



## **WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL**

A Meeting of the **CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW  
AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** will be held at the Civic  
Offices, Shute End, Wokingham, RG40 1BN on  
**TUESDAY 15 DECEMBER 2015 AT 7.00 PM**

Andy Couldrick  
Chief Executive  
Published on 7 December 2015

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## **Our Vision**

***A great place to live, an even better place to do business***

### ***Our Priorities***

**Improve educational attainment and focus on every child achieving their potential**

**Invest in regenerating towns and villages, support social and economic prosperity, whilst encouraging business growth**

**Ensure strong sustainable communities that are vibrant and supported by well designed development**

**Tackle traffic congestion in specific areas of the Borough**

**Improve the customer experience when accessing Council services**

### ***The Underpinning Principles***

**Offer excellent value for your Council Tax**

**Provide affordable homes**

**Look after the vulnerable**

**Improve health, wellbeing and quality of life**

**Maintain and improve the waste collection, recycling and fuel efficiency**

**Deliver quality in all that we do**

## MEMBERSHIP OF THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

### Councillors

Pauline Helliard-Symons  
(Chairman)  
Chris Bowring  
Bill Soane

Shahid Younis (Vice-  
Chairman)  
Lindsay Ferris  
Alison Swaddle

Laura Blumenthal  
Ken Miall

### Substitutes

Prue Bray  
Bob Wyatt

Tom McCann

Malcolm Richards

### Parent Governor Representatives

Vacancy, Parent Governor Representative  
Vacancy, Parent Governor Representative

### Diocesan Representatives

Vacancy, Roman Catholic Representative  
Vacancy, C of E Representative

ITEM NO.	WARD	SUBJECT	PAGE NO.
48.		<b>APOLOGIES</b> To receive any apologies for absence.	
49.		<b>MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING</b> To confirm the Minutes of the Meeting held on 27 October 2015.	5 - 12
50.		<b>DECLARATION OF INTEREST</b> To receive any declarations of interest.	
51.		<b>PUBLIC QUESTION TIME</b> To answer any public questions.  A period of 30 minutes will be allowed for members of the public to ask questions submitted under notice.  The Council welcomes questions from members of the public about the work of this committee.  Subject to meeting certain timescales, questions can relate to general issues concerned with the work of the Committee or an item which is on the Agenda for this meeting. For full details of the procedure for submitting questions please contact the Democratic Services Section on the numbers given below or go to <a href="http://www.wokingham.gov.uk/publicquestions">www.wokingham.gov.uk/publicquestions</a>	

<b>52.</b>		<b>MEMBER QUESTION TIME</b> To answer any member questions.	
<b>53.</b>	None Specific	<b>INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE</b> To receive and consider the report containing the findings of the independent review of leadership and governance in Wokingham Borough Council.	<b>13 - 46</b>
<b>54.</b>	None Specific	<b>DELIVERING EFFECTIVE SAFEGUARDING SERVICES</b> To receive an update on the development of Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).	<b>47 - 48</b>
<b>55.</b>	None Specific	<b>CHILDREN'S SERVICES PERFORMANCE INDICATORS</b> To receive and consider a report detailing the Children's Services performance indicators.	<b>49 - 58</b>
<b>56.</b>		<b>PRIMARY SCHOOL PLACE STRATEGY</b> To receive a verbal update on the Primary School Place Strategy.	<b>Verbal Report</b>
<b>57.</b>	Coronation; Hurst	<b>SCHOOLS PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND OFSTED REPORTS</b> To receive and consider recent Ofsted reports relating to the following schools: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• St Dominic Savio Catholic Primary</li> <li>• St Nicholas CE Primary</li> </ul>	<b>59 - 68</b>
<b>58.</b>		<b>COMMITTEE'S FORWARD PROGRAMME</b> To receive the current work programme for the Committee and to consider any amendments or additions.	<b>69 - 72</b>
<b>59.</b>		<b>ANY OTHER ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIRMAN DECIDES ARE URGENT</b> A Supplementary Agenda will be issued by the Chief Executive if there are any other items to consider under this heading	

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## **MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 27 OCTOBER 2015 FROM 7.05 PM TO 9.45 PM**

### **Committee Members Present**

Councillors: Pauline Helliard-Symons (Chairman), Shahid Younis (Vice-Chairman), Laura Blumenthal, Lindsay Ferris, Bill Soane and Malcolm Richards (substituting Ken Miall)

### **Other Councillors Present**

Councillors: Charlotte Haitham Taylor, Ian Pittock and Tim Holton

### **Officers Present**

Alan Stubbersfield, Interim Assistant Director Learning and Achievement  
Judith Ramsden, Director of Children's Services  
Luciane Bowker, Democratic Services Officer  
Rhian Hayes, Senior Strategy Officer  
Donna Munday, Schools Finance Manager  
Rob Stubbs, Head of Finance

### **91. APOLOGIES**

An apology for absence was submitted from Councillor Ken Miall.

### **92. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 22 September 2015 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### **93. DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest submitted.

### **94. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no public questions.

### **95. MEMBER QUESTION TIME**

There were no Member questions.

### **96. REVIEW OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNING BODIES - MONITORING**

The Committee received the review of the effectiveness of governing bodies monitoring report that was set out on agenda pages 13-40.

The Chairman praised the progress that had been made and noted the favourable comments made by Ofsted. Members were pleased to note that Officers had acted on the recommendations made by the Effectiveness of Governing Bodies Task and Finish Group. It was also commented that Digest for Governors (appendix 2) was very good.

Members agreed that in order to ensure continuous progress it was important to start an advertising campaign to attract new governors.

### **RESOLVED That:**

- 1) Support for actions taken be continued;
- 2) Any future steps to be taken and other suggestions listed in the minutes be endorsed.

## **97. ANNUAL REPORT OF WOKINGHAM SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD**

The Committee considered the annual report of the Wokingham Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB) which was set out on agenda pages 41-98. The report provided an overview of the performance and effectiveness of local services with regards to safeguarding children in Wokingham.

Frances Gosling-Thomas, Independent Chair to WSCB presented the report highlighting the following points:

- This was a statutory report that covered the period between April 2014 and March 2015. Frances indicated that progress had been made since April 2015 which would be included in next year's annual report;
- There had been considerable improvement in the work undertaken by the Board with agencies working together with a clear vision and direction;
- The Board had set five high priorities for 2014/15 which had been agreed at top level and which had been identified as a result of evidence. Progress in those five areas would be considered a major improvement to safeguarding children;
- The Board was aware of the areas that needed improvement and there was a high level of commitment at leadership level to work together to make the necessary progress;
- There was ongoing work outside of the WSCB to bring agencies together, Frances emphasised that there was a significant level of challenge and engagement by all parties involved in the Board.

In response to a question, Frances stated that there was good communication with agencies outside Wokingham Borough. Frances cited as an example the attendance of Judith Ramsden, Director of Children's Services at an event with Berkshire Police authorities to talk about reporting and sharing mechanisms. Frances declared that she was also chair to two other Safeguarding Boards in other local authorities and was in a position to contribute to cross borough issues and to encourage collaboration.

The Chairman, Pauline Helliard-Symons went through the five priorities in the report and the concern blog listed in the report, inviting Members to ask questions. The following points were made during the analysis of the report:

- Members asked what was being done to encourage vulnerable children to attend youth centres, as it was believed they would benefit from using their services. Frances responded that the website was being updated in consultation with Youth Services and social media such as tweeting was being used in an effort to attract such children;
- There was a survey in schools to find out areas where people didn't feel safe and bullying had been identified as an ongoing problem which needed tackling;
- Frances informed the Committee that Buckinghamshire had produced a commercial raising awareness of children safeguarding which was going to be displayed in various public places such as GP surgeries, libraries, cinemas, etc. Frances stated that it was possible that Wokingham could use that same commercial as long as credit was given to Buckinghamshire. Members could view this commercial on the Buckinghamshire Children Safeguarding Board website;
- There was an ongoing issue regarding the need to encourage multi-agency training and as a result training was now being tailored to make it more accessible to people;
- Members emphasised the need to make sure GPs located outside the Wokingham border received adequate training as they could be treating Wokingham children;

- E-learning had been improved and it now enabled staff to complete it in their own time;
- Following a practice review it had been recognised that staff needed more training on culture and diversity;
- Frances clarified that the statistics noted in the report by the Child Death Overview Panel included Wokingham children that had died outside of Wokingham;
- Frances pointed out that Lay Members had made a significant contribution to the Board;
- Although the budget was below the desired level, it was now more transparent and there had been a modest increase;
- There was a clear view of how the strategy needed to be improved in the area of domestic abuse;
- Although there had been some issues in the timing of the Children In Care health reviews, they had in all but two cases completed since the report had been produced. This was because two children had refused to undergo their health reviews;
- There would be a meeting of Policy and Procedures Sub Group in December to evaluate options for hosting Berkshire Safeguarding Procedures online. This would remain a concern until the Board was satisfied that all policies were fit for purpose;
- There was full representation from schools at the Board and there were also safeguarding sub groups where teachers met. Frances felt confident that schools in the borough were receiving adequate safeguarding.

The Chairman thanked Frances for presenting the work of the WCSB. The Committee felt reassured that the WCSB had come a long way and that improvements had been made.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

## **98. IMPACT OF THE APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMME**

The Committee received a presentation outlining the impact of the apprenticeship programme. Rhian Hayes, Senior Strategy Officer presented the item emphasising the following points:

- There had been an increase in the number of good quality apprenticeships offered by local employers;
- Disadvantaged young people were being helped to develop the right skills to achieve lifelong sustainable employment;
- The apprenticeship programme was being delivered by the Elevate Wokingham team;
- Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) was one of the largest employers in the Borough and therefore it was important that WBC set a good example in offering apprenticeships;
- It was WBC's target to employ seven apprentices and to provide 35 work experience placements per annum;
- It was recognised that disadvantaged young people often needed additional support. This was being offered in the form of work experience, additional training, support for CV writing and interview skills;
- Once on the apprenticeship there was a need for a more supportive environment, for example more training mentors and a buddy system;
- Rhian reported the successful case study of Nicole who had joined the Elevate team last October as a Skills Coordinator Apprentice. Nicole was encouraged to study for an NVQ level III in Business Administration and was now enrolled at a local college. She had also proved indispensable as a social media expert and was running the job search activity;

- To date five Employment Skills Plans(ESP) with 12 apprenticeships, 35 work experience opportunities and 15 jobs had been negotiated;
- There was a partnership with the Construction Industry Training Board to secure ESPs. It was felt the construction industry provided the opportunity for young people to start at low level and to work their way up;
- Rhian stated that a local shop had agreed to sell the work of a young person who wished to develop an artistic career and another local shop had offered her a four day a week job to support her;
- The work would continue to improve pathways for young people to get into employment through partners across Berkshire working in a more coordinated way.

