



Buckinghamshire Council Children's & Education Select Committee

Minutes

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHILDREN'S & EDUCATION SELECT COMMITTEE HELD ON THURSDAY 30 JUNE 2022 IN THE OCULUS, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNCIL, GATEHOUSE ROAD, AYLESBURY HP19 8FF, COMMENCING AT 2.00 PM AND CONCLUDING AT 4.15 PM

MEMBERS PRESENT

Z Williams, S Adoh, K Bates, D Blamires, A Collingwood, M Dormer, N Hussain, S Kayani, Dr W Matthews, A Osibogun, D Summers, P Turner, J Baum and A Cranmer

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE

K Dover, S James, R Nash, Ms T Ironmonger, P Kudhail, Cartwright, T Charlton, S Hadwin and G Porter

Agenda Item

1 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN FOR THIS MEETING

The Senior Scrutiny Officer welcomed everyone to the meeting and gave apologies for the Chairman, Councillor Julie Ward as she had tested positive for Covid and therefore was unable to attend the meeting.

It was RESOLVED that Councillor Mark Dormer be elected Chairman for this meeting of the Select Committee.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Tony Wilson and Councillors James, Jones and Towns.

3 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

This item was deferred until the next meeting of the Select Committee to be held on 8th September 2022, to allow the elected Chairman, Councillor Julie Ward to make the appointment.

4 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Bates declared a personal interest as Chairman of Governors at the Growing Together Foundation

Councillor Blamires declared a personal interest as parent of a SEND child

Councillor Kayani declared interests as Chairman of the Dyspraxia Foundation and employee of the Bourne End Academy

Councillor Hussein declared a personal interest as a governor at Pebble Brook School

Councillor Osibogun declared a personal interest as a governor at Buckingham Primary School
Councillor Turner declared a personal interest as a Governor at Chiltern Wood School
Zoe Williams declared a personal interest as a parent governor.

Councillor Hussein requested information be brought back to the committee on the issues of the 11 plus examination.

The Chairman for the meeting agreed that the issue of how to include this in the work programme be brought back to the next committee meeting for the Chairman Councillor Ward to advise on.

Action: KD/RN/Cllr Ward

5 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the Select Committee meetings held on 22nd March 2022 and 18th May 2022 were reviewed.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meetings of the committee held on 22nd March and 18th May 2022 be AGREED as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

6 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions were received in relation to this agenda of the Select Committee.

7 LOCAL AREA SEND INSPECTION OUTCOME

Councillor Dormer welcomed Tracey Ironmonger, Service Director; Gayle Porter and Tina Charlton from Buckinghamshire NHS Trust; Sue Hadwin from Oxford Health NHS Trust and Niki Cartwright from NHS Berkshire West CCG who attended the meeting to speak on this item.

Councillor Cranmer, Cabinet portfolio holder for Children's Services and Education introduced the report. It was noted that a thorough investigation of the local area SEND provision had taken place between 28th February and 11th March this year involving staff, service users and parents. The work had included a significant analysis of reported information from over 1000 parents. The review was the first of its kind on this service carried out jointly by the Care Quality Commission and Ofsted.

Councillor Cranmer noted that in the report was good overall and that the service was reported to know its area of work well and was aware of the areas that needed to improve as highlighted in the inspection report. These areas were already subject to improvement by both the council and the healthcare services who were working in partnership. The areas included the need for a cohesive area strategy on therapies, waiting times for autistic/ADHD reports and waiting times for appointments with community paediatricians.

Richard Nash noted that this was a local area inspection involving the health, education and departmental services which would work together to address the highlighted issues and ensure that all children requiring the services would receive what they required.

Simon James noted that there was a whole system approach to addressing the highlighted issues. The focus of the review of services had been on identifying needs; assessing and meeting needs and thirdly, identifying what the positive outcomes were for children and young people in the area. FACT (Families and Children Together) Bucks had taken evidence from parents and carers as well as speaking to parents within schools and this evidence was taken very seriously and was documented in the response letter from Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission.

