



Children's Services Priorities Select Committee

Tolis Vouyioukas, Corporate Director

4 June 2020



Priorities – Children’s Social Care

1. Service Improvement (Cllr Shaw)

Since the November 2017 ‘Inadequate’ Ofsted re-inspection, Ofsted have completed 4 monitoring visits (July 2018, December 2018, May 2019 and October 2019), the fifth was due in May 2020; however, all planned inspection activity has been postponed due to COVID-19. In summary, improvements have been made to date and the overall progress has been acknowledged by Ofsted and the DfE; however, the quality of practice in some teams still requires further improvement. All reports following each visit have commented on the strong political support, the leadership team’s accurate understanding of what needs to be done, and that our improvement activity is appropriately targeted. In addition, all our self-assessments presented to Ofsted have been accepted in full and Ofsted have not identified any areas of concern the service was not aware of and had not identified already. The main contributing factor which is hindering the pace of progress in some teams is the difficulties in recruiting high quality, experienced social workers and managers. A clear priority for this year is to make further progress against our improvement plan in order to secure better outcomes for the children and young people of Buckinghamshire.

Priorities – Children’s Social Care

2. Recovery from COVID 19 (Cllr Shaw)

The COVID-19 crisis is a significant challenge to manage and this will continue to effect the service throughout the rest of the calendar year. The service has reacted promptly and effectively to these unprecedented circumstances and has acted in a determined and focused way to continue our duty to protect children and young people. What lies ahead is difficult to predict but the service continues to experience an increase in the need to conduct physical visits to families. We are expecting an increase in referrals when children return to school. In order to manage this, a recovery plan is being developed to ensure that the service continues to provide children, young people and their families with the support and intervention required to protect them from harm.

Priorities – Children’s Social Care

3. Budgetary control (Cllr Shaw)

It is well documented nationally, that Children’s Social Care, as a result of increasing demand has and continues to face unprecedented financial pressures. Despite this, the service must ensure that these pressures do not have adverse consequences for children and families whilst at the same time, delivering services within the given financial envelope. Robust financial monitoring is key to this and like last year, there will be increased monitoring on high risk budget areas, including staffing, placements for looked after children and client costs

Priorities – Children’s Social Care

4. Recruitment of in-house foster carers (Cllr Green)

As shown in the table below, during last year more children were placed within foster care but more significantly, the proportion of children placed with a Buckinghamshire Council (in-house) carers compared to those placed with an Independent Fostering Agency increased significantly. In addition, the number of children placed outside of Buckinghamshire reduced as well as the overall number of looked after children.

	31 March 2019	31 March 2020
Number of looked after children	513	492
Number and % of children in care living with foster families	342 67%	350 71%
Number and % of children placed with a Buckinghamshire /in house carer	155 45%	189 54%
Number and % of children placed with an Independent Fostering Agency	187 55%	161 46%
Number and % of children in care living outside the local authority area	272 53%	227 46%

We want to build on last year’s success and further increase our in-house capacity to improve placement choices for looked after children, reducing our reliance external and more costly placements.

Priorities – Children’s Social Care

5. Improving the education and health of looked after children (Cllr Green)

We want Buckinghamshire to be the best place for our young people to grow up in and be proud of having done so. Every parent wants the best for their children and as Corporate Parents, we want the best for our looked after children. 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.

Priorities – Children’s Social Care

6. Transitions (Cllr Green)

The transition from childhood through adolescence into adulthood is an important and formative experience for everyone. Experiences during this period have a huge influence on the rest of a person’s life, and this is no different for those with disabilities and special educational needs. These young people have to deal with some additional complexities when moving from one set of support systems in children’s services to services for adults. As a council and as a service, it is crucial that we plan early and provide the right support at the right time so that our young people can live a healthy and fulfilling adult life, in the same way as their peers.

Priorities – Education

1. SEND Delivery and Improvements (Cllr Cranmer)

In preparation for our local area SEND inspection, we have an Improvement Plan in place to secure better outcome for our SEND service and in particular, the quality and timeliness of Education, Health and Care Plans. A priority for this year is to continue to improve the service to ensure that children and families received the help and support they need.

Priorities – Education

2. Improving Education Provision (Cllr Cranmer)

It is our ambition to provide all children and young people with access to a high quality, inclusive education by adopting an all age approach, from supporting access to early years provision through to the delivery of a diverse curriculum offer for young people post 16. Currently over 95% of early years providers are rated good or outstanding by Ofsted, and 90% of Buckinghamshire pupils attend a good or outstanding school. Our priority is to support providers and schools that are not yet good in order to realise our ambition of achieving the highest quality education for all children of Buckinghamshire.

Priorities – Education

3. Home to School Transport (Cllr Cranmer)

The Home to School Transport Policy change, agreed by Cabinet in March 2019, led to the introduction of charging for home to school transport for families of post 16 students with SEND. We will be reviewing the model based on the learning from the implementation of the policy so that we can improve the approach moving forward into future years.