In response to a Member question Rhian stated that apprentice salaries were in the region of £12k and £13k per annum.

Members questioned how many apprenticeships were required. Rhian responded that the service would be tailored according to the needs and as Wokingham was an affluent area there was not a high need. Rhian explained that if places could not be filled by Wokingham young people, other authorities could take the place. Members asked Rhian to circulate last year's targets.

It was expected that at the end of apprenticeships young people would have a qualification, references and hopefully a job.

Judith Ramsden praised the work being done and Committee Members were pleased to note that it had been targeted at care leavers.

**RESOLVED** That: The report be noted and that the targets from last year be circulated with the minutes of the meeting.

## **99. DELIVERING EFFECTIVE SAFEGUARDING SERVICES**

The Committee considered a report set out on agenda pages 99-110 which detailed the Children In Care (CIC) peer review.

Judith Ramsden, Director of Children's Services stated that peer reviewers had been invited to share their experiences and to offer a friendly eye to develop a clearer understanding of support services for CIC of Wokingham Borough Council. The reviewers had met with various people, including: Charlotte Haitham Taylor Executive Member for Children's Services; Judith Ramsden Director of Children's Services and social workers.

Judith reported that some of the findings had already been identified as a result of self-assessment. A quality improvement plan had been put in place and a report would be submitted to Corporate Parenting Board in future.

The Committee endorsed the implementation of an action plan for improvement following the peer review.

**RESOLVED:** That the implementation of a quality improvement plan be endorsed.

## **100. REGULATIONS SURROUNDING SCHOOL LOANS**

The Committee had requested a report examining the regulations surrounding school loans following concerns that schools in the Borough were facing financial difficulties. The Chairman explained that there was a time lag in receiving the Dedicated Schools Grant



(DSG) from central government and initial spending before the schools were able to access their grant.

Rob Stubbs, Head of Finance explained that schools could apply for loans but only on a capital basis. In order for the scheme details to change it would need to be consulted on with all maintained school, considered by Schools Forum and approved by the Executive as it was not currently allowed for in the Treasury Management Strategy.

It was recognised that schools budgets were tighter than in previous years and schools were currently looking at different ways to deal with their budgets. Rob explained that if a school was about to go into debt, it would normally contact Donna Munday, Schools Finance Manager, who would work with the school to help them with their finances.

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

- A school loan would only be considered if the school had the ability to pay it back;
- Both the Director of Children's Services and the Director of Finance and Resources would need to approve any school loans;
- Schools' governing bodies were going to have to make difficult decisions and find ways to cut costs to stay within their budgets;
- Schools were being encouraged to adjust their staffing levels according to their pupils numbers;
- Donna clarified that once a pupil had been allocated to a school, the school retained the funding for that pupil even if he/she moved to another school; there was no adjustment for mid-year movement;
- Rob pointed out that there had been minimal increases in the DSG over the last five years and this had added to the pressures in the budget;
- Schools had been sent an indicative budget last Friday, which was much earlier than in previous years, to help them to prepare ahead of the final budget allocation;
- There was ongoing work to lobby central government to increase Wokingham's school funding.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

#### **101. SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT POLICY 2015**

The Committee received a report set out in agenda pages 117-126 outlining the school improvement policy 2015 and delivery model.

Alan Stubbersfield, Interim Assistant Director Learning and Achievement presented the report and invited the Committee to consider its contents and to assess future developments in the context of the priorities.

The Committee asked that special attention be given to the work being undertaken by the School Improvement Officer as it was felt that this was an important role in achieving school improvements.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be endorsed.

#### **102. CHILDREN'S SERVICES PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

The Committee considered a report containing the Children's Services performance indicators which were set out on agenda pages 127-134.

Judith Ramsden explained that the timing of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting meant that the latest indicators available for formal reporting this cycle were the quarterly indicators reported at the end of September 2015, in line with internal monitoring arrangements.

The Committee sought reassurance that the targets were challenging enough for Wokingham. Judith stated that the targets were set by Officers in conjunction with the Executive Member for Children's Services. There were a number of considerations in setting the targets. It was noted that some targets were benchmarked against statistical neighbours, others against national statistics and some related to regulations.

The Committee asked that more detail be included in future reports, including comparison with statistical neighbours. Judith offered to include a further breakdown for the next report.

In discussing the report the following points were made:

- The indicator *% Care Proceedings completed in 15/16 within 26 weeks of application* which was red was linked to national expectation;
- The indicator *% Looked After Children living within 20 Miles of their home* should be amber and not green, this was also linked to national expectation;
- Regarding the indicator *% Looked After Children who achieved permanent care arrangements during previous 12 months*, Members felt this target could be higher and agreed to discuss it again at the next meeting with the additional breakdown information;
- Members asked that a target be included for the *Reduce the education gap at KS2 level 4 between disadvantaged and other pupils for Reading, Writing and Maths* indicator;
- The target for the *% Pupils achieving a good level of development (GLD) at Early Years Foundation Stage in academic year 14-15* indicator was 71%;
- Members queried why the target for Primary Schools with a current Ofsted rating of good or better was only 88% rather than 100%. Alan Stubbersfield commented that it was important to take into account the frequency in which schools were Ofsted inspected in order to set and achieve targets. Members agreed that the targets would be tailored to reflect the schools that had been Ofsted inspected.

**RESOLVED:** That

- 1) a more detailed report with a further breakdown of the targets on Children's Services Performance Indicators be submitted for the next meeting;
- 2) the Committee would reconsider the Children's Services Performance Indicators at its next meeting.

### **103. SCHOOL PERFORMANCE**

The Committee considered the schools performance report which was set out in agenda pages 135-156 and also a tabled paper containing data relating to neighbouring secondary schools as had been requested by the Committee previously.

The report provided provisional information on the 2015 pupil outcomes. Alan Stubbersfield stated that the data was currently being scrutinised by Officers.

It was noted that Wokingham scored in the lower set of results in the country for phonics, however it secured the highest results for Reading and Writing in the country. More analyses on this was needed, but it was believed that it was a reflection of differences in

levels of social economic disadvantage. It was thought that phonics mattered more in terms of achieving good levels of Reading and Writing to the more disadvantaged areas.

Judith explained that although schools were only allowed to log in the first result obtained in an exam, they allowed pupils to retake exams if the first result had been poor as they understood the importance of good results for students' careers.

The report demonstrated that strong improvements had been achieved, particularly with the more able pupils. Judith thanked Alan and his team for all the work that had been undertaken and confirmed that a final report was expected by the end of the year.

**RESOLVED:** that

- 1) the Committee support and challenge as appropriate the actions and outcomes identified in the report;
- 2) the Committee receive further reports following subsequent national data releases.

#### **104. SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT SERVICE PLAN 2015-2017**

The Committee considered the school improvement service plan 2015-2017 which was set out on agenda pages 157-162.

Alan Stubbersfield commented that following the completion of the self-evaluation of the authority's arrangements for school improvement a number of key actions had been identified as listed in the report.

It was expected that the implementation of the plan would have a positive impact on school improvement and the plan would continue to be reviewed.

**RESOLVED:** that the report be subject to further monitoring to identify progress with the actions identified in the plan

#### **105. PRIMARY SCHOOL STRATEGY**

The Committee considered the Primary School Planning Strategy update which was circulated. The Chairman invited Ian Pittock who chaired the Primary School Strategy Task and Finish Group to share his findings with the Committee.

Ian reported that the Task and Finish Group had held regular meetings with parents and had examined lots of information and analysis about the areas of concern where there was a shortfall of school places. Earley, Woodley and South West areas of the Borough had been identified as hot spots where there was the greatest shortage of capacity to meet the demand for school places. There was now clear evidence from which to draw up the Strategy.

The following comments were made during the discussion of the item:

- The Committee was informed that there seemed to be a 30 year cycle in which people moved out of their houses and young families moved in consequently requiring school places. This 30 year point had not been foreseen and this was one of the reasons for the shortfall;
- The report explored the rationale for the next steps towards the strategy;

- Work was being carried out to assess the practicality of increasing school places in reception classes within certain schools;
- Ian reported that there were discussions around site sharing and buildings usage, but some of this information was still at a confidential stage;
- Parents should be well informed and encouraged to submit a complete list of school preferences when completing their school admissions forms;
- Early Years had been asked to speak to parents to help and prepare them to fill in the preference form;
- The school admissions application form could be simplified to make it easier for parents;
- It was recognised that a better anti-fraud mechanism was needed;
- Due to national regulations if places were available in Wokingham schools the authority was obliged to accept children from other areas such as Reading and Bracknell if they applied for a place;
- Reading should be encouraged to increase the capacity in their schools to alleviate the pressure in Wokingham schools which were near the border with Reading;
- Members were worried that the large increase in housing developments would create even more pressure on school places in the future;
- Although new schools would be built with Section 106 money, Members were worried that these schools might not be ready in time to meet the demand created by the new residents;
- It was planned that the report would be submitted for consideration at the November Executive.

**RESOLVED:** That the progress on the Primary Planning Strategy be noted and endorsed for submission to Executive in November.

#### **106. COMMITTEE'S FORWARD PROGRAMME**

The Committee received and considered its current work programme, set out on Agenda pages 163-166 and agreed to include the following items for the next meeting:

- Ian Pittock would provide a verbal update on the Primary School Place Strategy;
- The Children's Services Performance Indicators including more detailed information as required at the next meeting.

It was agreed that Ofsted findings would be considered at the 23 February 2016 meeting.

**RESOLVED:** That the Committee's forward programme be confirmed including the addition of the items above mentioned.

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Independent Review of Leadership and Governance in Children's Services</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 15 December 2015
<b>WARD</b>	None Specific
<b>DIRECTOR</b>	Andy Couldrick, Chief Executive

**OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY**

Assurance that services to our children, young people and families are well-led and governed.

