



Children's & Education Select Committee minutes

Minutes of the meeting of the Children's & Education Select Committee held on Thursday 5 November 2020 in Virtual meeting via MS teams, commencing at 2.00 pm and concluding at 3.51 pm.

Members present

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

Others in attendance

G Drawmer, Mr S James, G Morgan, K Sutherland, S Taylor, C Pease and M Skoyles

Apologies

Agenda Item

1 Apologies for Absence

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting. No apologies had been received.

2 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Dominic Barnes declared that his wife worked for a grammar school in Buckinghamshire.

3 Minutes

It was agreed that the name of the person who had submitted the public questions be added to the minutes; future minutes would also include the name of the person who submitted the question(s).

ACTION: Mrs K Sutherland

The actions of the previous minutes were reviewed:

- Mrs Sutherland had amended the previous minutes.
- Item 5 Chairman's Update - The presentation had been circulated to the committee members.
- Item 7 SEND Improvement Plan - Mr James had provided a response to Councillor Stuchbury on whether there was a waiting list for speech therapy. Mrs Sutherland agreed to circulate the response to the committee members.

ACTION: Mrs Sutherland

- The Chairman and Mr James had discussed the timeframe of the possible agenda item on the forward plan.
- It was agreed that councillors would be referred to as 'Councillor' in future minutes.

RESOLVED: The minutes of the meeting held on 29 September 2020 were AGREED as an accurate record subject to the amendments mentioned above.

4 Public Questions

There were no public questions.

5 Chairman's Update

The Chairman advised that the Select Committee was very fortunate to have Mr Mark Skoyles, the primary school representative and Ms Clare Pease, the secondary school representative, as co-opted members to assist with education scrutiny matters. Mr Skoyles and Ms Pease had served previously and were welcomed back to the Committee.

In response to an update on a councillor's request to move the Children's and Education Select Committee meeting to the evening; the Chairman advised that all the meeting dates were agreed by the Shadow Authority and these committee meetings were arranged in the afternoon.

6 Family Support Service - One Year on

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Mark Shaw, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Councillor Anita Cranmer, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, Mr Tolis Vouyioukas, Corporate Director for Children's Services Mr Gareth Morgan, Head of Early Help and Mr Simon James, Service Director, Education.

Councillor Shaw advised that it had been agreed, by cabinet decision in March 2019, that a Family Support Service (FSS) be provided. The FSS launched on 2 September 2019 and aimed to provide local services to families at the right time. There were three teams; in Aylesbury, High Wycombe and the Chiltern and South Bucks area whose focus was to improve family resilience and obtain the best outcomes for children and young people. Positive feedback had been received and the Buckinghamshire Council Improvement Partner, Hampshire County Council, had been impressed with progress to date, bearing in mind the impact of Covid-19. Over the last year the FSS had seen a 16% increase in people seeking help and advice. Councillor Shaw expressed his gratitude to all staff over the last year and added that there would be a greater sense of concern over children and young people's wellbeing during the second lockdown.

Mr James highlighted the recommendations in the report and emphasised that the focus of the service was to provide the right support at the right time and to intervene as early as possible. Mr James explained that there was flexibility in the way the service offered its support to families across the county and there were two primary aims for the service; firstly, to support vulnerable families and their children

to achieve positive outcomes and, secondly, to make sure that services were integrated wherever possible to improve the resilience of families and the local communities.

Between the start of the service and March 2020 the service ran as planned; however, following the first lockdown, the majority of the service was provided by virtual contact. There was also an online Family Information Service (FIS) to help families self-serve. 77% of the outcomes agreed with families had been achieved and the improvement had been noted by the Improvement Board. However, there was always scope for improvement and the FSS would continue to focus on three areas: to ensure that all plans reflected issues across the whole family and were considered in a holistic way; to ensure that a reflective approach was embedded, particularly in connection with supervision and to ensure that the recording and case summaries were always up to date and appropriately detailed. Performance would be monitored on a monthly and quarterly basis.

