

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON 15 DECEMBER 2015 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.45 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Pauline Helliard-Symons (Chairman), Shahid Younis (Vice-Chairman), Laura Blumenthal, Lindsay Ferris, Malcolm Richards (substituting Ken Miall) and Bob Wyatt (substituting Alison Swaddle)

Other Councillors Present

Councillors: Keith Baker and Ian Pittock

Officers Present

Luciane Bowker, Democratic Services Officer

Andy Couldrick, Chief Executive

Brian Grady, Head of Strategic Commissioning

Alan Stubbersfield, Interim Assistant Director Learning and Achievement

107. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Charlotte Haitham Taylor, Ken Miall, Alison Swaddle, Judith Ramsden and Felicity Budgen.

108. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 27 October 2015 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

109. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest submitted.

110. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

111. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

112. INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

The Committee considered the independent review of leadership and governance report which was set out on agenda pages 13-46. The Chairman explained that the review had been requested by Members and supported by Officers as it was felt that it would be useful to receive the views from an outside person.

During the discussion of the item the following points were made:

- The report had been generally positive and confirmed the views of Officers, it reported on the strength of leadership and governance and made a series of recommendations that would be picked up alongside the action plan to be developed following the recent inspection by Ofsted;
- Councillor Blumenthal asked if the relevant people were sufficiently trained and able to deal with the child sexual exploitation in the form of social media and technology. Members and Officers expressed concern and anxiety around this issue, it was felt

that more should be done to help parents and teachers to be better prepared to protect children from harm in the form of social media and technology;

- Brian Grady, Head of Strategic Commissioning, stated that schools were working with parents and the Council did run sessions to help parents and teachers; Members asked to be sent the information relating to the current training programme on social media and technology that was available for parents;
- Brian Grady stated that there was a dedicated child sexual exploitation group who were looking into the issue of social media and technology;
- Councillor Wyatt enquired about the lack of whistleblowing in Wokingham. Officers informed that there were many ways this could be done, including the staff survey and there was no evidence that people were intimidated and unable to raise concerns;
- Councillor Baker stated that he felt the recommendations of the report were reasonable and fair, some had already been worked on;
- Andy Couldrick, Chief Executive, pointed out that it was important not to become complacent because Wokingham was generally a safe area as compared to other places, it was vital to keep alert to risks;
- Officers stated that the report gave the service the reassurance it was seeking when expecting the Ofsted inspection; it was recognised that front line management was not as strong as it could be;
- Andy Couldrick stated that this report set alongside the Ofsted report and that they complemented each other. Andy noted that this report had a political attachment to it whereas the Ofsted report didn't;
- Andy Couldrick explained that the Ofsted inspection attracted more attention from the public and therefore it would be the report that would be used as PR for the Council;

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Information regarding the current training programme on social media and technology for parents and teachers be circulated to Members;
- 2) The Committee noted the report and its findings and endorsed the plans to put together an action plan in conjunction with the action plan from the Ofsted report;
- 3) The Committee would continue to monitor both action plans.

113. DELIVERING EFFECTIVE SAFEGUARDING SERVICES

The Committee considered the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) update report which was set out on agenda pages 47- 48. Brian Grady and Linda York representing Thames Valley Police presented the report and answered questions.

Brian Grady stated that good progress was being made and all was in place for the implementation to go ahead in March – April time. There was a strategic and operational group in place taking the project forward. Brian emphasized that there were four areas of work that were being considered: information sharing agreement; accommodation; staffing and business processes.

Brian Grady explained that information sharing was a critical element and this had now been established. The Police, Wokingham Borough Council and Health had signed up to this agreement, the final agency to sign on was with colleagues in Probation and a date in December had been agreed for this.

Brian Grady informed that the accommodation had been agreed and it would be at Shute End without significant cost implications. A floor plan had been drawn up to begin to decide where the teams would sit, this would be finalised by 1 January 2016.

Brian Grady reported that staffing was progressing but still needed some work as the structure needed to be designed and agreed with colleagues at the Police. Linda York stated that three posts had been recruited and timescales for training were going to be agreed in January. Linda felt confident that the training would be available for all in time for MASH to go live on 1 April 2016.

It was noted that business processes were progressing well, there was a sub group working on this element to ensure that these were consistent with our internal workings and with those of the Police. Workshops would be set up during January 2016 with key colleagues testing the system and the processes. The current best practice was going to be incorporated to meet the signs of safety methodology where appropriate.

In response to a question Brian Grady stated that there were risks surrounding information sharing in terms of security. Also, it was noted that MASH in itself would not provide safeguarding, it was important to be aware of its limitations.

