



Buckinghamshire Council

Children's & Education Select Committee

Minutes

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHILDREN'S & EDUCATION SELECT COMMITTEE HELD ON THURSDAY 23 MARCH 2023 IN THE OCULUS, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNCIL, GATEHOUSE ROAD, AYLESBURY HP19 8FF, COMMENCING AT 2.00 PM AND CONCLUDING AT 4.45 PM

MEMBERS PRESENT

J Ward, M Dormer, S Adoh, K Bates, D Blamires, A Collingwood, C Jones, S Lewin, Dr W Matthews, J Towns, P Turner and Z Williams

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE

K Dover, S James, A Howard and J Macilwraith

Agenda Item

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

It was noted that Councillors A Osibogun, S Kayani, D Summers and S James had given their apologies for the meeting. Cllr R Stuchbury attended the meeting as a substitute for Cllr S Kayani.

Cllr S Lewin was appointed as a new Committee Member, replacing Cllr N Hussain.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- Cllr K Bates declared a personal interest as a Chair of Governors for nursery schools in Buckinghamshire.
- Cllr P Turner declared a personal interest as a school governor.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 3rd November 2022 be AGREED as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

In relation to the addendum to the minutes, Simon James updated the Committee on information relating to the item "Children Missing Education" as follows:

- There were 96 children missing education in the following categories;
- 19 had moved into Buckinghamshire
- 17 not able to be contacted

- 16 had not accepted a school place
- 9 referrals made from members of the public
- 8 were elected home educated but not able to be contacted
- 6 were movers out of Buckinghamshire
- 5 Gypsy/Roman/Traveller community
- 4 were part of normal checks undertaken by the team
- 4 moved into the county
- 3 had not started the expected school
- 2 were unable to be contacted by the county attendance team
- 2 were transitioning into year 7
- 1 left to go to an independent school

4 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

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

The Chairman noted that Councillor Stuchbury had submitted a question to the cancelled January Committee and that this would be taken at this committee meeting under the Education Standards item to which the question related.

5 OXFORD HEALTH CHILD & ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES UPDATE FOR BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

The Chairman welcomed Andy Fitton, Head of CAMHS and ED Services for Buckinghamshire and Dr Joe Clacey, Consultant Child & Adolescent Psychiatrist and Medical Lead for Bucks CAMHS, to the meeting.

Andy Fitton noted that the purpose of the report was to assure the committee of the services provided by CAMHS by Oxford Health for children and their families. The report outlined the areas and the performance of each, noting benchmarking against other areas. The report also detailed the areas for development and challenges going forward.

The delivery performance information contained in the report was noted to be somewhat limited, due to the Trust having been subject of a cyber attack last year. This report was focussed on the mental health support.

There had been an increase in requests for referrals of 27% with an increase in the presentation of complexity of needs. The services aimed to increase their provision. Key areas were:

- To make recruitment and retention as good as it could be
- To focus on the support of the most vulnerable young people e.g. eating disorder needs
- Building strong relationships with partners and collaborate further to support families

Dr Joe Clacey noted three clinical areas needing support -

- Awareness of neurodevelopmental need requiring regional and national work
- A continuing increase in demand in mental health services from the pandemic e.g. eating disorders
- An increased demand of young people with increased complexity of mental health need

In response to questions from Councillors the following points were noted:

- Prevention work was delivered via a national programme of mental health support

teams assigned to schools, working with issues such as anxiety. Training was provided for colleagues in schools and on mental health practice. Consultation work was provided to schools and mental health colleagues before referrals to ensure the correct referrals for each individual were made. Identification and awareness of needs had improved over the last decade and therefore earlier help had improved with more lower level interventions. There was a multi-agency approach to prevention to assess how best to help young people.

