

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON 23 JANUARY 2018 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.41 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Pauline Helliar-Symons (Chairman), Laura Blumenthal (Vice-Chairman), Ken Miall, Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey, Bill Soane and Shahid Younis

Other Councillors Present

Councillors: UllaKarin Clark, Malcolm Richards, Imogen Shepherd-DuBey, Alison Swaddle and Mark Ashwell

Officers Present

Luciane Bowker, Democratic and Election Services Specialist
Carol Cammiss, Assistant Director Quality Assurance and Safeguarding Standards
Lisa Humphreys, Assistant Director of Children's Social Care
Shan Ratcliffe, Head of Virtual School
Paul Senior, Interim Director of People Services

41. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillors Parry Bath, Kate Haines and Beth Rowland.

42. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 14 November 2017 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

43. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

A declaration of interest was submitted from Bill Soane on the basis that his daughter worked at the Coombes Primary School.

44. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

45. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

46. UPDATE ON MULTI AGENCY SAFEGUARDING HUB (MASH)

The Chairman thanked external partners for their presence to give an update to the Committee on the development of the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).

Graham Enright, Manager for MASH Berkshire, Thames Valley Police addressed the Committee and the main points put forward by him were:

- The Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) was received as an opportunity to learn and receive feedback on the MASH programme in Wokingham;
- Wokingham's MASH was new, it was launched in 2016;
- The JTAI identified that there was a tendency to receive information and pass it over; it was necessary to find a system to use the information to assess risk and make a decision in partnership;

- It had been recognised that improvements needed to be made in relation to joint decision making;
- There were six MASH projects around Berkshire and it was important that the lessons learnt at Wokingham be shared with the other Local Authorities.

Lisa Humphreys, Assistant Director for Children's Social Care stated that the JTAI had found that the MASH front of the house was safe, however the changes that were needed to make improvements were not easy and required investment in IT systems and accommodation. For example, at the moment the reception was split over three rooms, which was not ideal.

Lisa Humphreys stated that in order to expand MASH and make it more efficient, it would be necessary to invest in an IT management system that enabled partners to link together.

Karen Cridland, Director Children, Young People and Family Services, Health stated that they offered support to Wokingham's MASH three days a week, there was additional cover through the other Berkshire MASH's. She would support colleagues in further developments.

Liz Stead, Head of Safeguarding Children Berkshire West Clinical Commissioning Groups stated that progress would come with time, Berkshire Health covered six Berkshire authorities and the CCG commissioned the Health post within MASH.

Liz Stead stated that it was very beneficial to have MASH as it enabled conversations to take place and decisions to be made.

Councillor Miall felt it was important that the Council continued to invest in MASH and that the finance should be made available to enable the necessary IT systems to be purchased.

In response to a question Lisa Humphreys stated that there was no central database held by MASH, Wokingham used a system called MOSAIC for Social Care. Lisa stated that a true partnership should allow all partners to be able to see and contribute to the risk assessment. She envisaged such a system to sit on top of other IT systems.

Councillor Miall asked if there was such a thing as an intelligent system that was able to alert to possible risk. In response, Graham Enright stated that there was a project being run by the Home Office which offered predicted analysis, this was being tested.

Councillor Miall asked if it was possible to speed the processes within the Police. Graham Enright explained that the processes around domestic abuse had been reviewed and improved; where in the past it used to focus in adults, it now focused on children and information was being processed much more quickly.

Councillor Younis asked if the development of MASH was part of the 21st Century Council project. Lisa Humphreys explained that MASH was a different project which run alongside the 21st Century Council.

Councillor Blumenthal was curious to know how Wokingham's MASH compared to other Local Authorities. Lisa Humphreys stated that Wokingham's MASH was appropriate when compared to other areas and explained that an increase in referrals was not a bad

indicator, in fact she expected referrals to increase. However, repeat referrals were a cause for concern.

