Mr Vouyioukas stated he was very pleased with the response from schools and the chairs of the partnerships. The guidance from the DfE was not mandatory; the Service had worked closely with schools to provide advice and it had been important to work together to agree when the schools should re-open.
- Paragraph 1.12, SEND Service stated that on 1 May 2020 the Section 42 duty had been eased. The absolute duty to deliver the provisions identified was modified by the regulations and now 'reasonable endeavours' must be used to deliver as much of the identified provision within Early Help Care Plans (EHCPs) as possible. In response to being asked how the Service had responded to the changes; Mr Vouyioukas advised that he had seen an improvement in the SEND Service and that he held regular meetings to ensure the advice was applied.
- It was highlighted that paragraph 1.15 (EHCPs) stated that "No statutory process has been altered or changed; it has just been delivered in a different way." Mr Vouyioukas explained that as it was not possible to hold face to face contact, the team had used alternative ways of communicating which had resulted in more productive meetings with some young people; the guidance had been complied with and learning would be taken from the experience.
- Mr Richard Nash, Service Director for Children's Social Care, advised that approximately 20 face to face visits per week for high risk cases had been carried out at the start of the pandemic, but had recently increased and over 100 visits had been carried out in the week commencing 25 May 2020. Mr Nash was unsure how many visits would normally be undertaken each month but would provide the information after the meeting.
ACTION: Mr Nash
- Schools had supported the request for personal protective equipment (PPE) and had provided PPE to Stoke Mandeville Hospital. Schools had also been

supplied with PPE equipment.

- Mr Vouyioukas did not know how many children had caught the virus whilst attending school since lockdown but would ask the Public Health team to provide the data.

ACTION: Mr Vouyioukas

- It was noted that Mr Shaw had referred to a potential increase in referrals into the Children's Services when normal school attendance resumed and he emphasised the Council's commitment to supporting vulnerable children. In response to being asked about additional resources in schools, Mr Shaw stated that it would be a challenging time, the number and severity of cases would be closely monitored and quick action would be taken where necessary to ensure support for children needing help. Anita Cranmer, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, reported that there had been improved collaborative working between schools during the pandemic. In order to provide further support, the Service had also organised dedicated School Support Officers. Excellent communication had been maintained and a website had been established to provide quick access to help.
- Mr Vouyioukas added that Covid-19 had created a difficult financial environment as it was difficult to predict what additional activity would be needed in the future to deal with the recovery from the pandemic. The Service would continue to work in partnership with schools, the voluntary sector and health colleagues.
- Paragraph 1.6 stated that just over 96% of children have had contact with a social worker every four weeks during the COVID-19 period with 79% of those agreeing to virtual video contacts; however, 21% had not agreed to virtual contact and a member asked what had been put in place for these families. Mr Nash advised that as soon as the seriousness of the pandemic became apparent, the Service put plans in place to ensure continuity of protecting vulnerable children. Daily meetings allowed prioritisation of cases and a decision was made as to whether a home visit should be undertaken. The Service knew which families (4%) had not had contact and had evaluated their safety during the pandemic. 79% had agreed to virtual contact and this figure was comparable to other authorities. Some families, who did not have remote access, had been provided with improved mobile devices and internet connection.
- Paragraph 1.2 stated that changes were made to the electronic recording system so that work impacted by COVID-19 could be clearly recorded and accounted for. The system was revised to be able to record a virtual visit and the number of attempts to contact people to manage the current situation.
- The OFSTED improvement plan was constantly updated and presented to the Service's improvement partner at regular intervals; it was on the agenda for the Cabinet meeting in July 2020 and Mr Vouyioukas confirmed he would discuss presenting the plan to the Select Committee before the next meeting in September 2020 with Mrs Sutherland.

ACTION: Mr Vouyioukas/Mrs Sutherland

- A member expressed concern that due to the changes to Section 42 in the SEND Service that some children may be missed. However, Mrs Cranmer

reassured the committee that children were still having their plans administered and that there had been increased efficiency in the turnover of EHCP plans due to a higher number of staff and the appointment of a new Chief Educational Psychologist. Mr Vouyioukas added that in May 2020, 78% of EHCP plans were being processed within the 20 week timescale, which was a significant improvement. It was agreed that Mr Simon James, Service Director, Education, would circulate a briefing containing the SEND performance data.

ACTION: Mr James

- Staff had been well supported during lockdown and the Service was confident that improved levels of performance would be maintained.

The Chairman thanked all the presenters for this update.