Linda York clarified that the Domestic Abuse Risk Assessor that had been appointed as mentioned in the report was a specific new post for MASH.

Members were informed that domestic abuse had been increasing over the last few years; it was believed that this was a result of people feeling more confident to report it and not because of an actual increase in abuse. Linda York stated that it was impossible to be absolutely certain if there had been a real increase in numbers. Brian Grady informed that the Local Safeguarding Board had been investigating this issue.

The Chairman, councillor Helliard-Symons asked that the name of the MASH programme manager be revealed once this appointment was officialised.

Members were interested to know if projects such as MASH were happening in other local authorities in the country. Andy Couldrick explained that Wokingham Borough was not a pioneer; the majority of other local authorities already had similar projects in various shapes and forms in place. Andy believed this was a good position to be in as it was possible to learn from other local authorities' experiences.

Linda York stated that the model of working in Berkshire was standardised and this enabled more resilience from the Police point of view.

Linda York informed that a performance management framework would be issued in the future; it was possible that numbers would go up as a result of 'hidden harm' information becoming available. It was hoped that early and effective intervention would reduce instances of crime and it was important to have a strategy in place.

The Chairman thanked the Officers involved in the project for keeping the Committee updated on the development of MASH.

RESOLVED That: The Committee noted the update report on MASH.

114. CHILDREN'S SERVICES PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The Committee received the Children's Services performance indicators report as set out on page numbers 49-58. Brian tabled a briefing indicator target setting rationale 15/16 to complement the information contained in the report.

The Committee went through the report and during the analysis the following comments were made:

- The red indicator relating to % care proceeding completed in 15/16 within 26 weeks of application had occurred due to factors outside of Wokingham Borough Council's control;
- Members were reassured that there was regular monitoring of Looked After Children's attendance and performance at school; however Andy Couldrick pointed out that there was a range of factors and experiences that influenced LAC achievements at school and not just truancy;
- Andy Couldrick stated that he had received a letter from central government asking Wokingham Borough Council to help with asylum seekers; unfortunately the financial model offered by the government did not make it currently viable for Wokingham.

RESOLVED That: The report be noted.

115. PRIMARY SCHOOL PLACE STRATEGY

Councillor Ian Pittock gave the Committee a verbal update on the Primary School Place Strategy. Ian stated that the report had not been ready to be submitted to the November Executive as previously expected, it was now going to be submitted to the January meeting. Ian explained that a task and finish group had been established to try and find a solution to the problems arising in March when parents in specific areas in the Borough were not offered school places at their preferred schools. The task and finish group had identified demographic changes which resulted in more children applying for places than expected. The review would propose to increase the number of school places from September 2016-2017 in the Woodley and Shinfield areas.

In response to a question Brian Grady stated that the increase in school places would include places in Year 1 as well as reception places.

The Chairman commended the work undertaken by the task and finish group, particularly as it had involved the parents in the community.

RESOLVED That: The report be noted.

116. SCHOOLS PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND OFSTED REPORTS

The Committee considered the school performance report which was set out on agenda pages 59-68. The report included the Ofsted reports relating to St Dominic Savio Catholic Primary and St Nicholas Church of England Primary.

During the discussion of the item the following points were made:

Relating to St Dominic Savio:

- Officers informed that it was not clear how many '*outstanding*' items were necessary in order to achieve the overall outstanding rating by Ofsted;
- Alan Stubbersfield informed that there was an expectation that indoor and outdoor play areas should provide learning opportunities, for example having access to crayons near the sand pit;
- Members questioned the reference to '*pupils develop an extremely strong understanding of British values*' on page 61 and what this meant. Officers believed this referred to children not being liable to radicalisation, however it seemed that teachers were not clear as to what this was meant to achieve;

- Councillor Younis reported that his daughter had attended St Dominic Savio and he was confident this was a good school with very dedicated teachers;
- The Chairman pointed out to the positive references to the governors' involvement with the school. The Chairman mentioned the work of the review of governing services task and finish group and how it had positively influenced governing services.

Relating to St Nicholas:

- It was noted that the Ofsted report addressed the Headteacher personally. Officers informed that the Headteacher had started this term and had already made a positive impact on the school;
- Members were informed that the Headteacher was very engaged with parents;
- Members agreed that for a school to perform well a strong leadership team was crucial;
- Members were informed that it was the Council's practice to send schools a letter of recognition following positive Ofsted inspections.

RESOLVED That: the report be noted.

117. COMMITTEE'S FORWARD PROGRAMME

The Committee agreed to the items listed in the forward programme report for its next meeting on 23 February 2016. No further items were added to the forward programme.