- Increased funding had been given to Buckinghamshire which allowed for the increase in mental health support teams. This in turn helped to address the increase in the number of referrals.
- A three year national NHS Thames Valley Link Programme was in place to look at additional support for young people with complex needs. There was a well-established team for looked after or adopted children which would be combined with work for young people who did not fit well in other defined areas. Work was underway across the service to ensure better outcomes for young people.
- Following the success of the hospital support worker role in Stoke Mandeville Hospital during crisis presentation an additional role would be created to cover additional hours within the same hospital.
- Funding had been received for three years from the ICB to reduce waiting lists and work on this was part of the SEND development plan. The funding would lead to more therapies provided centrally.
- A major challenge was to find the staff to support the work.
- Work was underway with the charity “Barnados” and also with Bucks MIND to support work and their help was invaluable.
- The Children’s Services and CMH Management Teams were meeting to look at how to best develop services together.

The Chairman thanked Mr Fitton and Dr Clacey for their attendance and presenting the update on Buckinghamshire CAMHS.

6 EDUCATION STANDARDS REPORT 2021-2022

Councillor Anita Cranmer, Cabinet Member for Children and Education noted that the Education Standards report contained positive information regarding the plans for the future provision of Education in Buckinghamshire. The report noted that the schools were doing well compared to national results and that a strong focus was placed on the needs of the more vulnerable children within the area.

Simon James noted that the report delivered key information relating to children and young people for 2021-2022 and for the first-time published attainment data for early years and primary school levels since the covid pandemic. The area was broadly in line with comparative areas nationally. It noted that the gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children had increased as per the national trend. Exclusions were below the national rates and the county had a higher percentage of schools rated good or better. More children in Buckinghamshire attend a good or better school than this time last year. Grammar schools were providing spaces for more children who were eligible for free school meals and a higher percentage of young people from within Buckinghamshire were attending grammar schools. The number of children not in education, employment or training (NEET) was lower than the national figures.

For phonics 75% achieved the expected level, KS2 61% - higher than the national average, at

GCSE achievement was 57.3 points at attainment 8 which was higher than national average and statistical neighbours.

In response to Councillors' questions the Officers made the following points:

- The department worked closely with headteachers to ensure that had the necessary support around Ofsted inspections to ensure that they had everything they needed both before, during and after inspections with an increased team to support the schools. The department also attended the feedback sessions and talked through issues with the school leadership team. All schools had the opportunity to dial into a twice weekly meeting, and support was available for headteachers separately.
- The actions noted in the report were extracts from more detailed plans. All schools coming out of Ofsted inspections provided updates on progress at later dates. This report showed themes around improvement issues.

Action: SJ to provide examples of detailed information from schools in intervention categories, and an example of traits of a good school, to allow understanding of how these schools had achieved this.

- Some areas in Wycombe were lower in achieving in early years compared to other areas. As the children progressed through school the gap narrowed. The department were working to get more children into early years settings to help this and was working at community level to see where work could be taken. A sub-group had been set up to help co-ordinate more specific support to certain families, and find what would help. Work had been commissioned with central government also to help work to identify how schools were helping disadvantaged children. A handbook of good practice would be circulated in the summer.
- There were schools outside the Opportunity Bucks schools which were also the target of specific help. The widened gap for GCSEs was a national trend since the pandemic and was expected to be lessened in the next reporting period.
- It was noted that the way in which data was presented was how it was nationally. Our grammar schools out-perform other grammar schools. Our non-selective schools perform better than non-selective schools nationally in other high selective areas.
- We can compare cohorts from KS1 and KS2 but it was noted that the make up of the cohorts in KS2 was different as some young people were from elsewhere.
- It would be possible to compare our non-selective schools to those elsewhere by looking at the national averages as most other areas were non-selective.