6 Key priorities for 2020-21

Cllr Shaw listed the key priorities as follows:

- Service improvement
- Recovery from Covid-19
- Budgetary control.

Cllr Tony Green, Cabinet Member for Youth Provision, listed the key priorities as follows:

- Recruitment of in-house foster carers
- Improving the education and health of looked after children
- The transition of children from childhood to adulthood.

Cllr Cranmer listed the following three key priorities:

- SEND delivery and improvements
- Improving education provision
- Home to school transport. (This responsibility was divided - Mrs Cranmer advised that whilst she dealt with the policy; the delivery came under the Logistics portfolio).

The following key points were raised by the Select Committee members during discussion:

- A member asked for an explanation of how 90% of pupils attended a good or outstanding school as he felt the attainment gap had increased over the years. Mr Vouyioukas explained that the figure of 90% was published by OFSTED. He reassured the committee that the schools and authorities were working together to narrow the attainment gap; it was a joint responsibility.
- A member asked if there were plans to improve the transition process for SEND children and children with EHCPs as they reached adulthood. Mr

Vouyioukas acknowledged that there were a large number of children and young people involved and that the Service was working hard to provide a seamless transition.

- It was noted that it had proved difficult to recruit high quality social workers and this was a national problem. Mr Shaw explained that the Council was 'growing' its own social workers and a new group had been due to start in the Academy, but had been delayed due to Covid-19. Mr Nash stated that he had been working hard over the last 18 months on the recruitment and retention of qualified social workers, as well as growing the academy. The Service was in a much stronger position today than in the last two years; it was retaining more staff and the staff survey had indicated that staff felt supported. Recruitment had also taken place from Canada and Australia and five social workers had started before the pandemic; discussions were being held to decide when another four would be able to start work.
- Mrs Cranmer was pleased to report that after having similar recruitment difficulties, an additional 12 SEN Officers had been recruited in recent months, which had contributed to the tremendous improvement in the EHCP turnaround.
- A member highlighted the increase in the number of looked after children being placed with in-house foster carers, which was good for the children and the Council's budget. Mr Nash stated that it was important for children to be placed as near to home as possible and stated that there had been an increase from 128 to 180 placements with in-house foster carers. Recruitment of new foster carers involved a significant amount of training.
- In response to a question on the attainment gap, Mr James agreed to circulate an update on the position in Buckinghamshire compared with national figures and statistical neighbours.

ACTION: Mr James

- Mr James advised that the decision on when, or whether, the 11+ Secondary Transfer test would take place would be made in the next two weeks and he would inform the Committee as soon as the decision was known.
- In response to being asked what could be done to implement improvements more speedily; Mr Vouyioukas stressed that the Service was doing its best to recruit as many permanent social workers as possible and had discussed the situation with OFSTED.
- A member raised concerns that a large number of children permanently excluded from school could be fuelling the county lines problem and asked how many children were excluded. Mr Vouyioukas stated that the number of exclusions in Buckinghamshire had decreased and it was not proven that there was a connection between excluded children and the county lines. Mr Nash added that Children's Services staff were part of an exploitation hub, with Thames Valley Police, Health, Education and Youth Offending Service colleagues, which worked to identify young people at risk of exploitation.
- Mr Vouyioukas acknowledged that recruitment was a challenge and agreed that the offer of key worker housing could be helpful; the Service had been working with colleagues in the Housing Department to discuss this possibility.

- Mr Tony Green stated that there were willing and capable families who could provide fostering but were unsure how to go about it; more publicity was required to achieve results.
- A member advised that neighbouring councils had discovered that education teams had benefitted from working from home during the pandemic and asked whether the Council was considering an increase in hot desking in order to become less reliant on office space. Mr Vouyioukas explained that hot desking was out of the question due to the Covid-19 pandemic and that the Council was working to ensure the officers were safe and compliance with public health advice was followed.
- A member referred to page 20 of the agenda pack; priority 5 – Improving the education and health of looked after children, which read, ‘as a service, we must aim to raise the ambitions, educational attainment and health of looked after children in order to help them realise their potential, whatever their starting point is’ and asked how we compared to neighbouring authorities and nationally. Mr Vouyioukas agreed to provide a response after the meeting.

ACTION: Mr Vouyioukas

In response to a query on additional support which had been put in place for young carers during the pandemic; Mr Nash stated that there was a Carers Strategy and that the Service had been aware of the need to contact those families and had arranged respite care where appropriate.