**RECOMMENDATION**

The committee is recognised to note the report and its findings.

**SUMMARY OF REPORT**

The review was commissioned by the Leader of the Council to provide assurance as to the quality of Leadership and Governance in Wokingham Borough Council as applied to meeting the needs of vulnerable children and families, and young people at risk of harm as a result of Child Sexual Exploitation.

The review reports positively on the strength of leadership and governance and makes a series of recommendations that will be picked up alongside the action plan to be developed following the recent inspection by Ofsted.

## Background

This review was commissioned following the panel that met earlier in 2015 to consider the Serious Case Review published in Oxfordshire concerning Child Sexual Exploitation. It was commissioned to provide assurance that arrangements for the leadership and governance of the Council's Children's Services are sound.

Since the review Ofsted have also inspected Wokingham's services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers. The report of the inspection will be published in January.

## Analysis of Issues

This independent review found a large number of strengths and improvements in the leadership, management and governance of services for children in Wokingham. The Chief Executive, Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member are singled out for the strength of leadership they have shown, and the impact they have had on the quality of service provided by the Council.

Its recommendations for further improvement will be taken forward alongside the action planning following the Ofsted inspection.

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

***The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.***

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	Nil		
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	Nil		
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	Nil		

### Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

N/A

### Cross-Council Implications

Strong Leadership & Governance

### List of Background Papers

Independent Review of Leadership & Governance: Wokingham Borough Council children's services

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<b>Date</b> 4.12.15	<b>Version No.</b>

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# **Independent Review of Leadership & Governance**

## **Wokingham Borough Council children's services**

**Bernie McNally OBE  
Bsc. MSW. MBA.**

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## **Acknowledgements**

The reviewer would like to acknowledge and thank all members, staff and management of Wokingham Borough Council for their positive engagement in this review. She would also like to acknowledge the time and effort made by the council partners who also gave freely of their time to ensure the reviewer had a comprehensive picture of Wokingham's collective services to children. The reviewer would like to particularly thank Sherrie Newell for all her support and help through out the review process.

## **Introduction**

In July 2015 Wokingham Borough Council commissioned an independent review of leadership and governance in their children's services department. This commission was the recommendation of an assurance review carried out by Wokingham Council earlier in 2015. The assurance review related to the publication a serious case review into child sexual exploitation in Oxfordshire County Council, and examined the role of the current Wokingham CEO when he worked in Oxfordshire as an assistant director of children's services. While the outcome of the assurance review largely exonerated the CEO, the assurance panel wished to be further assured as to the current leadership and governance arrangements of Wokingham Borough Council's children's services department and it's ability to respond appropriately to the issue to child sexual exploitation.

The relevant recommendations were as follows:

"Commission a review (Possibly via LGA) on the leadership and governance of children's safeguarding arrangements, to ensure that Wokingham draws on all the best practice available and is well prepared for this aspect when it has its next Ofsted inspection"

"To assess the response of the Council's and partners' leaders to the emerging facts and concerns regarding Child Sexual Exploitation"

## **Terms of reference**

The terms of reference attached at appendix 1 reflect the requirement to base the review around the Ofsted leadership grade

descriptors attached at appendix 2, given the imminent Ofsted inspection of Wokingham's children's services expected later in 2015.

An integral part of the terms of reference (TOR) for this review was also to "Assess the response of the Council's and partners' leaders to the emerging facts and concerns regarding Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)"

This aspect of the TOR is within the context of CSE being a significant feature of the assurance review panel deliberations relating to the content of the Oxfordshire serious case review. CSE has also in recent times dominated the national child protection agenda, with high profile media coverage of an inquiry into Rotherham council's handling of CSE leading to further CSE inquiries being initiated and reported across the UK.

There has also been a heightened awareness of historical child abuse in the UK with the implication of high profile figures and celebrities, as well as allegations of negligence and cover up. This awareness has made many local authorities mindful in terms of how well their own child protection services are responding to the growing demand and how well child sexual abuse allegations in particular are being handled.

## **Leadership team**

Wokingham Borough Council is a small unitary council in the South East of England with a population of 155,000 of which 45,000 are children and young people under the age of 18. It has been a unitary authority area since 1998. It consists of 54 elected councilors, elected in thirds each year, with one 'fallow' year in four. The Borough Council Offices are based at Shute End in Wokingham. Wokingham Borough Council represents a relatively affluent part of the country, but has the lowest funding per head of population in the country, with the smallest number of staff per resident of any unitary authority in England. Council membership is predominantly from the Conservative Party, with a small group of Liberal Democrats. The ruling group elects a Leader, who appoints an Executive. The current

leader has held the post for the past 18 months and appears to work very well with the CEO and his senior management team. The leader is particularly focused on the improvement and on going development in children's services in Wokingham.

The Current Chief Executive of Wokingham Borough Council has been in his current role since 2011, prior to that he held the position of Director of Children's services in Wokingham, since 2009. The CEO appears to be highly regarded in terms of the improvements he has brought to the council since taking up post. He led an improvement programme that moved the Ofsted rating from "Inadequate" to "Satisfactory" and led to the lifting of an "Improvement Direction" imposed by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (as it then was).

The current Director of Children's Services (DCS) has been in post since 2014, having previously served as assistant director of children's services in Wokingham. The DCS has an impressive track record in managing children's services and made a key contribution to the children's services improvement journey referred to above. She has also led subsequent improvement work, which has resulted in the Bridges respite facility, children's centres, and children's services inspected by Ofsted showing on going improvement.

The current lead member for children's services in Wokingham Council has also been in place since May 2012, providing sound leadership and direction in partnership with the DCS as they work together on the improvement journey. Wokingham Council has also appointed a deputy lead member for children's services to share some of the heavy burden of children's work in the council, he has been in this post since July 2014

### **Current Environment**

Wokingham children's services are currently preparing for an imminent Ofsted inspection. The emphasis on the preparation for this inspection has created a healthy drive and pace for improvement across all of children's services in the council. The children services leadership team has indicated an interest in learning as much as possible from this independent review of leadership and governance to help them in their preparation for inspection as well as generally in terms of improvements going forward.

## **Methodology**

The reviewer was provided with a wide range of Council documentation and had access to additional documentation on request a list of which is attached at appendix 3.

The reviewer was also given access to a wide range of stakeholders a list of which is at appendix 4, both within the council authority and key partner organisations including:

- Political leadership figures
- A wide range of individuals at all levels in the organisation, corporate and professional
- External stakeholders, including the local safeguarding board chair, senior police, senior health personnel, the health and wellbeing board chair and the adult safeguarding personnel
- Parents, service users, children, volunteers

## **Leadership, Vision and Management**

In Local Government, leadership roles and responsibilities are shared across the political and officer spectrum. The leadership head on the political side is the elected leader of the council, who in turn appoints an executive team made up of elected members, one of whom is the lead member for children's services. The leadership head on the officer side is the Chief Executive who is appointed by the leader through a recruitment process and is accountable for the day to day running of all council matters and is delegated to perform most tasks. The CEO in conjunction with the elected members then appoint a senior team of officers to develop and manage the vast range of council services they provide

In this scenario the leadership, in terms of vision, values, key objectives and a general direction of travel, is essentially shared across both political representatives and paid officers.

This independent review began with an examination of the extent to which Wokingham Council leadership both political and officer had the required sense of a shared vision, had a common value base and

were working towards an agreed set of objectives. The reviewer was also interested in how far down the organisation these elements of leadership were evident and understood. The reviewer wanted to explore how well understood the vision for Wokingham was among the staff that are employed in children's services. She looked for evidence that the council vision is well articulated and understood by all stakeholders who understand the endpoint in the planning framework. The reviewer wanted to see evidence of a clear line of sight between the individual jobholder in Wokingham council children's services and the vision as articulated by the political and officer leadership.

### **Political Leadership**

The meetings with the political leaders in Wokingham council indicated a group of people enthusiastic and proud to represent the citizens of Wokingham with a desire to do the very best they can to represent their constituents. They are keen to ensure they develop a working environment based on openness and transparency and wish to be assured that council officers are providing sound management to staff in all services. They demonstrated in discussion that they are also very much aware of their responsibilities and accountability in the current climate of child protection enquiries and want to be assured that officers are basing their practice on the highest UK and international standards. They are also concerned that best practice from wherever it is found should be embedded into the work of Wokingham children's services department.

To help the political leadership with these objectives, Wokingham Council has developed an overall strategic plan with a clear vision statement and defined values and objectives.

The leader of the council and the lead member indicated they were both firmly signed up to this plan and the stated value base of: **Trust, Respect, and 'One Team'** working and **valuing** everyone's contribution.

However the process of arriving at a consensus across all members of the council and the paid officers as to what the vision and key priorities of the council should be was not clear to the reviewer. There was evidence of some dissatisfaction among some members as to their inclusive involvement in creating a shared vision for

Wokingham. Some members complained that the council plan was presented to them as a final document without the opportunity for full participation and contribution.

### **Children's Officer leadership**

In meetings with the children's officers, they too demonstrated a similar passion and desire to provide high quality services to all children in the council area and in particular to the council's most vulnerable children. The senior leadership from the CEO down are very much aware of their statutory responsibilities to provide high quality services to society's most vulnerable children in partnership with a wide range of stakeholders both internal to the council and external in the wider community. Both the CEO and the DCS have many years experience working as social work practitioners and social work managers and were able to demonstrate an extensive knowledge of the issues pertinent to children's services. It was also evident during interviews and documents provided that both were working at pace to ensure that there is a real focus on the needs of children in Wokingham. They are both particularly focused on ensuring the council has a stable and skilled workforce, that the staff are innovative and improvement focused and that the administrative processes are as effective and efficient as they can be.

The CEO and the DCS also agreed that there could be more work done to bring members and officers together, as a collective leadership, to share ideas, get to know each other better and develop not only a shared cohesive vision but to better understand each other's' roles and responsibilities. They recognised the concerns of some members regarding the importance of being more inclusive when agreeing the vision and direction of travel of the council to ensure ownership from everyone with elected responsibility.

### **Values**

An organisation's values inform and mould the style of leadership in the organisation and the behaviour of staff at all levels, to each other and to external stakeholders. Wokingham Borough Council Plan (2014-2017) identifies the values of Wokingham council as **trust and respect, pride, working as a team and being valued**. Following



through on these stated values one would expect to find senior staff and political leaders demonstrating them through their behaviour and tone. The reviewer was interested in not just managerial actions but how each person in a leadership position achieves their goals.