The following points were raised during discussion:

- A Member asked for clarification on whether the youth service would be brought back in-house as he reported hearing that young people had nowhere to go. Demand was rising and the Member asked how the service was coping with budget pressures and Covid-19. Mr Tolis Vouyioukas, Corporate Director, Children's Services, stated that the family support model included a youth offer targeted to those who needed it most. The report referred to a model that was based on local need instead of a 'one size fits all' approach. Buckinghamshire Council, like any other local authority in the country, knew that families were finding the situation challenging and were working to make sure they had the right support. Mr Morgan added that the oversight of the 16 community-led youth centres had been brought back in-house to enable the team to work alongside youth practitioners in community settings in order to increase capacity across the county for young people to obtain support and guidance appropriate to need.
- Covid-19 had provided the opportunity to create a virtual forum for shared ideas and to develop shared responses. There was a real pressure around the services as well as the voluntary community led groups; youth practitioners continued to operate within the integrated FSS to effectively target and support families with teenagers. The youth practitioners also carried out one to one work and worked alongside partner organisations to make the best use of resources to support young people through these difficult times.
- Mr Morgan noted that the Community Boards would also help to support the development of responses to local community need alongside FSS provision.
- A Member commented that the report did not provide a correlation between the old and the new service; a higher number of people were being seen but he queried how the quality of outcomes was being measured. Mr Morgan stated that there was no direct comparison. The report set out the progress

made against the three particular areas that the service wanted to change i.e. accessibility, being connected to communities and partner agencies and providing a more targeted service towards those families most in need of support. In terms of a direct comparison on the Children's Centre and family centre models, the nearest detail available was the increased number of sessions that were being run out of 16 sites compared to 35 children's centre sites; the comparison in terms of the age range and also the level of activity which was targeted at families who had additional needs compared to those using children's centres in order to access universal provision.

- Accessibility had improved as there had been a 21% increase in demand; 16% of those accessing the service came from the individuals themselves. The other accessibility improvement was the online and digital offer that the service provided; demand had increased across all the platforms resulting in increased access to support services.
- In response to concern over the expected surge at the end of the second lockdown and how the FSS would deal with the increased demand, Mr Morgan explained that much of the work with families started pre-lockdown would have concluded which had created capacity now to respond to increasing demand. The Service had adapted their way of working during the second lockdown and had continued to see families face to face where possible.
- A Member asked where the 16 centres were and requested assurance that those who needed help were able to access help; Mr Morgan agreed to re-circulate a list, but confirmed that the 16 centres were chosen after careful data and needs analysis. Mr Morgan reiterated that demand had increased and that the right people were being reached.

ACTION: Mr Morgan to circulate a list of the 16 Family Centres.

- Concern was expressed over the impact of lockdown on young people's mental health and whether the strategy supported the children individually or just as a family. Mr Morgan explained that the service did recognise that young individuals needed help; a family support worker was linked to every school in the county; staff had been seconded to the mental health support scheme in schools (an externally funded partnership project) and the FSS played a significant part in formation of those teams in order to respond early and support young people to build their resilience.
- Mr Morgan confirmed that the FSS was promoted via the FIS and social media but communication was not sent out via the school children; however, the FSS had regular dialogue with all the schools and there was a reliance on partner agencies. Mr James stressed that it was a targeted service and that not all parents would necessarily know about it.
- Following a query on whether there was sufficient resources to support the virtual clubs and health and wellbeing in youth clubs and whether analysis had been carried out to determine which sessions should be prioritised to reach the right people; Mr Morgan advised that the FSS was constantly considering requests to deliver sessions and would like to be able to deliver session in more community based locations; there was more work to be carried out with the Community Boards to explore new opportunities. Mr

James added that he was confident there were sufficient resources which were used in a targeted, careful way, in partnership and collaboration with partners, across Buckinghamshire. Mr Morgan confirmed that training would be provided to youth centres if required, once it was safe to do so.