7 Work Programme Discussion

The following suggestions were made for the work programme:

- The Children’s Services Improvement Plan – members of the committee requested sight of the improvement plan before it was presented to Cabinet in July 2020 and suggested a supplementary meeting be held. The Chairman advised that the improvement plan would usually come to the Select Committee after it had been to Cabinet and that members could ask questions at the Cabinet meeting. Mr Vouyioukas added that the Improvement Plan was a ‘work in progress’ document and Children’s Services were accountable to the Improvement Board. The Chairman agreed to look at the timing and process of the Improvement Plan and review the suggestion of an additional meeting.

ACTION: Chairman/Mrs Sutherland

- The Children’s Services budget and whether it was now sufficient to cover the improvement plan due to the impact of the pandemic.
- The resilience of young people in education and care and how the effect of the pandemic on their education, attainment levels and ability to find work could be mitigated.
- IT support and facilities provided for children being schooled at home.
- Lessons learned during the pandemic that could inform and improve the Council’s practices moving forward.
- The impact of Covid-19 on transitions between early year’s settings and reception and Year 6 to Year 7.

- Work being undertaken to narrow the attainment gap.
Some annual updates would be included on the work programme.

8 Date of next meeting

The date of next meeting was 10 September 2020.

Public Questions for Children's and Education Select Committee 29th September 2020

- 1 What provisions has the Council put in place that support children who are not able to access respite care as facilities are currently closed? When are respite centres opening again?
- 2 Is the Council now able to continue their statutory duties on timescales from 25 September 2020 under the Children's Act?
- 3 How has the Council allocated the extra Catch Up funding it received from Government for Education as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic?

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Report to Children's and Education Select Committee

Date: 29 September 2020

Reference number:

Title: Covid-19 Update

Relevant councillor(s): Cllr Mark Shaw, Cabinet Member Children's Services
Cllr Anita Cranmer, Cabinet Member Education and Skills
Cllr Tony Green, Cabinet Member Youth Provision

Author and/or contact officer: Tolis Vouyioukas, Corporate Director Children's Services

Recommendations: For the Select Committee to note (a) the way in which Children's Social Care has continued to respond and adapt its approach to service delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic, and (b) the work completed by the Directorate in supporting the full return to school from September 2020.

Children's Social Care

- 1.1 The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact upon statutory children's services. Protecting children and improving vulnerable children's outcomes is predicated upon direct, face to face interactions. It is also based upon co-located teams with visible and available line management.
- 1.2 It became clear during March 2020 that reducing the risk of infection and protecting the community as well as our staff was of primary importance. As a result, visits to children had to stop, unless there were extreme circumstances. The service took a number of proactive and robust steps to maximise the collective ability to still keep children safe and protect the most vulnerable. These steps were presented to the Children's Social Care and Education Select Committee in June 2020.
- 1.3 Since this time, the service has maintained grip and control of performance and this is monitored through weekly reporting on management oversight and virtual contact by team. In addition, a robust quality assurance programme has provided team level information on the strength of work within the service. These mechanisms ensure that standards are maintained, and that children and young people are protected.
- 1.4 Over recent months, as lockdown measures continued, the service has seen an increase in both the number of referrals and those with complex casework scenarios.

In the majority of cases, these are families that have not been previously known to us and potentially demonstrate the pressures they are facing are a direct consequence of covid-19. In addition, the service is actively supporting a number of older young people to stay safe in the community. In order to manage the increased levels of risk as the lockdown period progressed, the service gradually increased the number of physical visits to children and young people.

- 1.5 Unusually, during August 2020, we also saw a greater proportion of individuals self-referring into the service, which is a significant shift compared to previous trends.
- 1.6 On 19 August 2020, in preparation for the return of the majority of children and young people into education settings, the service released a revised set of mandatory social care practice standards. The over-riding purpose of these standards was to increase the number of physical visits to children, young people and their families in line with statutory requirements.
- 1.7 Throughout the pandemic, the service observed that for some specific cohorts of children and young people the use of virtual contact was well received and enabled social workers to form a stronger relationship with that child or young person. This was particularly evident for care leavers and some children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Moving forward, in very specific and well managed circumstances, the service will continue to allow some contact with children and young people to take place virtually. In these circumstances the rationale for which type of visit or contact is completed must form part of management oversight records with direct analysis and consideration of the risks noted. It is expected that where risk and need of the individual is high physical visits will take place.
- 1.8 The service will continue to act with care to meet our individual and collective health and safety obligations and this means using continual risk assessments to judge situations and scenarios, continued use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), adherence to government guidance and to act in the best interests of children.
- 1.9 A positive observation of the Covid-19 restrictions in recent months has been the availability of all staff and partners to attend statutory meetings such as professionals meetings, case conferences, looked after reviews, core groups and strategy meetings. As a result of this, the service will continue to use modern technology to undertake certain meetings including the use of a hybrid model where necessary with some participants being socially distanced in a room and others being present on screen. It is important to note that the rationale for how a meeting is constructed must include relevant views of the child, young person and family.
- 1.10 It is likely that, as children return to education settings and begin to discuss their experiences since March, the service may see an increase in the number of contacts and referrals although; at this stage it is too early to report against. In addition, there may be more contextual information provided by partners for those children already known to the service which will need to be considered.