The behaviour and tone of interaction between the council political leadership and the officers appears to be very much in line with the council's stated values in terms of mutual respect and trust. Political leaders gave examples of how there was a growing trust between the recently appointed DCS and council members, although some did express a desire for more open and transparent communication from the officers to the council members across the council as a whole. There also appeared to be some dissatisfaction around the timely presentation of papers and reports (in relation to the Corporate Parenting Board), which left some members feeling vulnerable in terms of being able to fully digest the contents and implications of the information provided.

The reviewer met a wide cross section of staff from within Wokingham council at all grades. Overwhelmingly staff had positive experiences to tell in terms of the culture of the organisation. Many staff reported being valued; being treated with respect and having pride in their work and the place they work. Staff described senior management up to and including the CEO as visible and approachable. However there were a number of comments in the staff survey, which may suggest that staff based in offices outside the Shute End building may not feel that senior staff across the Council is visible enough.

Staff and managers also described the lead member as someone who is passionate about children "walking the walk as well as talking the talk" They gave examples of the lead member coming to events and teams to find out what they do and take an interest in what they are achieving in terms of outcomes for children living in the council area. The lead member in conversation with the reviewer was very focused on what was working well within Wokingham children's services as well as where there was room for improvement. Such honest reflection is an important element of the continuous quality improvement cycle.

In terms of the CEO and the DCS almost everyone the reviewer spoke to recounted how things had changed for the better since the current CEO took up post. Many staff in the children's directorate identify with the CEO as someone who understands their world and their challenges given his background in children's services and his former role as the DCS in Wokingham.

Staff described the current DCS as hard working, driven to improve services and not afraid to tackle poor practice in her endeavour to drive up standards. They described how she has pioneered the innovation programme which most of the staff have enthusiastically embraced. The DCS appears to be visible, and active in visits to teams, holding 'Quality Conversations' on cases with staff as well as engaging in team development processes. Staff see her as responsible for having the hard work and foresight needed to engage with internal council partners to develop workforce strategies to stabilise the workforce in children's social care and create a stable safe environment where social workers can work effectively with children and families. They see her as a strong advocate for children, which motivates and drives her desire to improve children's services. The DCS' immediate reports are exceptionally supportive of her leadership style and the progress she has made describing her as the best DCS they have ever worked for.

But with a driven, performance management approach there can often be casualties with individuals who are not assessed as being up to the task or whose performance is not to the standard required in a busy and tightly regulated children's system. In this regard the DCS may have "ruffled a few feathers" as some poor performers have been managed out of, or chosen to leave, children's services. It is important to note that when such actions are necessary the individuals should be treated with respect and dignity in keeping with the council's values, and principles of fairness and compassion. It is also important that staff have access to grievance processes to deal with any issues they consider to be unfair. It would appear that in the recent past a previous council employee may not have felt that she was treated fairly and used the whistle-blowing process rather than the grievance process as a vehicle to vent her unhappiness. The reviewer is assured that in this case the whistle blowing policy and process was subsequently followed and all issues raised were thoroughly investigated. None of the matters raised gave any cause for concern about risk to children or the management role of the DCS

or Children's services leadership team. (The report addresses the Whistle-Blowing policy below)

### **Statutory guidance: leadership, management, and governance arrangements**

The roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services and the lead member for children's services are clearly laid out in statutory guidance "Statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Director of children's services and the lead member for children's services" attached as appendix 5. This guidance is very clear on the responsibilities of the lead member and the DCS particularly in relation to working together as a team and providing leadership to everyone concerned with providing services to children.

There is a lot of evidence of the lead member taking her leadership role extremely seriously in a wide variety of ways. These range from public endorsement of children's strategic documents such as the Wokingham Children and Young People's Plan 2014-2016, to visibility at the front line, meeting front line workers to show the support and encouragement they need when working in this difficult environment. The lead member for children's services has also demonstrated willingness within the public arena of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be held openly to account by other members in terms of the overall performance of children's services.

The DCS equally understands her role in terms of the leadership partnership required by law in children's services. She describes her relationship with the lead member as professional and courteous. To ensure compliance with statutory guidance the DCS has introduced regular formal meetings with the Lead Member and Deputy, to ensure an appropriate coherent strategic overview of children's services and support a proper strategic and policy focus. This is a correct and appropriate approach, to ensure proper governance between the DCS and Lead Member.

The DCS would also acknowledge however, that in the highly pressurised world of children's services, perhaps they both need to

take more time to sit down regularly in a less formal setting to discuss issues and concerns that might not necessarily make part of the agenda in formal meetings. Such informal meetings could help develop further the trusting relationship, which is crucial for leaders working in this highly charged environment.

Wokingham council have also created a role entitled “Deputy lead member for children’s services” The reviewer is not quite clear of the extent of delegated authority this role has conferred on the post holder and has some concerns that it may have created some ambiguity in terms of clear lines of accountability which is an imperative in children’s services. The post holder himself also expressed some concern in terms of accountability for services he felt he was not as well communicated with, as he should be and with administrative systems not as efficient as they should be. Further work is required to clarify the accountability of the deputy to the lead member who is the only person holding the statutory accountability, and they with the DCS, in order to establish working arrangements that fully comply with Government guidance.

### **Strategy for commissioning and developing services**

The reviewer was given access to a number of strategies which have been developed by Wokingham council and other partners to help guide the work of all the stakeholders in Children’s services which included:

- Wokingham children and young people plan 2014-2016 (Wokingham children and young people’s partnership)
- Wokingham Children’s services Early Help and Innovation
- Wokingham children’s services Engagement strategy
- Wokingham Children’s Services Business plan 2015 -2016
- Wokingham Children’s services commissioning strategy 2015-2018
- Wokingham Children’s safeguarding Board: Terms Of Reference.

**Wokingham Children and Young People’s Plan** is impressive in that it demonstrates clear political leadership with endorsement from the lead member and indicates a clear commitment from all strategic partners in Wokingham to work together to improve

outcomes for children. The plan also has an appropriate focus on the need to work with and communicate with children, which complements the **Children's Services Engagement Strategy**.

While Government no longer requires councils to produce a local children and young peoples plan, there is an expectation that each local authority develops a "clear and up to date strategy for commissioning and developing services, delivered by a suitably qualified and experienced workforce, that meets the needs of local children, young people and families" There is also an expectation that other bodies such as the local safeguarding board and the health and wellbeing board publish plans reflecting an overarching strategy for meeting the health and social care needs of all children. With all this paper and bureaucracy it is important that these plans dovetail and complement one another and that they follow a similar and consistent format so that the plan they are describing from their different perspectives is consistent and joined up. This consistency format and structure was not always clear to the reviewer perusing these documents which could cause confusion among those expected to use them as a road map for the development of a coherent children's service.

## **Communication and visibility**

Communication and visibility are important in all organisations if the leadership wish to inspire and motivate their staff. It is also important in the promotion of discipline, accountability and strategic alignment. It is the means by which the people at the top of the organisation maintain connectivity with the front line.

As referred to above there is plenty of evidence of communication and visibility of senior staff and political leaders in Wokingham, with staff describing how accessible their managers are both proactively and reactively. There is plenty of evidence of monthly newsletters and electronic communication. The CEO is described as visible and recognisable to most staff on the ground

However with most staff now organised into specialisms and many more dispersed locally throughout the borough, there may also be a need to bring senior staff from all departments together periodically

for CEO briefings to communicate directly to the leaders throughout the organisation on the key priorities and information points. Such gatherings would help break down the barriers of specialisms and enhance the communication and relationships across council departments. There should also be much more emphasis on breaking down silos and encouraging better communication across departments and professionals.

In children's services staff describe the DCS as very approachable and available to staff. They described a number of initiatives/fora where they can get access to her advice and guidance and where they can directly raise concerns and issues of importance to practice. For example the staff outlined the annual whole service days which the DCS convenes. They also referred to the quarterly social work development days for all front line social workers and managers, where they discuss practice issues with senior staff and develop learning opportunities. There was also evidence of the DCS heading up "the managers leading change forum" which is an opportunity for first line managers in children's services to take on leadership responsibilities in the improvement journey.

### **Safety (High quality safe and effective services)**

The ultimate test of how effective the leadership and management of the organisation is, lies in their ability to provide safe and effective services. The reviewer sought evidence of this in the form of

- **Evidence of a learning culture:** learning from mistakes, supported at times of crisis, learning from best practice, peer review, constructive challenge, innovation and improvement.
- **Assurance:** clear assurance framework and committee structure including prominence for the Corporate Parenting Board and the Scrutiny and Oversight Board, efficient and effective processes.
- **Policies for raising concerns:** such as anti-bullying and whistleblowing
- **Robust performance management and monitoring:** assessment of performance against government standards
- **Child protection services:** in particular a robust and integrated response to CSE

### Learning culture

Wokingham children's services department has placed a significant emphasis on being a learning organisation, which is manifested in things such as

- Partnerships with the local university providing 25 places for step up students (long standing employees) wishing to train as social workers
- Sponsoring 3 places at the open university as an alternative pathway to social work qualification.
- Quality circles and service improvement sets
- The Professor Eileen Munro Innovation programme: The introduction of the Signs of Safety approach to working with children and families, involving comprehensive training and consultancy with national leaders.
- Managers Leading Change programme for first line managers/team leaders, creating bottom up leadership at every level.
- Action Learning Sets for assistant team managers
- Systematic staff appraisal and regular quality supervision

All of the social work staff with whom the reviewer engaged described Wokingham council as a good place to work, a place they felt safe and supported and a place where they felt they could constructively challenge their managers.

### Assurance

In terms of assurance, the reviewer was given access to the council's assurance framework/committee structure. While the key elements for effective controls assurance were present, it was not sufficiently clear in terms of lines of accountability and would probably benefit from some further work on such things as terms of reference, purpose and membership. It would also be important that the council's corporate parenting board appeared as part of the corporate assurance structure. A similar observation was made of the assurance framework within the children's department, which

could also benefit from a review of the terms of reference of each committee/ meeting.

An issue, which did emerge, was the timely provision of reports and papers prior to the meetings. Some members complained of important documents being tabled on the day in some meetings, which is unacceptable practice and which doesn't lend itself to openness and accountability.

