Buckinghamshire Council

Children's & Education Select Committee

Minutes

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHILDREN'S & EDUCATION SELECT COMMITTEE HELD ON THURSDAY 3 NOVEMBER 2022 IN THE OCULUS, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNCIL, GATEHOUSE ROAD, AYLESBURY HP19 8FF, COMMENCING AT 2.00 PM AND CONCLUDING AT 4.20 PM

MEMBERS PRESENT

J Ward, M Dormer, S Adoh, K Bates, D Blamires, A Collingwood, N Hussain, S James, C Jones, S Kayani, Dr W Matthews, A Osibogun, D Summers, P Turner and T Wilson

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE

R Stuchbury, K Dover, S James, J Macilwraith and G Drawmer

Agenda Item

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

It was noted that Councillor J Towns and Zoe Williams had given their apologies for the meeting.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- Cllr K Bates declared a personal interest as a Chair of Governors for nursery schools in Buckinghamshire.
- Cllr S Kayani personal interest as a Policy Advisor for the Dyspraxia Foundation and as an employee at Bourne End Academy.
- Cllr A Osibogun declared a personal interest as a school governor.
- Cllr P Turner declared a personal interest as a school governor.
- Mr T Wilson declared a personal interest as a trustee of the Oxford Diocesan Bucks Schools Trust.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the committee held on 8th September 2022 be AGREED as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

4 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

One public question was considered at the meeting as attached to the agenda and a verbal response was provided by the Cabinet Member. The question and its response are appended to the minutes.

Councillor Robin Stuchbury, asked the following two questions, the answer to which and further detail was given at the item 7; “Children Missing Education” to which the questions referred.

I think we all would agree that children missing from education is a truly serious concern hence why the committee has a report on this subject on your agenda today,

You will be aware I'm sure that many of our secondary schools are oversubscribed which does create a difficulty for parents entering Buckinghamshire. This can result in their children missing education, sometimes through a lack of places in specific areas like my own Buckingham school which is oversubscribed.

Your report rightfully notes all the different communities where children are often missing education. What I am completely unclear of is how a measurement of children missing from education in totality is being undertaken over a long period due to a lack of a completed EHCP report, although there is a snapshot within the report From July 2022.

I see no specific graph monitoring the increase or decrease of children seeking special education support through not having a EHCP and whether this is determining factor in these children missing education. This affects families regardless of economic background.
Within your report is the total number of 609 children missing education what would like to know is what percentage of these children are children with special educational needs.
Are there any figures available information available to verify whether it is the lack of special educational support & a EHCP that is a determining factor in missing education within Buckinghamshire over and above other social concerns stated within the report and I would seek an officers understanding of the question posed in these specific areas cited in the question to the committee.

To summarize my questions are:

Of children missing from education:

- *What is the percentage and number of pupils with EHCPs that are CME?*
- *What is the percentage and number of pupils at SEN Support that are CME?*

5 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE BUCKINGHAMSHIRE SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN'S PARTNERSHIP BOARD 2021-2022

The Chairman welcomed Cllr Anita Cranmer, Cabinet Member for Children’s and Education, and Walter McCulloch, Independent Chair of the Board, who attended the meeting to speak on this item.

In their presentation, the following points were highlighted:

- The Children's Partnership was made up of three statutory partners: the Council, the Police and the NHS. However, many more organisations were involved in the partnership, such as schools, voluntary sector organisations and the Probation Service.
- The role of the Independent Chair was to give strong independent leadership to the Partnership Board, providing an overview of all its groups’ work and work with the Board’s partners; to achieve a reciprocal scrutiny arrangement with senior leaders in all three statutory partner organisations.
- A series of subgroups had been established to demonstrate the impact of the work on children. Six subgroups were currently operating, with another (learning and development group) having started shortly before the reporting period. Walter

McCulloch emphasised the importance of each of the sub-groups' work areas.