1.11 The service will continue to focus on the most vulnerable children, young people and their families during the next few uncertain months. This will be achieved by maintaining the systems and practice we have already used and ensuring that our leadership and strategic direction is both flexible and clear.

Full Return to School

1.12 The Department for Education (DfE) decided to partially close schools as a response to the Coronavirus pandemic on 20 March 2020. Schools remained open from this point for children of keyworkers and vulnerable children (designated as those children with either Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) or those open to social care). For these vulnerable children, professionals working with them discussed whether, on balance, the risk of them being at home was greater than the risk of them being in school. A further opening was made at the start of June, where children in Reception, Year One and Year Six were encouraged to return to school where possible alongside additional provision for pupils in Year Ten in secondary schools. The government mandated a full return to schools for the Autumn Term.

1.13 At each stage of the process, Buckinghamshire Council has provided support and guidance to schools to ensure that:

- Schools have access to the latest national guidance;
- Where information changes we provide clarity around those changes;
- Additional guidance related to our local context is shared and
- Schools have had access to Buckinghamshire Council staff to help address queries and concerns.

1.14 Specifically this has included:

- a) Twice weekly meetings with the Corporate Director of Children's Services (DCS), and other officers in Children's Services and Public Health with chairs of the School Partnerships to discuss schools' responses to the crisis and co-produce work that supports schools. This has raised a number of themes including supporting staff wellbeing, managing HR issues and communicating changes effectively to parents.
- b) Twice weekly meetings with the Department for Education led by the DCS to raise concerns with any guidance issued and to seek clarity on issues that directly affected Buckinghamshire.
- c) The creation of a website for schools containing a repository of government information as well as responses from Buckinghamshire Council teams in a FAQ format which has been updated daily.

- d) Utilising staff across the directorate (especially those who were unable to continue their daily work during this period) as School Support Officers who called schools on a weekly basis to ensure that any issues that they had were addressed rapidly.
- e) Access to the Public Health advice and support through webinars for both Headteachers and Governors.
- f) The School Improvement Team have worked directly with schools that have required focussed help to ensure any issues have been addressed.
- g) Resources have been sent to pupils who have required them, specifically the Local Authority managed the rollout of the government laptop scheme which has seen over 850 devices sent to vulnerable pupils without access to the internet, providing them with a method of engaging with online learning. The Virtual School also ensured that all children in care had access to a device to support their learning in the first weeks of lockdown prior to the government scheme. In addition to this the Council delivered over 250,000 books to pupils before the summer break to ensure that they had access to quality literature.
- h) Distribution of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to all schools and early years settings across Buckinghamshire for use by staff with symptomatic pupils.

1.15 On the full return to school, there was significant work completed to provide schools with clarity and [guidance](#). This has included:

- a) [Support for providers in early years.](#)
- b) [Identification of key duties during re-opening.](#)
- c) [A framework to support national guidance.](#)
- d) [Planning Checklist.](#)
- e) Specific guidance regarding the wearing of face coverings in schools.
- f) An Outbreak Guide from the Public Health Team, to provide an overview of the framework for the response to COVID-19 outbreaks that occur in schools and other early years settings within Buckinghamshire.
- g) Guidance from Public Health and Education to support schools with planning for 'bubbles', mixing pupil groups and providing wrap-around care.
- h) Business Continuity Planning for School Transport.
- i) Information from Buckinghamshire Grammar Schools on changes to the timing of the Secondary Transfer Test.

1.16 It was well understood that during the first few days of the autumn term there would be a period where schools would need to support their pupils in adapting to the changes that have needed to be made for social distancing. As a result, the expectation was that schools would phase their opening as required up until Friday 11 September 2020, with a view that all classes should have returned full time by that point. The indication is that all schools achieved this in the specified timeframe and anecdotal information shows an almost complete return.