Lisa Humphreys explained that *repeat referrals* were when a case was reported to the services, it was dealt with and closed, and subsequently another referral was received in respect of the same case. Repeat contact was when information was received from different sources in relation to the same issue.

In response to a question Lisa Humphreys stated that there were no targets in relation to these statistics. Members felt that it would be useful to monitor the number of referrals in future reports.

In response to Members concern over the funding of MASH, Councillor Ashwell, Executive Member for Children's Services stated that there was £100k in the Capital Fund for MASH.

Councillor Soane believed that the voluntary sector should be involved in the MASH project. Lisa Humphreys stated that the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) was the only voluntary agency that was allowed to take investigations. Lisa stated that although voluntary organisations were not partners in MASH, they would be contacted if needed. Also, they were well informed as to how to raise a concern.

The Chairman was interested to know how information was shared when children moved areas. Graham Enright stated that a system called NISHE was used by Thames Valley Police to record any issues reported. He stated that if a child protection issue was raised, this information would be shared and it was not restricted by Borough borders.

In response to a question Councillor Ashwell stated that he had seen MASH in action and believed that it worked very well.

Councillor Younis asked about the impact of the General Data Protection Review (GDPR) on MASH. Lisa Humphreys confirmed that this had already been considered and it would not make any difference as there were clear responsibilities in relation to child protection.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) An update report would be submitted in six months, with a particular emphasis on the benefits seen since the implementation of the project; and
- 2) The report be noted.

47. JOINT TARGETED AREA INSPECTION

The Committee considered the Joint Targeted Area Inspection report which was set out in agenda pages 37-64.

The Chairman asked what was meant by '*Audit report to WSCB Q&P subgroup agenda March 2018*' on page 42 of the agenda. Liz Stead explained that this referred to a report on quality and performance to the Wokingham Safeguarding Children's Board.

The Chairman asked that information regarding the improvement on the initial risk assessments be included in future update reports.

The Chairman was interested to know how the service proposed to measure progress in the joint decision making in MASH. Lisa Humphreys stated that she would be measuring things such as timescales, application thresholds and evidence of information sharing.

In response to a question Graham Enright reassured the Committee that the risk assessment forms were now being completed by the Police.

In response to a question Lisa Humphreys stated that the multi-agency training would be completed by the whole of Children's Services workforce, and the training programme was ongoing.

In response to a question Carol Cammiss, Assistant Director Quality Assurance and Safeguarding Standards stated that the Neglect Task and Finish Group had been set up and had met four times already.

The Chairman thanked Officers for the report which contained a very detailed action plan. She asked that an update report be submitted in six months with a summary of the benefits seen so far for children.

Councillor Younis asked if there were many interim posts within MASH. Lisa Humphreys felt confident that the issues in relation to Social Workers recruitment and retention had now been resolved. Paul Senior stated that Wokingham's use of interims was lower than the national average.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The report be noted; and
- 2) An update summary report including outcomes and benefits to children be submitted in six months' time.

48. CHILDREN'S SERVICES PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The Committee considered the Children's Services Performance Indicators report which was set out in agenda pages 65-72. The Committee noted that the indicators were in the same position as previously reported.

The Chairman was pleased to note that the report specified which indicators were national and which were local.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

49. POLICY UPDATE FROM EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Councillor Ashwell, Executive Member for Children's Services addressed the Committee and explained that he had taken the opportunity to review the services with the arrival of Paul Senior in November 2017. His review revealed a number of strengths within Children's Services, such as: good schools, good Children's Social Care and single front door to early help, 98% permanent staff in Children's Social Care and an effective Corporate Parenting Board. However, Councillor Ashwell stated that the management structure was fragile, with a high number of interim posts. Paul Senior reassured the Committee that there were plans in place to secure permanent solutions.

Councillor Ashwell stated that the service was expecting two inspections to take place this year: a Special Education Needs and Disability inspection and a new Children's Social Care inspection by Ofsted.