- All children's partnerships had a policy procedure subgroup, which contained a range of resources and tools for practitioners to familiarise themselves with those regulations.
- In terms of education and learning, the group engaged with a range of partners across schools, academies and the education sector.
- The local safeguarding practice review subgroup focused on cases where safeguarding issues had arisen. It had recently undertaken a review of its work and noted that the implementation of some actions had been delayed, possibly due to the pandemic or due to a delay in legal proceedings.
- The business plan outlined a focus on a strong committee partnership and striving towards tangible improvements to children's lives. Operational policies and procedures were noted to have a great impact on day-to-day practice, and the importance of ensuring they were kept up to date was highlighted. There had also been a focus on early intervention and prevention up to the age of two and contextual safeguarding and the challenges it could bring for services.
- Children, young people and their families were always involved in safeguarding plans, however, not in a systematic way.
- The multi-agency training programme was noted to have been creditable. There was an outstanding action to complete a training needs analysis, but a plan was in place to deliver this.

During the discussion, comments and questions raised by the Committee included:

- A Member highlighted the importance of equality, diversity and inclusion in the annual reports and its photographs, which was echoed by Walter McCulloch.
- It was noted that the timelines for the targeted work plans within the subgroups would be agreed in due course. Furthermore, meetings would also be held with senior leaders to discuss the steps needed to deliver the best outcomes for children, young people and their families. It was noted that the Committee would be updated on the outcome of these meetings in around six months to provide support for any changes.

ACTION: WM

- Children and young people were not currently involved in the development of the safeguarding plans, though it was anticipated that attendance at partnership meetings and involvement through existing school councils might be facilitated in the future.
- A Member suggested that it would be helpful to receive an overview of quantitative performance data to ensure success rates, attendance rates are adequately monitored. Walter McCulloch advised that these data could be provided to the committee and included in the next annual report.

ACTION: WM

- The importance of engaging with further education institutions was highlighted, particularly as young people between the ages of 16 and 25 might find the transition to further education challenging, both from an educational and social care point of view.
- In response to a Member's question around support for children attending schools outside of Buckinghamshire, Walter McCulloch advised that meetings are held with other independent chairs in adjacent areas to gain understanding about the issues they might face and discuss any steps to ensure adequate cross-border support.
- Walter McCulloch emphasised the importance of multi-agency safeguarding training and advised that a meeting with sub-group chairs would be held shortly to ensure completion. He would update the Committee with a timeframe once this information was made available to him.

ACTION: WM

- Walter McCulloch explained that within serious case reviews the category of

'invisible men' referred to adult males who were associated with the family in question and who posed potential danger as they did not engage with the work services provided to the family in question.

- A Member suggested that a 'RAG' (red, amber, green) rating system be introduced to the business plan to colour-code information accordingly for easy recognition of the different levels of work.

The Chairman thanked the presenters for their attendance and participation.

6 CHILDREN'S SERVICES UPDATE - MARCH TO SEPTEMBER 2022

The Chairman invited Cllr Anita Cranmer, Cabinet Member for Children's and Education, and John Macilwraith, Corporate Director of Children's Services, to speak on this item.

In their presentation, the following points were highlighted:

- Two regulatory inspections had been held between March and September 2022: one on the Youth Offending Service and secondly the OFSTED focus visit regarding care leavers. The results would be shared with the Committee once available.

  - Action JM

- Improvement of the service posed as a challenge due to growing demand and the increased complexity of cases. However, regular meetings with the Improvement Board were being held and the improvement journey so far had been successful. The Council was further adapting its procedures around provision and placements for young people to whom the Council was a corporate parent.
- A Shout out for SEND event, in line with the Council's participation strategy would be held on the 9th of November to consider the views of young people. This would be the Council's second event of this nature. The event would primarily focus on children in mainstream schools receiving SEN support and their inclusion within the schools. The feedback would then be forwarded to the individual schools directly.