Much work had commenced on the three areas of work recommended for improvement which would be responded to in the written statement of action. The statement would be submitted to Ofsted via the Department for Education and NHS England no later than 8th August. The strengths currently found in the SEND service were detailed in the response letter as follows:-

- good SEND governance which included the Board co-chaired by Simon Jones and the chair of FACT Bucks,
- good leadership in local authority, health, social care and schools
- co-production was embedded in terms of strategic work
- effective joint commissioning especially relating to children's mental health needs
- Children are well prepared for school
- EHCPs are provided in a timely manner
- The independent board provided an added level of scrutiny
- Fortnightly planning meetings occurred to ensure the written statement of action was on track
- All elements formed the planned ongoing journey for the service
- Work would continue with parents to aid improvements

Tracey Ironmonger, noted that the overall responsibility for funding the SEND service lay with the CCGs. The council's integrated commissioning team undertake the procurement and contract monitoring of services via a section 75 partnership agreement and this was particularly useful where services are provided jointly. The area is complex with a wide range of providers delivering joined up services to children which included:

- Children's integrated therapies; delivered by Bucks Healthcare Trust and including community speech and language therapy, physiotherapy and occupational therapy to children registered with GP in or resident in Buckinghamshire
- The neurodevelopment pathway delivered with Oxford Health Foundation Trust and Bucks Healthcare Trust which provides pre-assessments for diagnostic assessment of autism and ADHD and post diagnostic support. This service provides a single point of access managed by Oxford Health. BHT is responsible for 0-11 year olds and Oxford Health is responsible for 11-18 year olds.
- The community paediatrics service which is provided by Bucks Healthcare Trust and which gives a specialist medical service from prevention through to identification, assessment, diagnosis and case management for children and young people with moderate and severe disabilities, special educational needs and those looked after or going through the adoption process.
- It was considered important to maintain a strong relationship with parents and carers through FACT Bucks
- Plans were developing via a system wide approach and co-production between services providers
- The written statement for action would be an opportunity to accelerate the service's progress
- From 1st July the CCGs for Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West, would merge and become an integrated care board which would look at the challenging area of improving consistency of service provision across the areas.

In response to questions from Councillors it was noted that:

- There is an existing improvement plan already in progress which included preparation for adulthood and early identification of children moving from primary to secondary school; and ensuring the quality of EHCPs remains high and that the experience of annual reviews of EHCPs remains good

- Care plans are a national issue. Both Berkshire West and Oxfordshire also have long wait times to access services. We have funding for a CAMHS academy and the service was assessing how to develop roles to supplement the workforce.

Action: Niki Cartwright to report back to committee with information on waiting times

- A different approach was required and as such, schools' meetings have discussed embedding health professionals in schools. Some schools are already employing specialists directly. The recommendation was for a hub and spoke model with expertise based in geographical regions so that specialists would get to know a particular school's culture more thoroughly and therefore be able to respond to the children's needs more effectively. Recommissioning as a whole system over the next 2-3 years was being assessed.
- The committee's attention was drawn to consider Birmingham and Camden which were areas with strong service level agreements and were good models to examine.
- The issues noted by the review were long-standing ones and the focus now was on mitigating the long wait times and secondly how to avoid these issues again in the future.
- Service level agreements were very detailed and the specifications would be reassessed to ensure that the whole system would work as well as possible
- The expertise for making a difference to children and young people once needs were identified, should be based in schools
- Waiting lists were being prioritised on the basis of clinical needs and measures were brought in to relieve pressure on the system
- Reports from private practitioners commissioned by parents were accepted as part of EHCPs and quality assured to save time in the assessment process
- Diagnoses were not the only requirement for assessment of a school place. Assessments were based on the needs of the child
- Specialists helping in schools, enabled the upskilling of staff in schools and this would be developed further as part of the whole school approach, with oversight from specialists in place.
- It was suggested that a task and finish group of councillors could be formed to look into a SEND related area.

Action: Simon James to look at possible areas for a SEND task and finish group

- Richard Nash noted that with regards to supported living, work was underway with the housing and commissioning teams to try to match young people to accommodation appropriately, taking into account their needs and wishes. Much progress had been made in this area so far and it would be business as usual to ensure the correct level of support here.
- John McCoughlin chaired the Improvement Board which would monitor progress and would also discuss potential solutions. The written statement of actions would go to the next meeting on 11th July for comment and approval. The board would have an on-going remit to monitor progress of this. Board work would dovetail with the other improvement work which was on-going.
- There is a requirement to report back to the Department of Education within 4-6 months.
- The CQC would return to reinspect the service within the next three years.
- All three areas for improvement were already in the improvement plan prior to inspection. Measures had already been put in place to make improvements such as the introduction of Speak Link in schools, and commissioning services from Helios -a