1.17 The Council has commissioned work to support the wellbeing of school leaders, staff and students as they return to school – this work is being led by Aspire, the secondary Pupil Referral Unit. The release of funding from central government for a specific and [similar scheme](#) has allowed us to expand this work and incorporate this into the project plan.

1.18 As at Friday 11 September 2020, 100% of schools were open. There have been 15 incidences where schools have had to close year groups or send pupils home due to pupils or staff testing positive for Covid-19. In each case, the issue has been addressed directly with the school and the service has worked closely with Public Health to support. The School improvement Team hold a central record of each case to support our understanding of the situation across Buckinghamshire.

1.19 Throughout this period, there has been regular communication with schools, including:

- All updates to local guidance have been sent to schools directly.
- The chairs of the school representative bodies, Primary Executive Board (PEB), Buckinghamshire Association of Secondary Heads (BASH) and the Special School Head Teachers (SSHT) have contacted schools at least twice weekly since March in order to update them on current issues and actions that they need to take.
- The Director of Education has written directly to all parents in the county to thank them for their support.
- The communications team have sent out regular updates via social media to help parents.

1.20 The Transport Team has worked closely with schools to better understand their requirements across this period. [Guidance](#) has been issued to schools and parents to clarify the situation which includes:

- Where possible, asking parents to transport eligible students to school themselves and claim mileage for the journey.
- Provide additional public transport bus provision to ensure social distancing can be maintained (support from central government grant funding).
- Increasing the number of school busses on some routes.
- Support transport suppliers to understand and follow the specific [guidance](#) for transport operators issued by the Department for Transport and Public Health England.
- Guidance for parents and students on social distancing whilst using school transport.

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Report to Children's and Education Select Committee

Date: 29 September 2020

Reference number:

Title: Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Improvement Plan

Relevant councillor(s): Cllr Anita Cranmer, Cabinet Member Education and Skills

Author and/or contact officer: Simon James, Service Director Education

Recommendations: For the Select Committee to note the most recent update against the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Improvement Plan

Executive Summary

This report provides an overview of the improvement work that has been undertaken in relation to improving outcomes for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in Buckinghamshire.

1. Introduction and background

- 1.1 The SEND Reforms of 2014 set out a new approach to supporting children and young people with SEND, broadening the focus from education alone, to include health and social care more fully, binding us all by the Children and Families Act 2014. This aimed to improve the experience of families and ensure a more joined up approach to meeting needs.
- 1.2 In May 2016, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission instigated an inspection process to assess how well local areas (not solely local authorities) achieve the aspirations of the reforms. The 5 day inspections consider how well children and young people's needs are identified and met, as well as how confident leaders are that the support and services provided are achieving positive outcomes. Areas that fall short of expected standards are required to develop an action plan to address these failings.
- 1.3 Buckinghamshire has yet to be inspected and the cycle of inspections is currently paused due to COVID-19. The inspection programme is expected to resume in Spring 2021, with interim 2-day visits to some authorities anticipated between now and then.

Interim visits will not result in a judgement and will focus on the response to the pandemic in relation to SEND.

- 1.4 In reviewing the range of services that support children and young people with SEND and their families in Buckinghamshire, a self-evaluation document has been produced. This is a live document that has contributions from all stakeholders across Buckinghamshire including statutory and non-statutory services, schools, parent representatives and the voluntary and community sector. The self-evaluation identifies a number of areas of strength as well as some key areas for development.
- 1.5 The SEND Improvement Plan captures these development areas and outlines the actions being taken to achieve the desired outcomes. It identifies what we want to achieve, what needs to change and the outcomes we are working towards. It also evidences a direct link to the new SEND and Inclusion Strategy.
- 1.6 The SEND and Inclusion Strategy has been co-produced with key stakeholders and in particular with parent representatives from Families and Carers Together (FACT) Bucks. The strategy was consulted upon in March 2020 and has led to the development of a clear vision and a set of principles that link directly to the improvement work.
- 1.7 Improvement work is governed by the SEND Integrated Service Board that drives progress and provides scrutiny and challenge. This Board is chaired by the Corporate Director. An Improvement Group monitors the progress of the improvement plan, with actions driven forward by multi-agency Impact Groups. These are often co-chaired by local authority representatives alongside health colleagues or parent/carer representatives. The Impact Groups are themed as follows:
 - Coproduction and Parent/Voice of the Child
 - Statutory Performance (SEND Operations)
 - Quality of Education, Health and Care Plans
 - SEN Support
 - Preparing for Adulthood
 - Sufficiency; Autism Spectrum Condition and Social, Emotional and Mental Health
 - Integrated Commissioning
 - The Local Offer
- 1.8 In addition to the above, to ensure the aspirations of the new SEND and Inclusion Strategy are achieved, two new workstreams are being developed building on existing work. These relate to (1) further developing early intervention and family support in relation to SEND; and (2) enabling greater involvement of the voluntary and

community sector in supporting children and young people with SEND within communities. There is also a specific group entitled 'Needs and Provision' that is focused on driving the new funding model for high needs SEND in schools forward.