During discussion, comments and questions raised by the Committee included:

- The Council's Housing Services had prioritised accommodation for care leavers over the last 12-18 months. The transition from leaving care was a key element in the strategy. It had been successful in supporting young people into employment, education and training with around 20 care leavers commencing university this year. More detailed data around the categories of destinations of care leavers would be provided to the Committee.

  ACTION: JM

- A Member raised concerns about the pledge to deliver up to £6 million tutoring packages nationally in light of current recruitment challenges of teachers and teaching assistants. Simon James echoed that recruitment, particularly of teaching assistants had been challenging due to the cost-of-living crisis. As this was a national issue, discussions were being held with the Department for Education. The team were also examining opportunities for further benefits being put in place to assist teaching assistants with living costs as a matter of urgency. He also advised that the Council was working on a project focussing on recruitment and retention of staff. In collaboration with a number of partners, such as teacher training agencies, to encourage people to take up teaching vacancies within Buckinghamshire. It was also explained that the Council had made representations to central government around school finance and funding.
- The Council was currently working with the organisation 'Impower'. They had

presented information at the latest safeguarding partnership meeting and were trying to focus on how to meet demands for children's social care across the partnership and how to deliver services in the future. A further update on the programme would be provided at the next Select Committee meeting.

- Action: JM

- Simon James explained that the government had released capital spend of £70m as proposed in the SEND Green Paper. The Council would ensure that those funds would be utilised within Buckinghamshire by releasing a bid for a new special school focusing on children with social, emotional or mental health difficulties. The Council had also received an uplift in revenue money in line with national uplifts. However, the Council has also lobbied the government for more funds to support children with SEND as part of the F40 group.
- In response to a Member's concerns about OFSTED inspections, Simon James advised that school inspections had increased over the past 12 months. Schools that had previously received a good or outstanding rating were able to maintain their scores over this period which was to be congratulated. The improvement board had also been very active in overseeing progress against OFSTED's recommendations. John Macilwraith added that the Council was committed to working towards achieving a 'good' rating by putting actions on recommendations in place, such as to reduce homelessness levels of 16 to 17-year-olds. He expressed confidence in the Council's workforce but noted that a clear plan was needed to consolidate recommendations and other areas of activity. This was currently being undertaken with senior colleagues across the organisation.
- A Member expressed concerns around OFSTED's findings of delayed diagnoses of SEND children and questioned how the Council would ensure that the right support is put in place for children awaiting diagnosis. It was noted that the neurodevelopmental pathway for diagnosis of Autism and ADHD remained a significant area of concern. Although the issue mainly involved the healthcare sector, the Council was using their partnership with health colleagues, both in terms of commissioning and provision. The aim was to both decrease wait times for diagnosis and the need for diagnosis itself by focusing on needs-led provision of services and early intervention, for example through mental health support teams in schools.
- It was noted that schools were contacted to establish whether the requirement of a 32.5 hour week was being met. The schools that fell short of this requirement were monitored and consultations would have to be undertaken with parents, the local authority and other stakeholders to ensure they are meeting the needs of their pupils.
- The Council had started the introduction of a banded funding arrangement for schools in Buckinghamshire that would follow the needs of the child. The band values had been agreed with the schools, particularly in relation to special schools. This method would be implemented over the coming months.
- A pilot had been done with some of Buckinghamshire's schools to ensure that digitised EHCPs were fit for purpose and met the needs of families, before the system was implemented further.
- In relation to the academisation agenda outlined in the Government's White Paper, it was noted that the future design of school structures in Buckinghamshire would continue to focus on what works best for the pupils. Headteachers were receiving support and information around which schools might benefit from being a multi-academy trust to alleviate any anxieties. Similarly, schools who were focus of the school improvement agenda would also receive additional support to ensure increases in performance. Mental health support was also being implemented in schools, with an average of over 17 educational psychologists in the service. A board had been established in with public health professionals to focus on mental health support.

The Chairman thanked the presenters for their attendance and participation.