Action: S J/G D

- It would be possible to provide data in relation to geographical areas

Action: S J/G D

- Councillor Stuchbury posed the following question:

My question relates to the Education Standards item and to the attainment gap of the key pupil groups in Buckinghamshire. It is stated that the attainment gap has increased post-Covid, and Covid would certainly have been a negative factor for children in all the groups reported within your report, particularly the most economically challenged and those who fall within the broad spectrum of children with special educational needs. Your report suggests that Buckinghamshire children attainment has dropped considerably in percentage from 74% to 64% against Statistical neighbours and national comparisons, however: I would like to ask why, in 2023 nearly a decade forward after the first enquiry and the parliamentary report, are we are still discussing how to improve children attainment gap in education in Buckinghamshire despite the continued efforts by the Education department and what are the factors which you believe will produce the improvement that everybody desires to really make progress with this.?

- Simon James responded to Cllr Stuchbury's written question submitted to the January committee as follows:

I would like to thank Cllr Stuchbury for his question and for his ongoing support for children with special educational needs. We know that he, like all Members wants what is best for children in Buckinghamshire. The issue of the attainment gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children, quite rightly remains a priority across the education system. As referenced in the report, the pandemic has led to a widening of the attainment gap across the entire country. In Buckinghamshire, this has also been the case but the gap has widened less than the national average and that of our statistical neighbours. There are a number of interventions that the Local Authority and schools are working on together.

The critical phase is the early years phase. This is where we need to narrow the biggest gap. We know that children do better and better as they progress through the school system but that some have a start that is behind others.

We are particularly focussing on the 10 wards in the Opportunity Bucks area and are expecting to see the gap narrowing between now and the next Education Standards report.

- The data included in the report would contain information from children who were resident outside the county but not from those children who are resident in the county but attend schools elsewhere. The data was affected by some children coming in and out of the county. It was based on the pupil levels in our schools. It would be possible to map information by ward.
- The process of the 11 plus had gone smoothly in this reporting year. Results were delivered well and letters went via the school to avoid the IT issues that had been experienced previously. Over 12,000 children put in for the 11 plus this year and a very small number of parents email addresses were not found.

7 BUCKINGHAMSHIRE EDUCATION STRATEGY 2022-2027

The Chairman invited Cllr Anita Cranmer, Cabinet Member for Children's and Education, Simon James, Service Director, Education, and Gareth Drawmer, Head of Achievement and Learning, to speak on this item.

In their presentation, the following points were highlighted:

- The strategy had gone through a review process with partners at the end of 2021 and went to public and member consultation in 2022. 106 responses had been received from children.
- Key themes emerging from the consultation included the need for more early years and secondary provision, as well as specialist SEND provision.
- The strategy had five key priorities, all of which had their own success measures monitored through the Education Strategy Board (joint board across schools and local authority officers) as follows:
 1. Having the right number of places available in the county
 2. Preparing learners for adulthood
 3. Collaboration of school improvement to raise standards
 4. Embedding inclusion across Buckinghamshire
 5. Supporting the emotional health and wellbeing of children

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

- Concerns were raised about the low response rate in the public consultation. It was noted that the strategy went to consultation again for this reason, and time was dedicated to consult with Members as well. It was noted that the strategic priorities and aims were broadly agreed and accepted by the public, resulting in fewer responses. Furthermore, the consultation took place during Covid. In future, more face-to-face promotion would be conducted across the county.
- A Member urged that the strategy should be shared with departments to ensure that future school provision is considered as part of the Buckinghamshire plan. It was noted that joint work was already undertaken across education, housing and property, and that Kingsbrook school was a positive example of this. An analysis had also been done on areas that had high levels of pupil capacity across the county, with new schools being built through section 106 funding.
- Concerns were raised around the recruitment and retention of teaching assistants, particularly in special education institutions. This was considered as part of the strategy, with efforts to make Buckinghamshire a more attractive place for teaching assistants to work. The impact of term-time-only remuneration was also being examined as a priority with school leaders. A working group was also looking at recruitment and retention in education more widely, particularly around the decrease in applicants for teacher training.
- A Member asked what nursery and childcare provisions were available to access by parents and carers. The current percentage quality in terms of early years providers continued to be strong, with 96% being good or outstanding. Consideration was also given to families who could access funding as a result of new legislation. The early years team were particularly focusing on the quality of provision. Training for staff around inclusion was an important factor, as more children were entering early years settings. A review of childcare in the local authority was published annually to strategically identify gaps in service provision, and this was monitored regularly. Population growth was also closely monitored for future planning.
- In response to a Member's question, it was noted that children who are not attending school, or attending different parts of education, were also monitored. For more vigilance, there were plans to increase capacity in the attendance team, particularly in more disadvantaged areas. Exclusion rates had decreased significantly in the past years, with the authority now reaching levels below the national average. Reasons for exclusion are closely monitored to prevent future exclusions.