The reviewer had the opportunity to attend a scrutiny and oversight committee meeting as part of the review. This meeting was conducted in public with several members of the public in attendance. Some members of the public were permitted to ask questions at the start of the proceedings. The meeting was chaired by a council member and attended by the accountable officer (DCS), the lead member and the deputy lead member. The conduct of the meeting was most professional with a respectful tone and approach. The papers were in order and easy to follow. The challenge function of the members in attendance was robust and fair. The content of the meeting was appropriate with the required amount of detail in each paper to allow the committee to scrutinise the performance of children's services and to focus on appropriate priority items

### Performance management

One of the papers considered during the scrutiny and oversight committee was the children's services performance indicators covering the year to March 2015. All performance indicators had a RAG rating of green indicating an achievement of the targets in each area reported. While such indicators have limitations in terms of analysis of long-term outcomes for children they do have some merit in terms of an analysis of how well a council is meeting nationally agreed standards of performance.

In addition the DCS has also submitted a full annual report on children's social care, providing a clear analysis of strengths and areas for further improvement, to the LSCB, the Health & Wellbeing Board and to the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee. This report demonstrates good practice provides evidence an open and transparent approach to performance management.



### Whistleblowing

The reviewer had access to the council's whistle blowing policy of November 2014 which is hard copy and on the council's intranet site. There is also a confidential email address for any employee wishing to raise a concern.

The policy aims to:

- encourage employees to raise concerns about malpractice within the organisation without fear of reprisal
- reassure employees that concerns will be taken seriously
- provide employees with information about how to raise a concern and how the council will respond

During the course of the review the reviewer had access to a wide cross section of staff in the organisation. All employees spoken to indicated they were aware of the whistleblowing policy but none indicated they had ever cause to use it. Most staff indicated that they felt able to challenge management on any issues of concern that they had and in fact saw it a part of their professional code of conduct to raise concerns if they were worried about the quality and safety of the service.

A phenomenon that emerged during the review, from a small number of middle managers interviewed, was of a service under high pressure to achieve and improve, an agenda owned by all, but where the pressure of the job and the demands could have an inhibiting impact on a manager's confidence to raise a concern.

### Child protection and CSE

Most of the activities that we now call child sexual exploitation are not new, however advances in technology and social media have exposed more children and young people to them. Child protection systems need to be geared to identifying and responding to new and emerging threats. Adults need to become as skilled in social media as children, young people and abusers. In recent years, there has been

an increase in awareness of child sexual exploitation across the UK and its relationship with trafficking. Law and policy around trafficking emphasize the need to avoid blaming the victim and instead reinforce that children and young people who are at risk of CSE should be listened to and supported rather than seeing them as problem children requiring behavior modification. There is also a growing recognition of the need for social services and law enforcement agencies such as police and border control to work closely to disrupt, detect and prosecute offenders who commit such deplorable crimes against children.

The terms of reference of this current review included a requirement to

“To assess the response of the Council’s and partners’ leaders to the emerging facts and concerns regarding Child Sexual Exploitation”

The reviewer had access to information from a number of sources including:

- Child Sexual exploitation Strategy (Wokingham Safeguarding Children Board)
- Front door response to referrals
- Plans for the development of a MASH
- Training plans relating to child protection and CSE

CSE is very much on the agenda of the local safeguarding board, as it requires a multiagency response. The WSCB is currently running challenge sessions involving all agencies to explore how effectively the various partners are responding to this issue. The reviewer had the opportunity to attend a challenge session involving a number of statutory partners. The reviewer was impressed by the openness and transparency of the process and the willingness of all participants to present their service response to CSE. The reviewer was also impressed by the partner’s willingness to accept challenge and suggestions for improvement from others. The reviewer considers this to be a concrete way of developing robust relationships and improved collaborative working. It also provides a forum for sharing best practice from across Berkshire given that some of the

participants including the chair attend a number of safeguarding Boards. The challenge session was courteous and professional and focused on how each agency can improve in their response to the growing problem of CSE without losing sight of the fact that this is essentially a child protection issue which should follow the child protection policy and procedure pathway.

Like many other safeguarding boards, Wokingham LSCB refreshed their strategy with reference to best practice in early 2015. This was presented and signed off by the Board along with the annual report on work to identify and prevent CSE by the police and the Local Authority. The LSCB are working towards raising awareness of CSE as a child protection issue and treating the children involved as victims rather than complicit in this activity.

The WSCB strategy identifies 6 key strands for tackling CSE:

1. Informing/ awareness raising of the nature and impact of CSE.
2. Identifying locations and persons who may sexually exploit as well as identifying risk through early indicators
3. Preventing young people from becoming involved on continuing to be involved in sexually exploitive behaviour
4. Provide appropriate support
5. Divert, disrupt and actively pursue perpetrators
6. Prosecute perpetrators

Staff and management in Wokingham council are very much aware of the growing threat of CSE and are exploring all avenues within the child protection system to adequately deal with all aspects of this issue. Wokingham children's department are not keen to develop a separate child protection process to deal with CSE which is appropriate given it's size and the resources available. Instead they are working hard to integrate the learning from emerging research and recent enquiries into their current child protection system.

Wokingham Council children's services have developed CSE champions across every childcare team. These individuals have received specific training on all issues relating to CSE and are available to provide consultation and guidance to their team colleagues as the need arises. The DCS has also commissioned

specific CSE training, which has been developed by the University of Kent. Children's services are now working to ensure an effective and comprehensive roll out of this training across all agencies in the Borough. A multi-agency operational forum has also been set up to ensure information is effectively shared and that children's needs and risks are identified and acted upon. Children's services are also actively working with the police to develop a Multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) to build on the multi-agency front door arrangements developed over the last 12 months.

Council staff have focused their efforts, appropriately on timely sharing of information across agencies and clear pathways to either early help interventions or child protection interventions. Given the relatively recent research and learning from inquiries into CSE, Wokingham children's department are still working to adapt their child protection system and approach to cope with the emerging themes.

## **Children and Families**

During the course of the review some children and parents were given the opportunity to provide an input into the review in terms of their experiences of Wokingham council. Given the nature of statutory intervention into families in crisis these experiences are not always positive particularly in the early days when families are traumatised and frightened. The children in care council which represents looked after children and children receiving after care services were very forthcoming in their views as to how the system could improve. The young people generally felt that the original crisis point where they were received into care was confusing and traumatic, which is not surprising as many of these children have had horrific experiences which have necessitated statutory intervention in the first place. The children were more complimentary of the system of support and guidance they subsequently received from their individual social workers, particularly within the after care system.

The key children's issues are

1. There could be more consultation and communication with them in the early stages to help them understand what is going on and why
2. There could be less people involved in the care planning process
3. Formal meetings are sometimes not very child friendly with still too much jargon used by professionals
4. Some children reported a number of changes in their social workers and personal advisors which means they have to tell their story again to a new worker
5. Pathway plans are not always shared prior to meetings

There is some evidence that these issues have been picked up by recent consultation activity and reported to the Corporate Parenting Board. There is also evidence that these issues are being addressed within the service, for example the recent activity in children's services to stabilise the workforce was primarily motivated by the desire to improve the consistency of workers with individual children. Staff have also been provided with guidance on practice issues such as pathway planning to ensure the children are fully involved in the development of the plan prior to meetings being held.

Children's services has also recently invested in improving engagement with young people:

- Consultation days with young people commissioned jointly with the LSCB
- Employment of three young commissioners (who have experience of involvement with children's services, one as a care leaver)
- Support to, and engagement with the Children in Care Council:
- The Children in Care Council holds an annual survey to test the Council's progress against its pledges to young people

The children acknowledged that some things have improved recently however, they identified a number of areas which they would like to see some further improvement.

1. Better information on how to navigate the system and understand what is happening to them.
2. More consultation and participation across a range of issues including policy development
3. A clearer move to a rights based approach so that all looked after children and care leavers are advised more of their rights and entitlements.

Parents and Carers with whom the reviewer engaged (not necessarily within the child protection service) were very positive about the help and support they received from Wokingham's children department. One parent who had been involved in the incredible years programme at the children's centre described it as "unbelievably helpful" and said " I don't think I could have coped without it"

## **Partnerships**

It is well recognised that child protection is everyone's business and that no one agency working alone can provide the services and protection required to keep children and communities safe. Over the last decade organisations have formalised their working together arrangements into formal partnerships. The reviewer was interested in a number of partnerships in Wokingham which have been set up to protect children and vulnerable adults, to explore how well they are working and how effective they are. The reviewer was interested to know if partnerships are supported by transparent and rigorous governance arrangements, if their shared priorities are clear and resourced and if there is effective engagement. The key partnerships which the reviewer had access to governance arrangements, terms of reference, minutes and agendas included

- Children and Young people's Partnership
- Health and wellbeing board
- Local safeguarding board
- Adult safeguarding board

The reviewer also engaged with

- Trade union representatives
- Other council directorates
- Other statutory agencies particularly police and health

The chair of the Health and Wellbeing board was positive about working together arrangements around children and referred to progress being made during his first year as chair with a more appropriate focus on children's issues.

The adult safeguarding professionals believe that their partnership and integration focus is now more with health rather than children's social care with more silo working than people would like given the nature of the specialisms. This focus is reflected in the agenda of the meetings examined by the reviewer. The area causing some concern appears to be the transition period for young people leaving care with complex needs for housing and support. Staff suggested that the young people's housing strategy needs to be more proactive for what is a small but complex number of care leavers who have nowhere to live. Staff did describe a holistic approach to families where there were vulnerable adults with dependent children. Adult safeguarding staff referred specifically to improvements in communication where there are parental issues of mental illness.

The local safeguarding children's board has also just completed the first year under a new chair, who has moved the partnership forward considerably in terms of identifying clear priorities and putting more focus on the challenge function of the board. The board has also become more inclusive with the executive group being disbanded and the membership becoming more empowered and accountable. The chair indicated a need to work collectively on relationship building within the partnership to ensure further trust and mutual respect is developed.

Police and Health partners expressed great satisfaction with their working together arrangements with the children's services directorate. Senior staff from both organisations were very positive about interagency relationships at all levels. The most senior police officer interviewed described the working relationships with Wokingham as the "best across Berkshire" and gave examples of

working through issues when things go wrong to learn from mistakes and go forward. She described the current DCS as “a professional hard working director who was a pleasure to work with” The police are also very much involved with the council children’s department in the development of a Wokingham MASH which it is hoped will further enhance working together arrangements.