2. Progress to date and key challenges

2.1 Significant progress has been made on our key priorities; however, there remain some areas of challenge. Achievements and current challenges are described below.

Co-production and Voice of the Child

2.2 Co-production at a strategic level works well with parent representatives sitting on, or co-chairing all of the key improvement impact groups. This impact group is chaired by the chair of the parent / carer forum (FACT Bucks).

2.3 At an operational level, co-production is in its infancy. A reduction in caseloads has enabled Education, Health and Care Coordinators to engage more closely with families at key points in the statutory 20 week Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment process. Parent satisfaction is measured in part through our quality assurance programme; however, work is underway to develop a more comprehensive user satisfaction survey relating to the statutory processes.

2.4 Strengthening the voice of the child is a key part of the improvement work. We work closely with the SEND Youth Forum, a core mechanism to shape service development and delivery. Examples of this work include:

- Supporting young people to give their views to shape the new Preparing for Adulthood Service.
- Publishing case study films of work experience opportunities for young people with SEND on the Local Offer,
- Showing the benefits of work experience opportunities for both employer and employee
- Identifying new activities and groups to be inspected as part of developing the Young Inspectors Programme to increase promotion of activities suitable for SEND young people.

2.5 We have received positive feedback from the Chair of FACT Bucks about work completed in partnership with them:

"The strategy development process has been a great example of co-production - at the outset I asked for it to be an open, honest and co-produced process aimed at raising our aspirations as a Local Area. This has been delivered in full. Parents and Carers welcomed the tone and direction of the strategy during the consultations ... We will now work together to take it forward to focus on key aspects to improve the offer

being made and ultimately improve the outcomes of SEND CYP in Bucks. We do not underestimate the scale of the task, but it begins from a firm foundation.”

Statutory Performance (SEND Operations)

- 2.6 The Statutory Performance (SEND Operations) group is co-chaired by the Head of the Integrated SEND Service and a member of FACT Bucks, with the concept originally being proposed by the parent group. The group provides support and challenge particularly around these statutory markers. Compliments, complaints and tribunals raised with services are also monitored through this group. Representation across the multi-agency domain of SEND in Buckinghamshire is strong, including professionals from a variety of teams across the local authority and health, as well as internally commissioned services such as colleagues from transport. This enables the group to discuss, consult and monitor any operational changes to systems that can affect any partner.
- 2.7 Statutory performance has been an area of concern in Buckinghamshire over the past few years. Each year a national data return is published showing each Local Area’s average % for the completion of statutory Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments and the development of a Plan within 20 weeks (the latest reported national average is 60%). Buckinghamshire return data has been as follows:

2017	2018	2019	2020 (Jan – Aug)
18.9%	32.7%	40%	65%

- 2.7 During the latter part of 2019 and 2020, there has been a marked improvement in statutory performance in this area. Since May 2020, performance has been consistently above 75% and we are currently at a cumulative % of 65% for 2020 (as shown above), which is above the latest reported national performance (2019). Educational psychology advice that contributes to an Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment must also be completed within a statutory timeframe, and performance for our Educational Psychologists during August was at 89%.
- 2.8 As of 7 September 2020, Buckinghamshire has 4879 children and young people with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) that they maintain via the process of an annual review. Processing annual reviews of EHCP in a timely manner is an area for development. That said, some progress has been made following the appointment of additional Education, Health and Care coordinators in April 2020.

Quality of EHCPs

- 2.9 EHCPs are legal documents that describe the needs, provision and outcomes for children with SEND aged 0-25. They replace Statements of SEN that were purely focused on education. A Quality Assurance Framework has been developed that details a programme of ongoing auditing and moderation to assess and improve the overall quality of EHCPs. In addition, the Integrated SEND Service complete monthly audits as part of their management oversight of all Education, Health and Care Coordinators. Support is provided to individual officers to address issues and training is being rolled out across the service to raise standards.
- 2.10 The auditing demonstrates that the quality of plans is improving. For example, 19% of plans audited in July were judged to be good or above; this rose to 47% in August. While there remains a way to go to feel confident that all plans are high quality and fit for purpose, this work is now becoming embedded in the teams and is now viewed as integral to the work. Reduced caseloads have enabled this, as well as oversight from a designated Project Manager who has been able to drive this forward.

