

**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.