There is evidence of some partnership working between Wokingham council corporate directorates and the children’s directorate. There are particularly positive relationships with the human resources department and the finance department with “business partner” arrangements working quite well. The reviewer heard of quite innovative retention and recruitment strategies between the HR business partner, the finance business partner and the children’s social care management to stabilise the children’s social care workforce.

Trade union representation in Wokingham children’s directorate is not extensive by any means, however relationships between management and staff side representation are positive and progressive. It would appear that issues such as discipline and grievance are less in children’s services than other directorates, which is a positive indicator of staff satisfaction and morale.

## **Staff**

For all organisations their most expensive and valuable resource is the staff. They are expensive to recruit and to skill up. It is therefore important that they are treated well and encouraged to remain in the organisation. Instability in the workforce can lead to reduced moral and poor productivity. In children’s social care the detrimental impact of an unstable workforce is felt very acutely by the children and families who often complain about changes in social workers and having to tell their story over and over again. There was certainly some evidence of instability in children’s social care management in the recent past, which is not uncommon in other local authorities throughout the UK.

However in Wokingham a more stable ‘front-line’ social care workforce has been built over the last year, with staff turnover at 9%, well below the national average. This positive trend appears to be the



result of the close internal partnership between the HR business partner and the DCS referred to earlier who have developed a strong workforce strategy focusing on the recruitment and retention of good quality social work/social care staff. Their retention strategy has at the heart of it valuing the contribution of all staff to the organisations goals and objectives. Using the professional capabilities framework they managed to align the staff competency and caseload complexity to the incremental pay scales focusing on payment for skills. Along side this they have worked hard to ensure staff working in this very stressful work have manageable caseloads and appropriate support and supervision. All of the staff the reviewer engaged with confirmed a systematic approach to supervision across all children's social care teams, including intensive supervision for newly qualified workers. Staff also confirmed a corporate approach to appraisal and continuous professional development.

## **Conclusion**

This review was conducted in response to a recommendation from a previous assurance panel to

“Commission a review (Possibly via LGA) on the leadership and governance of children's safeguarding arrangements, to ensure that Wokingham draws on all the best practice available and is well prepared for this aspect when it has its next Ofsted inspection”

The terms of reference reflected the requirement to base the review around the Ofsted Grade Descriptors. The terms of reference also reflected the desire to conduct this review with particular emphasis on the council's ability to deal effectively with the CSE in Wokingham.

“To assess the response of the Council's and partners' leaders to the emerging facts and concerns regarding Child Sexual Exploitation”

The reviewer was provided with a wide range of council documentation and had access to additional documentation on request. The reviewer was also given access to a wide range of stakeholders both within the council authority and key partner organisations. The reviewer was impressed by the openness of everyone interviewed during the course of this review and their

willingness to participate and contribute to improving the overall effectiveness of Wokingham council's children's department.

The reviewer concludes that the political and officer leadership of Wokingham Council appear to work well together in terms of corporate governance. Communication between the leader and the CEO is regular and effective. Wokingham Borough Council's plan 2014-17 reflects a shared vision and agreed objectives. There is evidence however, that the process for developing this plan does not appear to have been as inclusive among all members of the council as it could have been.

The working relationship and working arrangements between the lead member for children's services and the Director for children's services are very strong and reflect the statutory requirements of the department of education guidance. However the role of the deputy lead member for children requires clarification to avoid any ambiguity or confusion in terms of lines of accountability.

There is a strong and relatively stable officer leadership team in children's services who work well together who are passionate and driven in their work and provide effective management and leadership to the workforce. They are visible, approachable and supportive to staff at all levels.

The current DCS is very capable and is concentrated on bringing further improvement to Wokingham children's department. She has particularly strong, trust-based relationships with colleagues in the police and health services, which are essential for the leadership of an effective child protection service.

The council assurance framework contains all the important elements of controls assurance but some of the committees may require some review and up date in their terms of reference and membership.

As regards performance management the oversight and scrutiny committee provides appropriate oversight and challenge. The most recent performance indicators available for children's services are quite impressive with all performance indicators getting a RAG rating

of green indicating an achievement of the targets in each area reported.

Wokingham Council's stated values of trust, respect, pride, team working and valuing staff is evident at every level in the organisation. There is an appropriate emphasis on staff development and learning, the innovation programme work is evident throughout the organisation with Signs of Safety well embedded in the culture of the organisation.

The experience of children and families is largely positive although the young people had definite views on how things could be improved particularly in relation to stability of social workers and personal advisors. More work is also required in terms of engagement with children and families particularly on the issue of participation.

Pace of change and drive for improvement is evident and appears necessarily relentless. While the combination of a determination to deliver improving outcomes for the most vulnerable, and the pressures of the external regulation regime make this inevitable, it is important that opportunities are created to take stock of the progress made so that changes can bed down and become sustainable as more changes are introduced.

Work around the issue of CSE in Wokingham is active and on going, as the child protection system is adapted to cope with the emerging knowledge, practice and research into CSE. The council, the police, health, schools, voluntary sector and the LSCB are working together to ensure an effective response to CSE is achieved.

Partnership working both internal to the council's various departments and external in terms of the various partnership boards, while improving, requires on going attention. The LSCB and the HWBB appear to be moving in the right direction in terms of working together to protect the most vulnerable children.

Services for vulnerable young people moving into adulthood feature as an area of enduring concern, with gaps in provision evident. Care leavers and vulnerable young adults are a group requiring ruthless and integrated focus from key agencies and partnerships. Some of these young people will be at particular risk of exposure to CSE so it

is imperative that services across the Council and beyond are able properly to cohere around these transitions and to meet the needs these young people have (health, housing, training and therapeutic support).

There is an expectation that each local authority develops a clear and up to date strategy for commissioning and developing services, delivered by a suitably qualified and experienced workforce, that meets the needs of local children, young people and families. While the reviewer had access to a number of well-developed plans and strategies, improvements could be made to their format and alignment with each other so collectively they map out a clear path for those who use them for guidance.

## **Recommendations**

1. Further work is required to ensure that the council's vision and stated objectives are co-created by all members and senior officers working together to enhance commitment and ownership.
2. The role of the deputy lead member for children requires clarification to avoid any ambiguity or confusion in terms of lines of accountability.
3. The council assurance framework contains all the important elements of controls assurance but requires review to ensure clarity around lines of accountability.
4. Some committees require review to update their terms of reference and membership.
5. The Council's Corporate Parenting Board should have greater prominence in the Corporate assurance framework
6. More work is required in terms of engagement with children and families particularly on the issue of participation.

7. The DCS and Lead Member should meet regularly with the Director of Health and Wellbeing and his Lead Member jointly to oversee progress on implementation of key joint initiatives (Transition Planning, Housing for young people and families etc.)
8. Some improvements could be made to the numerous council plans and strategies to enhance their format and alignment with each other and ensure they collectively map out a clear path for those who use them for guidance.
9. While on a rapid improvement journey it is important to ensure that key staff, including middle managers feel able to articulate concern and challenge as part of the leadership process.

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**TITLE:** Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) Update

**FOR CONSIDERATION BY** Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny  
Committee 15 December 2015

**WARD** None specific

**DIRECTOR** Judith Ramsden, Director Children's Services

<b>OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY</b>
<b>RECOMMENDATION</b> For the Board to review the update below.
<b>SUMMARY OF REPORT</b> <p>We are making good progress with our Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub and there is a strategic and operational group in place to take the project forward. There are 4 areas of work that are being considered.</p> <p><u>Information Sharing Agreement</u> This has been established and the Police, Wokingham Borough Council and Health have signed this agreement. Our WBC legal colleagues have approved this. The final agency to sign on is with our colleagues in Probation and we have a date in December for this to be agreed.</p> <p><u>Accommodation</u> It has been agreed that accommodation will be at Shute End. The Police have visited the site on 4 and 18 November and we are awaiting their final report. Early indicators suggest that there will be no significant cost implications. As soon as we have the report we will liaise with our property team. A floor plan has been drawn up to begin to develop where our teams will sit and this will be finalised by 1 January 2016.</p> <p><u>Staffing</u> The staffing structure for the MASH needs to be designed and agreed and this is being developed with our colleagues in the Police. Timescales for training all Police and Multiagency staff will need to be clarified in early January 2016. The MASH supervisor has been recruited by the Police and starts work on 7 January 2016. We also have a Domestic Abuse Risk Assessor in post and ready to start. The MASH support worker is in training and should be ready by the end of February 2016. The plan is for training to</p>

be staggered due to the limited staff who can train however this will be available for all to go live on 1 April 2016.

#### Business Processes

There is a sub group working on business processes to ensure that these are consistent with our internal workings and with those of the Police. Workshops will be set up during January 2016 with key colleagues to test the system and the process. We will incorporate our current Best Practice to meet the Signs of Safety methodology where appropriate.



<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Children's Services Performance Indicators</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 15 December 2015
<b>WARD</b>	None Specific
<b>STRATEGIC DIRECTOR</b>	Judith Ramsden, Strategic Director of Children's Services

## **OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY**

Children's Services performance indicators underpin the council's priorities and principles to focus on every child reaching their potential and looking after the vulnerable.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

That the Children's Service performance indicators be noted.

## **SUMMARY OF REPORT**

The timing of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee means that the latest indicators available for formal reporting this cycle are the Quarterly indicators reported at the end of September 2015, in line with internal monitoring arrangements.

## **Background**

A set of information on performance indicators is provided to the Corporate Leadership Team and the Executive on a regular basis. The most recent report, providing information for Children's Services covering the quarter to September 2015, is provided as Appendix A to this report.

## **Analysis of Issues**

Since the Q2 data was reported in September 2015, additional analysis has been published with regards to Early Years Foundation Stage Profile results.

We now know that the percentage of disadvantaged pupils at Wokingham schools achieving a good level of development at Early Years Foundation Stage in 2015 was 50%. In comparison, 71% of all other pupils at Wokingham schools achieved a good level of development. This means a gap of 21%, which is above the national gap of 18%.