SEN Support

- 2.12 The majority of children with SEN are supported within educational settings utilising the delegated resource for SEN already with our schools, without the need for an EHCP. As at January 2020, there were 9590 children and young people in Buckinghamshire on the SEN support register who are supported in this way. Duties to identify the needs, plan support, provide provision and review progress sits with each individual school. Within Buckinghamshire, as of the last census published in July 2020, 10% of our children have been identified as needing SEN Support, compared with 12.1% nationally. This is an area that requires further work to ensure the needs of children with SEN are being identified early enough and that appropriate support is provided to prevent their needs escalating.
- 2.13 Two projects have been launched over the past year to address this. One is the 'Ordinarily Available Provision' concept, co-produced with parents, schools and professionals, introducing a shared language when talking about the provision that should 'ordinarily' be available in schools, without the need for additional resource or statutory oversight. A guidance document was produced as a result of this work, and the concept launched in January 2020 as part of a training programme for schools. The document stipulates the provision expected to be made available for children and young people identified as requiring SEN Support. It clarifies the role of settings to provide early intervention to improve outcomes for children and young people.

- 2.14 Speech and Language link, launched in September 2019, is a jointly commissioned resource between the local authority and our health partners. [Speech Link](#) and [Language Link](#) is a tool intended to empower schools working with children with speech, language and communication needs at the earliest stage, indicating the need for further support for the child where required. This is implemented through an online tool that screens and plans intervention for children and schools. This tool was initially commissioned for one year, but this has recently been extended to March 2021.
- 2.15 Embedding this graduated response within schools is ongoing and steps are being taken to ensure that schools feel equipped and confident to support children and young people with SEND in mainstream settings. Part of this work is ensuring the offer from specialist services is sufficient and accessible, as well as developing a culture of inclusivity in all settings and learning from best practice that is happening in some of our schools. Greater awareness of alternative approaches to managing the presenting behaviour of children and young people with SEND is critical. There has been the introduction of surgeries held jointly with therapies and specialist teachers to support this. Schools can access these without the need for referral, resulting in quicker advice and support. From September 2020, specialist teachers also introduced a 'helpline' as part of their new 'tiered approach' offer, enabling even more efficient support when schools need advice on specific issues. Educational Psychologists are also introducing a SEND Support offer this month, to increase the capacity of the early intervention offer, supporting schools with identifying needs and addressing them sooner.

Preparing for Adulthood

- 2.16 Preparation for adulthood is a key aspect of the Children and Families Act (2014) and as such the new SEND and Inclusion Strategy has been built around the 4 pillars identified in the Code of Practice: health, education and employment, social activity and independence. A new impact group has been established to drive this work, building on the experiences young people shared at the "Shout Out for SEND" conference in 2019, and recent feedback from members of the SEND Integrated Services Board. The four workstreams feeding into this impact group will focus on the four pillars, with cross working from a variety of teams, including housing, to really drive the goal of preparing our young people for adulthood forward holistically.
- 2.17 Alongside progressing these key areas, work is ongoing to integrate those aspects of Adult Social Care with the Children with Disabilities Team, to ensure smooth transitions into adulthood. The teams are currently co-located and an operating

model for an integrated 0-25 service with a single management and governance structure, aligned to best practice, is being developed.

Sufficiency; Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) / Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH)

- 2.18 The diagnosis and escalation of needs relating to ASC and SEMH needs in our children and young people is growing rapidly in Buckinghamshire, as is the pattern nationally. This group was originally created some time ago, and drove the creation of a new 42 place primary special school, dedicated to those children with SEMH needs primarily, as well as those with high functioning ASC needs, in September 2019.
- 2.19 The group has recently been re-configured and was re-launched in July 2020 as an impact group, co-chaired by the Head of the Integrated SEND Service and the Head of the Integrated Commissioning Service. Chairs were purposefully selected to drive through progress in this area on an equal footing between the local authority and health, given the issues cross both domains so significantly.
- 2.20 Separate workstreams, chaired by two Headteachers who are specialists in their relevant areas, have been set up focusing on ASC and SEMH independently. Their focus is to drive through early identification of need, enable equitable provision and support schools to be more inclusive. Identification of need encompasses issues at both an education and health level, and part of this work will focus on how we drive down waiting lists for diagnoses and the transition from children's to adults' mental health services. Sufficiency of provision is also critical to this work. These areas of need are increasing over time and we need to ensure that provision across education, health and care is in place to support our children and young people.