- Reference was made to the graph on page 17 of agenda pack. The report stated 77% of families achieved their outcomes but the graph showed 63% family outcomes achieved. Mr Morgan explained the discrepancy in that 63% was the percentage of outcomes of everyone who was referred into the FSS (the gross figure). The figure of 77% was the percentage of families who positively engaged with the FSS i.e. a net figure measured against a slightly reduced cohort.
- In response to being asked whether use of the 'positive parenting' scheme had been considered as a preventative measure; Mr Morgan stated that the FSS did deliver the course where possible. The 'Family Links' programme was used by the Service as it focussed on mental wellbeing within the family as the foundation for change. It was a targeted offer at level 2. The FSS did not have the resource to roll parenting support out as a universal offer but with the health visitor service and various other services there was a large parenting offer across the county to address a significant amount of need. Mr Morgan highlighted that the non-targeted part of the service was available via the FIS; every school had been provided with an FIS information pack but it would be possible to send out a refresh. One of the Members added that a link could also be posted on school web sites.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their contribution.

RESOLVED: The Children and Education Select Committee NOTED the progress made and impact achieved by the Family Support Service in the first year of operation.

7 Educational Standards

Councillor Anita Cranmer, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills thanked the schools for their work over the last six months and reported that all the schools were currently open; only two schools had had to close for a short period of time. 16 schools had been mildly affected by Covid-19 and there had been 39 reported cases in 85,000 children. Councillor Cranmer highlighted that the information in the report related to educational outcomes for children and young people in Buckinghamshire for the academic year 2018-2019 and did not include this year's GCSE results as they would not be reported nationally. Exclusions were still below the national rate and, nationally, Buckinghamshire schools still had a higher than national rating of good and above.

Mr James also formally thanked the schools and advised that the purpose of the detailed report was to provide the Select Committee with updated information on educational standards and attainment. Mr James highlighted the following key points:

- Buckinghamshire was ranked 6th in the country for good level of

development in the Early Years Foundation Stage; the inequality gap had decreased and a higher percentage of Buckinghamshire pupils with an EHCP achieved a good level of development compared with national data.

- Key Stage One levels for reading, writing and maths were above the national average. Pupils with an EHCP achieved above national attainment levels in Reading at Key Stage 1. Pupils with SEN Support also achieved attainment levels above the national in reading and writing.
- Combined attainment in Reading, Writing and Maths for pupils on SEN Support and those with an EHCP, was above national at Key Stage 2.
- Key Stage 4 results were above the national, including those with SEN. Looked after children were also above the national average in reading and writing.
- Exclusion rates were positive.
- The percentage of pupils in Buckinghamshire schools rated as Ofsted good or outstanding had increased to 90% in 2019. The national average was 85%.
- The percentage of children in Buckinghamshire Early Years settings rated as Ofsted good or outstanding had increased to 96% in 2019 and was in line with the national figure.
- Disadvantaged children remained the highest priority; focus and a clear plan of action would continue to narrow the attainment gap.

The following points were raised in discussion:

- Following a query on whether the high exclusion rates for Black and Ethnic Minority (BAME) pupils would be addressed; Mr James confirmed that this had been included in the action plan. Mr Gareth Drawmer, Head of Achievement and Learning, added that BAME, Pakistani heritage and disadvantaged children in rural areas were disproportionately represented and that these three groups were at the heart of the work being carried out. It was agreed that the outcome of the forthcoming conferences on Narrowing the Gap and monthly workshops be included in the next report to the Select Committee.
- The Chairman requested an updated figure on the number of children missing from education and whether there had been an increase in elective home education since March 2020. Mr Drawmer stated he did not have the precise figures but confirmed that there had been an increase in elective home education. The number of children missing in education had also risen, partly due to people moving in and out of the area whilst the schools were shut and the time lag in the information from the schools.

ACTION: Mr Drawmer

- It was noted that there had been a noticeable increase in the attainment gap across all age groups and it had been reported in the media that the gap was likely to increase further due to Covid-19. Mr James assured the Committee that this issue was the biggest priority and an action plan was in place. It was agreed that a report be provided at a future date setting out how the action plan/strategies had performed.