Councillor Ashwell informed the Committee that work was being undertaken to develop the following strategies for the Borough:

- Education Vision Strategy, integrating it with Health. In an effort to develop this strategy, a Wokingham Learning Partnership (WLP) had been set up, which involved a partnership with schools, other groups and the Local Authority. An independent chair was in the process of being recruited to chair the WLP.
- SEND Strategy, this would cover 0-25 year olds.
- Secondary School Admissions Strategy, in recognition of the pressure that had been created in secondary schools around the Borough with the opening of Bohunt School.

Councillor Ashwell stated that he would continue to update the Committee on the development of these strategies. In response to a question he stated that he would bring the timescales to the next meeting.

RESOLVED That the update report be noted.

50. PROPOSAL CARE LEAVERS LIVING SUPPORT: COUNCIL TAX EXEMPTION

The Committee considered the Care Leavers Living Support: Council Tax Exemption report which was set out in agenda pages 73-82.

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

- Councillor Miall believed that a Council tax reduction was a good idea, however he worried that the Council may be over-protecting young people and not helping them to prepare for real life. He suggested that a progressive pay scale should be used instead of full exemption;
- Councillor Ashwell believed that 25 was a good threshold as the Council's responsibilities towards Children In Care (CIC) now extended to 25;
- Members felt anxious about the impact of not paying anything at 25 and then having to pay the full amount of Council tax at 26;
- Lisa Humphreys stated that there were a number of other Local Authorities that were offering similar schemes of support to Care Leavers, as per the narrative in the Children's Society report attached to the Agenda;
- Lisa Humphreys believed that as Corporate Parents the Council had a responsibility to provide for the CIC. She pointed out that Council tax was the only type of debt for which there was no discretion, and if someone could not pay it, it cost the Council more to go through the debt collection agency than to exempt it;
- Lisa Humphreys stated that this proposal related to the most vulnerable people in society, who had no-one else to rely on. She stated that there were strategies in place to help them to prepare for adult life and this help with tax exemption would be a very positive step towards helping young people who may be facing financial difficulties;
- Lisa Humphreys stated that Local Authorities were legally required to demonstrate how they would help young people up to the age of 25, and she believed this was a good initiative;

- In response to a question Lisa Humphreys stated that there were budget management courses and second and third chances around tenancy in order to help Care Leavers;
- Councillor Blumenthal asked what proportion of Care Leavers faced financial difficulties. Lisa Humphreys responded that Care Leavers often had financial difficulties due to the amount of responsibility they had at a young age;
- In response to a question Lisa Humphreys stated that arrangements would be made to pay the Council tax of Care Leavers living in other Local Authorities;
- Councillor Soane suggested looking at each individual Care Leaver and their ability to pay Council tax;
- Lisa Humphreys stated that at the time of writing the report there were 33 Care Leavers, most of which were receiving low wages. She stated that parents strived to be equitable to all children and she felt uncomfortable with the idea of offering different benefits to the children.

Councillor Ashwell stated that he would like to take this proposal to the March Executive and was hoping to have a steer from the Committee.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommended the approval of the extension of Council tax exemption to cover Wokingham Borough Council's Care Leavers to the age of 25 years on a sliding scale to prepare the youngsters to do it on their own, with discretion to full exemption if necessary; and
- 2) This Committee would discuss this sliding scale at a future meeting.

51. FOSTER CARER BENEFITS AND ENTITLEMENTS: EXEMPTION OF COUNCIL TAX

The Committee considered the Foster Carer Benefits and Entitlements: Exemption of Council Tax report which was set out in agenda pages 83-90.

Members were unanimously in favour of this proposal and stated that Foster Carers should be rewarded for their work.

Councillor Blumenthal asked the service to monitor the improvement in Foster Carer recruitment and retention as a result of this benefit, she suggested the production of a graph and asked that this be shared with the Committee when available.

RESOLVED That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee endorses the proposal for Council tax exemption for Wokingham's in-house Foster Carers.