Integrated Commissioning

- 2.21 An all age Commissioning Service coordinates joint commissioning arrangements between the Local Authority and Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). Statutory budgets and pooled budget arrangements as well as non-statutory funding from the CCG for CAMHS, Integrated Therapies and Section 75 (including Community Paediatrics) facilitate smooth communication between services. Access is not dependent on any kind of funding agreement as joint commissioning is in place from the start, enabling the service to be child focused.
- 2.22 This is an area of real strength for us as a local area, as it demonstrates the strong partnership working in place, focused on the outcomes for children and young people, to create services to support them without delay. As an integral part of the Children and Families Act 2014, joint commissioning being evaluated as such a

positive aspect of our SEND improvement work, is hugely significant for Buckinghamshire.

Local Offer

- 2.23 The Children and Families Act 2014 and SEND Code of Practice requires all Local Authorities to produce a Local Offer that sets out in one place information about services available for children and young people with SEND aged 0 to 25 years. This includes people who do not have an EHCP. The Local Offer explains how to access these services and has useful information and signposting.
- 2.24 The [Buckinghamshire Local Offer](#) has been developed with parents, carers, young people and professionals and is continually being reviewed and improved. It aims to provide clear, accessible information about services and support available locally. Work is progressing to move the published Local Offer information onto the new corporate website platform and the new Family Information Service directory (due to launch November).
- 2.25 The Local Offer is responsive to feedback and there is a clear mechanism in place to publish feedback and the actions taken in the form of 'you said, we did' which is updated each month.
- 2.26 The Local Offer has involved young people in its development in a variety of ways. Young people have been asked to contribute to specific pieces of work and consultations. This has resulted in creating the promotional e-postcard and videos on topics suggested by local young people as they told us that they preferred video content to written information. Young people have been encouraged to promote the Local Offer and local activities through the SEN Young Inspectors scheme and Local Offer Champion training in schools to help raise the profile of the Local Offer amongst peers. Young people's feedback is regularly gathered through outreach at a wide range of events. For example, user feedback sessions led to the development of an [e-postcard](#) to help promote the Local Offer to young people. Several young people took part in user research interviews to inform the development of the new website content. This is an area we want to continue to develop to ensure the Local Offer is responsive to the needs of local young people.

3. Next steps and review

- 3.1 The SEND Improvement work is ongoing and regular updates are provided to the SEND Integrated Services Board. These take place quarterly and provide an opportunity for scrutiny and challenge.

Children's & Education Select Committee Work Programme 2020-21

Date	Topic	Description & Purpose	Lead Officer	Contributors
29 th September at 2pm	SEND Improvement Plan	For Members to understand the SEND Improvement Plans and progress to date.	Simon James, Hero Slinn	Anita Cranmer, Tolis, Simon, Hero
	Covid 19 Recovery	To receive an update on children returning to school & how the Council has supported this. What support can schools offer/access for children's mental resilience and to support those transitioning from Early years to reception and Yr 6 to Yr 7 at this challenging time. And to hear if there has been an increase in referrals to Social Care as anticipated. Any lessons learned though Covid-19 including any practice changes which might be carried forward.	Simon James	Anita Cranmer, Tolis, Simon, Head teachers
5 th November at 2pm	Early Help Update	To receive an update on and review progress of the Early Years model which was introduced in September 2019.	Simon James, Gareth Morgan	Anita Cranmer, Tolis, Simon, Gareth Morgan
	Educational Standards report	To receive the annual report on educational standards and attainment in Buckinghamshire.	Simon James	Anita Cranmer, Tolis, Simon, Head Teachers
	*Inquiry Scope - TBC			
7 th January 2021 at 2pm	Support to Care Leavers	To receive a report on support that the Council provides to Care Leavers (to include housing options – full scope of discussion TBC)	TBC	
	Ofsted – Monitoring Visit update or Improvement Plan update		Richard Nash	Mark Shaw, Tolis, Richard Nash
4 th March 2021 at 2pm	Children's Mental Health	Details to be scoped – possible focus on Tier 4 MH provision	TBC	
	Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Partnership	Update on the work of the Partnership	TBC	

*Possible in depth inquiry into Social Worker Recruitment – Scoping document to be discussed in November

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