The Chairman thanked the presenters for their attendance and participation.

8 UPDATE ON THE SOCIAL WORKER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION REPORT

The Chairman invited John Macilwraith, Corporate Director of Children's Services, to speak on this item.

In the presentation, the following points were highlighted:

- Conversations were currently being held with the Director of Health & Adult Social Care to create a joint workforce board for social workers. The organisation's workforce strategy around recruitment and retention, particularly of social workers, was also being reviewed. A workforce consultation was also held, particularly focussing on reducing the reliance on agency staff.
- For social work week, a virtual event has been held to thank social workers for their

work. Next year's event would be held in person, which the Chairman welcomed.

- The wellbeing of social workers was a priority for the organisation. Social workers were able to participate in regular wellbeing sessions and activities, for which feedback has been positive. This was further being rolled out across the Children's Services Directorate.
- Since the academy has been established, 66 social workers had been recruited, and 38 had successfully completed the programme. 51 social workers remain in Buckinghamshire's Children's Services.

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

- Members commended the work the department has done around recruiting and retaining social workers. A Member also welcomed the steps the organisation has taken towards providing management training.
- A Member asked about the number of social workers which were agency staff. Mr Macilwraith noted that 30 out of 40 managerial positions were agency team managers. The agency rate for social workers was currently at 25%. Further data around specific teams and the direction of travel would be forwarded to the Committee outside of the meeting. An update from the government around social worker recruitment and retention strategies would also be shared.

ACTION: JM

- Although the agency was successful, this only focused on newly qualified social workers. Recruiting more experienced social workers to manage more complex cases was still challenging. However, seven agency social workers had converted to permanent roles. Consideration was also given to social work practice methodology regarding safety, balanced caseloads and supervision.
- It was suggested that young carers looking after their family members could be encouraged to commence a career in social work, as they already possess some of the skills needed in the profession. Mr Macilwraith advised that the organisation was already considering this as part of its academy approach. Conversations were being held with young carers and education providers, and it was highlighted that carers would already have contact with social workers as part of the assessment process. It was also suggested that the Council could link with voluntary groups, such as Buckingham Winslow Young Carers, to support them.
- A Member noted that technology had been a major issue for social workers. Laptops were acting as a barrier between the child and the social workers, with tablets being a possibly overlooked solution to the issue. Productivity was also a concern due to the pressures and working hours of social workers. The use of transcription software was suggested to alleviate the pressures of frontline staff. Mr Macilwraith advised that he would discuss the suggestion with the principal social worker, facilitate conversations with staff around the suitability of equipment and report back to the Committee.

ACTION: JM

The Chairman thanked Mr Macilwraith for his attendance and participation.

9 WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Officer provided the following update on the work programme:

- Due to the cancellation of the Select Committee Meeting in January, both (i) the annual report for fostering and adoption and (ii) the placement sufficiency strategy would be carried to the ensuing municipal year.

- During May, a work programme development meeting would be held with officers and councillors to examine possible items to discuss in the ensuing municipal year.

Cllr D Blamires, Chair of the SEND task and finish review group provided the following update about its progress:

- The inquiry focused on improving the experience for parents of children with autism, ADHD or anxiety awaiting diagnosis. Meetings had been held with around 15 organisations, including senior leadership at schools, to examine the issues faced.

10 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Select Committee would be held in mid-June of 2023.

CHAIRMAN

The meeting concluded at 4.45 p.m.