In addition, further detail was requested at the previous meeting regarding comparative statistical neighbours. Where available, this has been added into the report. A summary of the findings is as follows:

Indicator	Comparison
% referrals in 15/16 which are repeat referrals within 12 months of a previous referral to Children's Social Care	The latest comparative data is 14/15. Wokingham performed marginally better than our Statistical Neighbours (WBC: 21.3%; SN: 21.7%). More recent performance for Q2 shows a sustained improvement in Wokingham and we are meeting our locally assigned target.
% Children who are currently subject to a Child Protection Plan (CPP) who are subject to a CPP for a second or subsequent time within 24 months	The latest comparative data is 14/15. Wokingham performed better than our Statistical Neighbours (WBC: 12.0%; SN: 18.3%). Recent performance information for Q2 suggests Wokingham is well within our locally set target.
% Care Proceedings completed in 15/16 within 26 weeks of application	No comparative information is available for this measure.
% Looked After Children living within 20 miles of their home	The latest comparative data is 13/14. For the same period, Wokingham performed less well than our statistical neighbours (WBC: 68%; SN: 78%). More recent performance shows Wokingham is still performing below the target of 70-75%. Our intention is to measure 20 miles from West of Berkshire in the future.
% Looked After Children who achieved permanent care arrangements during previous 12 months	No comparative information is available for this measure.
Reduce the education gap at KS2 level 4 between disadvantaged and other pupils for Reading, Writing and Maths	The latest WBC and comparative data is 14/15. Wokingham's gap was marginally larger than our Statistical Neighbours' (WBC: 22%; SN:21.2%), although a higher % of disadvantaged children in Wokingham achieved level 4 in Reading, Writing and Maths compared to our Statistical Neighbours.
Reduce the education gap at KS4 level 4 between disadvantaged and other pupils for 5 A*-C GCSE incl E&M	The latest WBC and comparative data is 14/15. Wokingham's gap was marginally larger than our Statistical Neighbours' (WBC: 33.8%; SN:33.7%), although a higher % of disadvantaged children in Wokingham achieved level 5 A*-C GCSEs including English and Maths.
% Primary Schools with a current Ofsted Rating of "good" or better.	The latest comparative data we have is for 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2015. Wokingham exceeded the national average (WBC: 83%; National 82%)
% Secondary Schools with a current Ofsted rating of "good" or better.	The latest comparative data we have is for 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2015. Wokingham exceeded the national average (WBC: 89%; National 73%)
% Children who attend at Wokingham school who are at a school with an Ofsted rating of "good" or better.	No comparative information is available for this measure.
% Pupils achieving a good level of development (GLD) at Early Years Foundation Stage in academic year	The latest comparative data we have is for summer 2015. Wokingham exceeded the national average (WBC: 71%, National 66.3%). Wokingham has also exceeded its 14/15

14-15.	figure of 61%.
% Disadvantaged pupils achieving a good level of development at Early Years Foundation Stage in academic year 14-15	The latest comparative data we have is for summer 2015. Wokingham performed slightly less well than the national average (WBC: 50%; National: 51%). However, Wokingham has exceeded its 14/15 figure of 35%, in line with a target of improvement in this area.

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

***The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.***

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	Not applicable		
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	Not applicable		
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	Not applicable		

### Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

None

### Cross-Council Implications

n/a

### List of Background Papers

None

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**Telephone No** 0118 974 6055

**Date** 20<sup>th</sup> November 2015

**Service** Children's Services

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**Version No.** 1

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# Community



Look after vulnerable people									
Key Indicators									
Indicator	Target	14/15 Actual	15/16 Qtr. 2 Actual	Comparative info.	RAG	Direction of Travel	Strategic Director / Executive Member	Commentary	
% referrals in 15/16 which are repeat referrals within 12 months of a previous referral to Children's Social Care	18 - 22%	21.3%	16.1%	21.7%	Green	Better	Judith Ramsden/ Charlotte Haitham Taylor	Comparative info relates to 14/15 statistical neighbours.	
% Children who are currently subject to a Child Protection Plan (CPP) who are subject to a CPP for a second or subsequent time within 24 months	3 – 7%	12.0%	0%	18.3%	Green	Better	Judith Ramsden/ Charlotte Haitham Taylor	Comparative info relates to 14/15 statistical neighbours.	
% Care Proceedings completed in 15/16 within 26 weeks of application	100%	42%	50%	N/A	Red	Better	Judith Ramsden/ Charlotte Haitham Taylor	None of the factors causing delay were within the control of Wokingham Borough Council. Some of the more significant delays were expected as other countries are involved in the cases or extra assessments are ordered by the court.	

# Community



Indicator	Target	14/15 Actual	15/16 Qtr. 2 Actual	Comparative info.	RAG	Direction of Travel (Better/ Worse/ No change)	Strategic Director / Executive Member	Commentary
% Looked After Children living within 20 miles of their home	70 – 75%	62.2%	64.3%	14/15 data yet to be released  13/14: 78%	Green	Better	Judith Ramsden/ Charlotte Haitham Taylor	45/70 children live within 20 miles of their home. This number excludes 2 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children who have no home postcode.  14/15 comparative national and statistical neighbour data due December 2015.
% Looked After Children who achieved permanent care arrangements during previous 12 months	Over 30%	40.2%	33.3%	N/A – this is a local indicator	Green	Worse	Judith Ramsden/ Charlotte Haitham Taylor	34 children achieved permanence out of a possible 102 Looked After Children during the period 01/10/2014 – 30/09/2015. One child who had returned home has since become Looked After again.  There is no national or statistical neighbour comparative information for this measure.

# Workforce



Improve educational attainment and focus on every child achieving their potential									
Key Indicators									
Indicator	Target	14/15 Actual	15/16 Qtr. 2 Actual	Comparative info.	RAG	Direction of Travel (Better/Worse/No change)	Strategic Director / Executive Member	Commentary	
Reduce the education gap at KS2 level 4 between disadvantaged and other pupils for Reading, Writing and Maths		Summer 2014 Other 87% Disadvant 65% Gap 22%		Summer 2014 Statistical Neighbours Other 84% Disadvant 62.8% Gap 21.2%			Judith Ramsden/ Charlotte Haitham Taylor	No detailed information on Summer 2015 examinations will be available until December. Additional analysis of data is taking place to identify the balance of curriculum and motivational approaches required to further narrow gaps	
Reduce the education gap at KS4 level 4 between disadvantaged and other pupils for 5 A*-C GCSE incl E&M		Summer 2014 Other 70.6% Disadvant 36.8% Gap 33.8%		Summer 2014 Statistical Neighbours Other 67.59% Disadvant 33.87% Gap 33.72%			Judith Ramsden/ Charlotte Haitham Taylor	No detailed information on Summer 2015 examinations will be available until January. Additional analysis of data is taking place to identify the balance of curriculum and motivational approaches required to further narrow gaps	

# Workforce



Indicator	Target	14/15 Actual	15/16 Qtr. 2 Actual	Comparative info.	RAG	Direction of Travel (Better/Worse/No change)	Strategic Director / Executive Member	Commentary
% Primary Schools with a current Ofsted Rating of "good" or better.	88%	83%	84%	82% National (31st March 2015)	Green	Better	Judith Ramsden/ Charlotte Haitham Taylor	End of Summer term data will be published by Ofsted in the autumn. The significant reduction in the number of school inspections in spring and summer 2015, which was beyond the control of the LA, slowed the rate of change
% Secondary Schools with a current Ofsted rating of "good" or better.	100%	89%	88%	73% National (31st March 2015)		Worse	Judith Ramsden/ Charlotte Haitham Taylor	End of Summer term data will be published by Ofsted in the autumn. The one secondary school with a "Requires Improvement" judgement is a free school which is relatively recently established. Inspection evidence suggests that school is improving steadily.
% Children who attend at Wokingham school who are at a school with an Ofsted rating of "good" or better.	90%	88%	87.2%	No comparative data		Worse	Judith Ramsden/ Charlotte Haitham Taylor	End of Summer term data will be published by Ofsted in the autumn. We anticipate a greater number of inspections in the Autumn term.



# Workforce



Indicator	Target	14/15 Actual	15/16 Qtr. 2 Actual	Comparative info.	RAG	Direction of Travel (Better/Worse/No change)	Strategic Director / Executive Member	Commentary
% Pupils achieving a good level of development (GLD) at Early Years Foundation Stage in academic year 14-15. 57	Increase	Summer 2014 61%	Summer 2015 71%	Summer 2015 - National 66.3%	Green	Better	Judith Ramsden/ Charlotte Haitham Taylor	No information on Summer 2015 examinations will be available until later in the autumn. WBC data shows very strong improvement in this area however.
% Disadvantaged pupils achieving a good level of development at Early Years Foundation Stage in academic year 14-15	Increased attainment & reduced gap	Summer 2014 Other 62% Disadvant 35% Gap 27%	Summer 2015 50% Gap (21%)	Summer 2015 – National 51%	Green		Judith Ramsden/ Charlotte Haitham Taylor	No detailed information on Summer 2015 examinations will be available until November. Strong improvement in the overall GLD measure was accompanied by narrowed achievement gaps for disadvantaged pupils

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# Agenda Item 57.

<b>TITLE</b>	School Performance: Summary of Two Schools with Ofsted Report being published between October 2015 and December 2015
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee 15 December 2015
<b>WARD</b>	Coronation and Hurst
<b>DIRECTOR</b>	Judith Ramsden, Director of Children's

<b>St Dominic Savio Catholic Primary School</b>	Good
<b>St Nicholas Church of England Primary School</b>	School Short Inspection Report – School continues to be Good

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# St Dominic Savio Catholic Primary School

Western Avenue, Woodley, Reading, Berkshire RG5 3BH

<b>Inspection dates</b>	14–15 October 2015
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- The headteacher has made a strong contribution to the improvement of the school. Under his ambitious and highly effective leadership, the school has improved in key areas.
- Leaders and governors have ensured that the quality of teaching has improved and is now consistently good. As a result, pupils make good progress and achieve well.
- Governors test the work of the school for themselves. They have been highly effective in improving the school.
- Leaders and governors clearly understand their school. Their plans for further improvement are extremely well considered.
- The quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection and is now consistently good.
- Teaching assistants are skilled, and work closely with teachers and leaders.
- Behaviour and pupils' personal development and welfare are outstanding. This is a happy school, where pupils feel safe and well protected.
- Pupils are cared for extremely well. Older pupils take care of the younger children.
- Pupils achieve well. Results in all the various national checks have improved since the previous inspection. Progress in most year groups is strong. Achievement in writing has improved markedly.
- The early years provision is good. Children achieve well. Children's achievement has improved since the previous inspection. Teaching is good. Adults take good care of the children.
- The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils throughout the school is extremely strong.
- Pupils develop an extremely strong understanding of British values.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The written feedback pupils receive in their books does not always encourage them to find out for themselves how to improve their work. As a result, their learning is not as rapid as it could be.
- For children in the Reception classes, the indoor and outdoor areas do not always offer enough opportunities for them to learn basic literacy and numeracy skills through play activities.