7 CHILDREN MISSING EDUCATION

The Chairman invited Cllr Anita Cranmer, Cabinet Member for Children's and Education, and Simon James, Service Director for Education, to speak on this item. Simon James answered Cllr Stuchbury's questions, which had been put during the public questions section, and then gave further details within the presentation as follows:

1. What is the percentage and number of pupils with EHCPs that are CME?
3% of the CME cohort

2. What is the percentage and number of pupils at SEN Support that are CME?
15% of the CME cohort

In their presentation, the following points were highlighted:

- The definition of a missing child encompassed anyone not on school rolls at compulsory school age, except for those being home educated. Pupils at the greatest risk of missing education included children from traveller families or asylum seekers, those with parents in the armed forces, those excluded from school and those with chronic health conditions. Regular house moves or not starting school at the appropriate age had been noted as possible reasons for missing education.
- As of July, 67 children were missing education, with the highest numbers having been noted in Aylesbury and High Wycombe. The split of children missing education is broadly 50/50 between boys and girls.
- The Council had a range of responsibilities, including identifying children missing education. The three main priorities that had been identified for the next 12 months were: supporting the most vulnerable families, ensuring that both schools and parents were proactive and establishing a multi-agency panel for children missing education to ensure faster integration back into schools.

During discussion, comments and questions raised by the Committee included:

- Most of the 67 children missing education belonged to the Gypsy/Roma/Traveller communities. There was also a category where a school place had not been recorded, for example if the child had left the county and not notified the Education Department. Simon James noted that a further breakdown of those categories could be provided to the Committee.

ACTION: SJ

- It was noted that the highest number of children from Gypsy/Roma/Traveller communities missing education was in years nine and ten. A small team within children's services provides support for those communities and emphasises the importance of education in terms of future opportunities. Furthermore, colleagues from both children's services and housing would frequently visit traveller communities to better understand the vulnerabilities and safeguarding risks within those communities.
- Home-educated children would receive regular visits from local authority officers to ensure their education met the requirements of literacy and numeracy. If the assessment found the child's skills did not meet those requirements, the family would receive further support in terms of the curriculum.
- The Council received regular attendance records from schools through their management information systems, as well as school census data at fixed points of the

year, to monitor attendance data. This data could be shared with the Committee and Councillor Stuchbury in response to his question.

ACTION: SJ/KD

- The schools also communicated with families and took note of children at risk of not attending, which were also shared with the Council. If those families related to vulnerable groups, the Council would also work with the pupil referral units. Attendance also tended to improve over the course of the academic year.
- It was noted that the transition from primary to secondary school was particularly challenging for some families. There was also an overlap with those age groups at the pupil referral unit. The Council's oversight of those children therefore needed to be higher as they were more vulnerable to exploitation in the community.
- Gareth Drawmer explained that over the course of 2021/2022, 570 instances of children missing education had been logged, with only 30 instances remaining open for more than three months. The Council and its partnership worked rapidly in ensuring the families in question were located and the child's school destination established. There were some families with cases open longer than 12 months, which were subject to biannual local authority checks. The admissions teams were also aware of cases where parents incorrectly completed transfer forms, which were included in the number of children missing education.
- A Member suggested that information materials could be sent out to parents of children in years 9 and 10 to ensure the Council could be notified if the child had left education. Simon James welcomed this suggestion.

The Chairman thanked the presenters for their attendance and participation.

8 WORK PROGRAMME

The Select committee received the draft work programme. Members were advised to contact the Scrutiny Officer for the committee with any additional topics they wished to be included. It was noted that a task and finish group would commence on the issue of pathways to SEND services for children and young people with autism, ADHD and anxiety/depression and would be chaired by Councillor Blamires.

A Member noted that the Committee should be informed around any issues with the 11 Plus exam. Simon James confirmed that this issue would be included in the Education Standards report in January.

Action: SJ

9 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting of the Select Committee would be Thursday, 26th January 2023.

CHAIRMAN

The meeting concluded at 4.20 p.m.