ACTION: Mrs Sutherland

- A Member stated that it had been a continuous problem to narrow the attainment gap in Buckinghamshire; he felt the report did not adequately reflect the fact that many children came into the county to be educated in grammar schools. There was also concern that many disadvantaged children would have missed out on a large part of their education due to Covid-19. Mr James stated that the reporting style and details contained in the report were in line with the best practice required by the Department for Education (DfE). Mr James advised that many disadvantaged children were now in receipt of a laptop; schools had worked to ensure the right interventions were in place and public exams had been delayed by three weeks to allow vulnerable children to progress.
- Mr Skoyles reiterated how well the schools had done during Covid-19 and asked whether any data was available on the Side by Side Programme to show the difference the resource had made to the intervention schools. Mr Drawmer stated that there had been improvements in the latest results for secondary schools; however, the results had been teacher assessed rather than by exam so a direct comparison could not be made with previous years. It had not been possible to make a judgement on 2019-2020 on primary school results as all formal exams had been stopped from early years through to Key Stage 2. The Side by Side Programme was introduced in 2018-2019 and initial feedback had been very positive and demonstrated the schools had improved their outcomes. Mr Skoyles advised it would be useful for the Select Committee to see the results data and trends. Mr Drawmer clarified that the funding for this project was provided via a grant from the DfE.

ACTION: Mrs Sutherland

- Ms Pease reported that it was noticeable how happy the children were to be back in school and that the impact on the children's mental health and education could not be underestimated. There would be a number of children in Buckinghamshire who would have been borderline for a grammar school place and, who having missed six months of school, and perhaps not had the capacity to be tutored, would be looking for a place in a non-selective school resulting in filling the grammar school places with children from out of the county. Would the local authority be monitoring the potential increase of requirements for non-selective places in schools within the County from September? Mr James advised that monitoring was required, and was reviewed monthly, to ensure accurate forward planning, particularly with the impact of the 11+.
- Ms Pease stated that the Government had recently released a statement saying the allocation of laptops to schools had been reduced and asked whether any provision was in place to ensure that all children could access a laptop if schools were closed. Mr Drawmer reported that the number of children who required a laptop was smaller than initially thought. The Service was working on the fact that there were enough laptops in the system but the situation would be monitored carefully.
- Concern was raised over families who might only have one laptop between three children. Mr James explained that the government scheme provided laptops to specific groups of children e.g. those with an allocated social

worker. Most schools now had an allocation of laptops and could provide a laptop to children if need be. Regular meetings took place with school leaders to ascertain if there were particular children in need and Mr James was confident that the needs of the disadvantaged children would be addressed.

- A Member asked for information to be provided in the future of how children from a low economic background had fared during the pandemic. Mr James stated that the country was still in unprecedented times and it was unknown how the children would fare; the Service was doing everything it could to support the children and, once life was back to normal, the service would take stock and look at the lessons learned for the future. Mr Drawmer added that there was focus on self-regulation in the pupils to develop strategies for resilience. The Service was working carefully to manage the impact on this cohort of children and additional funding was available for disadvantaged children in terms of tutoring and support.
- In response to being asked if the Council had taken steps regarding the Supreme Court's decision on the capability of SEN children taking the 11+; Mr Drawmer stated that SEN children had appropriate adjustments made to access the tests.

The Chairman thanked all the officers, school staff, head teachers and social workers on behalf of the Select Committee for their hard work.

RESOLVED: The Children and Education Select Committee NOTED the report and the action plans it contained.

8 Work Programme

It was proposed that the following items be included on the Select Committee work programme for the meeting on 7 January 2021:

- Children's Mental Health
- A report from the Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Partnership (if there was no monitoring visit by Ofsted).

Following Mr Skoyles' request for clarification on the youth offer, it was agreed that this would be discussed after the meeting..

ACTION: Mrs Sutherland

Mrs Sutherland advised that a small working group would be set up to carry out initial scoping on the recruitment of social workers. It was agreed that Mrs Sutherland would circulate an email to the committee members asking for volunteers to contact her.

ACTION: Mrs Sutherland

RESOLVED: The Children and Education Select Committee NOTED the work programme.

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Date of Next Meeting

Thursday 7 January 2021 at 2.00 p.m.

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