- partnership around diagnostic support and an evidence-based provider.
- Feedback from parents was sought via FACT, or via the feedback button on the local offer, via “You Said We Did” and analysis via any complaints.
 - Action: Data from Helios to be brought back to Select committee**
- The plan would give details of aims and when targets would be expected to be met and what the hoped impact would be for families.
 - Action: The Directors noted that they could consider areas that would be helpful to be reviewed by a task and finish group including areas of good practice.**
- Further to new legislation relating to the development of multi-academy trusts, schools were already considering potential structures and it was noted that the local authority would still have the same level of statutory oversight with a key role in engaging and ensuring strong outcomes for children in the future.
- The Side by Side project would also be used to help develop improvements

8 **RAPID REVIEW GROUP REPORT ON SOCIAL WORKER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION**

Councillor Mark Dormer introduced the report of the rapid review group on social worker recruitment and retention.

The work had initially covered the whole service but the group had re-focused their focus in the early stages of the review to the child protection and child assessment teams where there were additional challenges and problems.

The approach taken had covered holding meetings with directors; managers; front line social workers and undertaking research on the national picture. Focus groups with social workers were held in confidential sessions to allow employees to be open with their views on where improvements or changes could be made. Meetings were also held with finance and human resources (HR) officers to look at salaries, issues regarding leavers and to consider how the HR service aligned with the front-line staff.

Richard Nash noted that the issue of recruitment and retention of social workers was not a new issue but it had come under much greater pressure during the last 16 months when a 60 % increase in work in the child protection area had been experienced. As a statutory service, all calls on the service had to be addressed to ensure all children in Buckinghamshire were safe. Social workers often worked anti-social hours under pressure. Increasing the number of social workers was important and the social work academy would be increased this year to train 60 social workers. It was important to support and train the social workers well to equip them to deal with the difficult scenarios they might face. There was also a balance to be achieved between needs and resources.

In response to a question, Richard Nash detailed the timeline that social workers often had to follow in relation to a section 47 incident where the council had a statutory duty to respond. The timeline might include the teacher noticing a problem, the designated officer who would then contact the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) as soon as practically possible. A social worker would then be required to speak to the child at their home on the same day, possibly with police colleagues with the parent/carer. If a placement was required due to harm caused to a child, the social worker might be working till very late in the evening, to ensure the child was safe. The same social worker would be back into work the next morning to continue their work on the incident and having possibly been working under very stressful circumstances.

The review group had considered it their role to discover what the council could do to help social workers to carry on performing their role and be supported.

Richard Nash noted the recommendations regarding improving I.T. systems for supporting social workers and the challenges to do so in making them compatible with the current I.T. social care systems.

Palvinder Kudhail noted streamlining work had commenced on the redesign of forms and both

I.T. and business support. A report was expected to the Director next week with short term and longer term items.

Action: improvements to be reported back to the Select Committee

In response to further questions it was noted that:

- being an agency worker was preferred by some social workers due to role flexibility. In some high profile cases there had been a significant impact on permanent staff which had made agency working more attractive.

- Inks were good with local universities but the council's own social worker academy provided more social workers more immediately. Three apprentices of the ASYE academy would qualify next April and 6 more were starting in October. The social work academy runs the training programme for social workers with support from HR where required.

- retention bonuses would help to retain staff by showing the team they are valued. However, the cost of living in Buckinghamshire was relatively expensive compared to many areas of the country and this was a deterrent to working here.

- there were many examples of good management in the service e.g. in the stable care leaving team which if extended across the service would really help retain staff.

Action: the committee to write to thank all the social workers for their commitment and work

Councillor Dormer thanked the review group for their work and noted that the report would be taken to the Cabinet on 12th July and would respond to the recommendations thereon.

Action: Councillor Cranmer to report back to the committee in six and nine months' time on progress made in relation to the recommendations in the report.

9 WORK PROGRAMME

The Select committee received the draft work programme and made the following suggestions for consideration with the Chairman at the next meeting:-

- Councillor Collingwood noted the action plan on the Ofsted report and it was suggested that this come back to the next meeting of the committee.
- An update on the Sufficiency Strategy was requested to come back to the January committee meeting.
- An item was requested on vulnerable children missing from education.
- Information regarding the attainment gap would be included in the Education Standards report in January 2023 and would include the process of the 11 plus exam. This issue was being managed by the Risk Management and Audit Committee on 15th July.
- The issue of school transport would be discussed at the Transport, Environment and Climate Change Committee on 3rd November.

10 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Select Committee would be held on Thursday 8th September 2022 at 2.00 p.m. in The Oculus, The Gateway, Aylesbury