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14 October 2015

Miss Debra McGrail  
Headteacher  
St Nicholas Church of England Primary School  
School Road  
Hurst  
Berkshire  
RG10 0DR

Dear Miss McGrail

### **Short inspection of St Nicholas Church of England Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 23 September 2015 I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in February 2012.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You have made a real difference since arriving at the school, wasting no time in establishing a concrete vision to make the school outstanding as quickly as possible. You have revitalised the highly capable staff, who are now motivated to match your high expectations to achieve this ambition. You have reinvigorated communication and relationships with parents, who recognise the significant contribution you make to the school.

This is a school where every child's progress and personal development really matter. You and your senior leaders track pupils' achievement diligently and closely, making sure that any extra help that pupils need to catch up is prompt and effective. As a result, pupils currently at the school make good progress. Disadvantaged pupils and those who are disabled or who have special educational needs receive focused attention and carefully tailored support, both in and out of lessons. Pupils' behaviour is excellent. They have a very strong understanding of the school's core values of perseverance, respect, friendship and thoughtfulness, which they put into practice in lessons and around the school. Pupils enjoy school, take great pride in their appearance and work, and want to do well.

At the time of your last inspection, the inspector recognised the many strengths of the school, including pupils' excellent social, moral, spiritual and cultural development. They also identified a need to improve pupils' progress in reading and writing in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, raise pupils'



attendance and sharpen leaders' checks on teaching. Leaders have addressed all of these effectively so that:

- children's progress in reading and writing in Reception and Years 1 and 2 has accelerated
- pupils' attendance has risen steadily and is now above average
- you and other leaders check the quality of teaching regularly and accurately, providing precise and useful advice for teachers about what to do to further improve pupils' achievement.

You, your leadership team and governors are not complacent, however. You have identified the correct key priorities for further improvement and are taking the right actions to address them. You know that pupils, especially the most able, will only make really rapid progress in lessons if they are stretched and challenged more. While some effective support has been put in place for a minority of disadvantaged pupils who attend school less regularly, you know that this work needs to expand. Pupils' achievement at the end of Reception and Year 1 has risen markedly over the last three years so it is at or above national averages, but you recognise that it needs to rise further. Although governors have played an important role in checking leaders' actions to make improvements, their role in evaluating the impact on pupils' outcomes is not clear enough.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Pupils' safety is of paramount importance to everyone at the school. Pupils feel safe and parents are highly satisfied with how the school cares for their children. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe, including when using the internet. Parents are involved in this too: for example, on the day of this inspection, parents were invited to an e-safety workshop in the early evening led by a local police officer. Children behave sensibly around the school. They are supervised well during break and lunchtimes, when they play happily, often energetically but safely.

Staff receive regular and appropriate training about safeguarding. Pupils' safety is always discussed at weekly staff meetings and any necessary actions are taken without delay. All governors and staff have recently had training about keeping pupils safe from the dangers of radicalisation and extremism. The school works effectively with external agencies in the very small number of situations when this is necessary. Leaders, including governors, have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. The school recently commissioned the local authority to conduct a health and safety audit, which identified only minor issues to be rectified.



## Inspection findings

- Since your arrival in April 2015, you have swiftly established a culture of high expectations. Everything you, other leaders and teachers do is focused on improving pupils' outcomes and personal development. You have firmly established the necessary impetus and fresh determination to improve the school so that it becomes outstanding.
- You have galvanised the staff and governors, who now have renewed vigour. Building on leaders' good work to successfully address the areas from the last inspection, you have quickly got to grips with what the school needs to do now. Working with other leaders and governors, you have identified the right priorities and have the correct actions in place to achieve them. Your evaluation of the school's current effectiveness is accurate.
- You are on the playground every morning to greet parents and pupils. Parents recognise the difference you are making and welcome the regular communications from the school, your accessibility and the way that any queries or questions they might have are dealt with quickly and effectively. Parents rate the school highly.
- Leaders' checks on teaching and other aspects of the school's work are very thorough. Teachers receive detailed and useful advice from leaders about what they need to do to improve, which is always focused on accelerating pupils' progress.
- The school's assessment information is accurate and detailed. Every pupil's progress is tracked, enabling leaders to regularly hold teachers to account for pupils' achievement.
- Governors have rightly reorganised the way they work, resulting in further rigour in their challenge and support for leaders. Although they monitor the progress of improvements closely, their role in evaluating the impact of leaders' actions on pupils' outcomes is not clear enough.
- Leaders have refined how they provide extra support for the small numbers of disadvantaged pupils and for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. Additional help is carefully tailored to pupils' individual needs. As a result, these pupils' progress is accelerating.
- Most pupils attend school very regularly. A small minority of pupils, many of whom are disadvantaged pupils, attend less regularly. Leaders have instigated a number of actions to address this, including employing a family support worker. The early signs are that these strategies are working and warrant further expansion.
- The majority of pupils make good progress across subjects in all year groups. There is no evidence that the dip in pupils' achievement at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2015 is symptomatic of a decline. Standards in reading, writing and mathematics have risen at the end of Key Stage 1.
- While the proportions of children achieving a good level of development at the end of Reception Year, and pupils reaching the expected level in the Year 1 phonics screening check in 2015, are close to or above national averages, current pupils are on course to achieve more highly. Standards in these areas have risen rapidly over the last three years.

- Teachers have strong subject knowledge and generally challenge pupils well in lessons. Teaching assistants provide good support for pupils who need it. Teachers respond well to the advice you and other leaders give them. Most importantly, they are working hard to stretch pupils more, including the most able, so that they make really rapid progress over time.
- Pupils take great care over their work because teachers expect them to. Consequently, the standard of presentation in pupils' work is very high. Teachers' marking helps pupils improve their work. All pupils have appropriate individual targets, based on teachers' good knowledge of every pupil.
- Pupils are avid and frequent readers. They read regularly and enthusiastically for pleasure and parents are given useful guidance about how to help support their children's reading at home.
- Pupils take pride in their appearance and their school. They dress very smartly, do not drop litter and play a full and active part in the life of the school. They are invariably very happy at school and want to succeed. Standards of behaviour are extremely high and incidents of poor behaviour are incredibly rare. Pupils show high levels of respect and care for each other.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- governors clarify their roles in measuring the impact of leaders' actions on pupils' achievement
- teachers stretch pupils further in lessons, including the most able, so that they make rapid and substantial progress over time
- the attendance of a small number of disadvantaged pupils continues to rise so that it matches that of other pupils
- pupils' achievement at the end of Reception Year and in the Year 1 phonics screening check continues to improve.

Yours sincerely

Matthew Haynes  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

I met with you, other leaders, teachers, pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of Wokingham local authority. I also spoke to a representative of the Diocese of Oxford on the telephone. We visited sections of six lessons and scrutinised a wide range of pupils' work. I took account of 19 responses to the staff survey and 32 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I observed pupils' behaviour at break, lunchtime and around the school. I spoke to a number of parents at the beginning of the school day. I analysed a range of the school's documentation, including information about pupils' achievement, records of leaders' checks on the quality of teaching, the school improvement plan and safeguarding checks, policies and procedures. We discussed your own evaluation of the school's effectiveness.

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## CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

DATE OF MEETING	ITEM	PURPOSE OF REPORT	REASON FOR CONSIDERATION	RESPONSIBLE OFFICER / CONTACT OFFICER
15 Dec	Primary School Place Strategy	To receive and update on the implementation of the strategy	To monitor the situation in light of following the review request.	Verbal update by Ian Pittock
	Delivering Effective Safeguarding Services	To receive a regular update including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Update on the development of the MASH.</li> </ul>	Standing item to monitor safeguarding services	Head of Social Care and Intervention/
	Children's Services Performance Indicators	To receive an update and monitor Children's Services performance measured by local indicators	Standing Item To enable the Committee to assess performance and identify areas of concern	Children's Services Performance & Information Team

DATE OF MEETING	ITEM	PURPOSE OF REPORT	REASON FOR CONSIDERATION	RESPONSIBLE OFFICER / CONTACT OFFICER
	School Performance Indicators and Ofsted reports, School Improvement	To receive information on schools' performance, and to review recent Ofsted Reports  Achievement Gap Review	Standing item to enable the Committee to assess performance and identify areas of concern	Head of Learning & Achievement
	Leadership and Governance review	To receive a report on the Leadership and Governance review of Children's Services	To assess the findings of the review	Director of Children's Services
	Children's Services O and S Committee Forward Programme	To consider the forward programme of the Committee	Standing Item	Democratic Services
<b>23 Feb 2016</b>	Delivering Effective Safeguarding Services	To receive a regular update including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>an update on the recruitment and retention strategy.</li> </ul>	Standing item to monitor safeguarding services	Head of Social Care and Intervention/
	Children's Services Performance Indicators	To receive an update and monitor Children's Services performance measured by local indicators	Standing Item To enable the Committee to assess performance and identify areas of concern	Children's Services Performance & Information Team

<b>DATE OF MEETING</b>	<b>ITEM</b>	<b>PURPOSE OF REPORT</b>	<b>REASON FOR CONSIDERATION</b>	<b>RESPONSIBLE OFFICER / CONTACT OFFICER</b>
	School Performance Indicators and Ofsted reports, School Improvement	To receive information on schools' performance, and to review recent Ofsted Reports	Standing item to enable the Committee to assess performance and identify areas of concern	Head of Learning & Achievement
	Ofsted Findings	To receive a report containing the Ofsted finding following the recent inspection to WBC Children's Services	To enable the Committee to assess the results	Director of Children's Services
	Children's Services O and S Committee Forward Programme	To consider the forward programme of the Committee	Standing Item	Democratic Services

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