52. RETENTION AND RECRUITMENT UPDATE, CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE WORKFORCE

The Committee considered the Retention and Recruitment update, Children's Social Care report which was set out in agenda pages 91-95.

The Chairman was pleased to note the improvement in the retention and recruitment of Social Workers and congratulated Officers on their work to achieve it.

RESOLVED That the report be noted and that an update report be submitted in six months.

53. ELECTIVE HOME EDUCATION REVIEW

The Committee considered the Elective Home Education report which was set out in agenda pages 97-136.

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

- Councillor Soane expressed concern over the limited powers for the Local Authority in relation to home elective education, and the fact that even the number of children being educated at home may be inaccurate as there was no way of knowing if a child was at home if this child was never registered in the first place;
- Shan Ratcliffe, Virtual School Headteacher was aware of the tension that the government policy in relation to home education created. However, she stated that the Officer that worked with overseeing home education was doing an excellent job in building relationships with parents and creating robust processes to ensure home education was being properly monitored;
- Paul Senior was confident that the systems and processes that were in place were as robust as they could be;
- Lisa Humphreys pointed out that only in a small minority number of cases there was a safeguarding issue, the vast majority of parents did educate their children at home, including by employing tutors;

In response to a question Shan Ratcliffe stated that she was not aware of any un-registered schools in Wokingham.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

54. 2017 EXAM RESULTS WITH A BREAKDOWN OF ALL SCHOOLS IN THE BOROUGH

The Committee considered the report which contained the 2017 school exam results.

The Chairman stated that she would like to see the exam results for Yately and Edgbarrow schools included in the report. It was understood that Wokingham had no control over the outcomes of schools out of the Borough however, there were many Wokingham children who attended those schools and the Committee wished to see their results for comparison purposes.

Paul Senior stated that the results for KS1 and KS2 were above the national average and this was to be celebrated.

The Chairman stated that Wokingham parents had high expectations and demanded more than average results.

The Committee was not entirely content with the results.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) That future reports include the exam results for Edgbarrow and Yeately schools; and
- 2) The report be noted.

55. SCHOOL PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND OFSTED REPORTS

The Committee considered the School Performance Indicators and Ofsted reports which was set out in agenda pages 143-157.

Addington School – short inspection, this school continues to be outstanding
The Chairman stated that the Headteacher at this school was very good. Paul Senior stated that families were moving into the area because of the school.

Bulmershe School – this is a good school
Members were pleased to note the result. It was noted that the part of the report containing the list of areas for development was missing and asked that this be included in reports.

Councillor Younis stated that this had been a two day inspection. He reported that the feedback from parents was positive and the leadership within the school was very strong.

In response to a question Paul Senior stated that in order for a school to achieve an overall outstanding result, all aspects had to be outstanding.

Members recognised that good schools needed to have strong Headteachers and senior leadership.

Piggott School – overall effectiveness good
Members noted that the *areas for development* comments were missing from the report and asked to have it included in future reports.

Willow House Hospital School – this school continues to be outstanding
Councillor Ashwell stated that he had visited this school and was very impressed with the service they provided.

Members noted that this was a residential provision for children with an acute level of need.

RESOLVED That the Ofsted reports be noted.

56. FORWARD PLAN

The Forward Programme which was set out in agenda pages 159-162 was considered and it was agreed that the various progress reports requested during the meeting be added to the forward plan.

Lisa Humphreys was concerned that the Children In Care questionnaire would not be available in time for the agenda publication at the next meeting. Members agreed that on this occasion they were prepared to accept the report at the meeting or via email before the meeting.

Luciane Bowker, Democratic and Elections Specialist suggested and Members agreed to include the Education Health and Care Plan Audit report to the next meeting.

57. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED That under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of the Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act as appropriate.

58. SCHOOLS CAUSING CONCERN

This item was discussed in a part 2 session.

RESOLVED That the contents of the report be noted.