

Please note: amendments were made to these minutes at the meeting on 22 May 2018.

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
HELD ON 20 MARCH 2018 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.00 PM**

**Committee Members Present**

Councillors: Pauline Helliar-Symons (Chairman), Parry Batth, Ken Miall, Beth Rowland and Bill Soane

**Other Councillors Present**

Councillors: Mark Ashwell

**Officers Present**

Luciane Bowker, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist  
Piers Brunning, Specialist, Strategy & Commissioning Places  
Carol Cammiss, Assistant Director Quality Assurance and Safeguarding Standards  
Patricia Davies, Interim Assistant Director for Education  
Lisa Humphreys, Assistant Director of Children's Social Care  
Shan Ratcliffe, Virtual School Headteacher  
Paul Senior, Director of People Services

**59. APOLOGIES**

An apology for absence was submitted from Councillor Laura Blumenthal.

**60. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 23 January 2018 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**MATTERS ARISING**

Shan Ratcliffe, Virtual School Headteacher stated that following the publication of the minutes, a complaint from a member of the public was received in relation to a comment within the Elective Home Education Review report.

The complainant was unhappy that report referred to home educated children as 'vulnerable'. Shan Ratcliffe recognised that this had been a poor choice of word as home education did not make a child vulnerable, it was a matter of parental choice.

**61. DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

A declaration of interest was submitted from Councillor Beth Rowland in relation to item 62 on the basis that she was a Governor at Highwood Primary School.

**62. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no public questions.

**63. MEMBER QUESTION TIME**

There were no Member questions.

**64. CHILDREN'S SERVICES PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

The Committee considered the Children's Services Key Performance Indicators report which was set out in agenda pages 17-22.

Please note: amendments were made to these minutes at the meeting on 22 May 2018.

In relation to the Local Indicator: *Percentage of child protection visits due in the period which were completed on-time (within 10 days of the previous visit)*, the Chairman felt that it would be useful to include a summary of the reasons as to why this indicator was red. She stated that she was often questioned about this indicator at the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, therefore it would be useful to include the reasons to satisfy Members' questions.

Lisa Humphreys, Assistant Director of Children's Social Care stated that she would be attending the next meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee to talk about this indicator. Lisa explained some of the reasons for the red:

- The national target was 42 days, and the local target was 10 days;
- Some children required visits more frequently than others, each situation was different;
- Unannounced visits run the risk of people not being in;
- Families could refuse to let Social Workers in;
- Older children could refuse to see Social Workers;
- Families could be on holidays;
- Social Workers did not have the authority to demand a visit; and
- School visits did not count as a child protection visit.

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

- In response to a question Lisa Humphreys stated that although the national target was 42 days, Ofsted would rate 42 days as inadequate as it was not justifiable to visit a child who was at risk in six weeks;
- Paul Senior, Director of People Services stated that he was confident that the service would stand up to scrutiny as Wokingham's response was proportionate to the level of need;
- Councillor Rowland was more concerned about the deteriorating direction of travel for certain 'green' indicators;
- Members questioned if this target was achievable and whether it would be better to change it to 15 days;
- In response to a question Lisa Humphreys stated that this indicator had on occasions been green for a short period of time;
- In response to a question Lisa Humphreys explained that Wokingham benchmarked against other South East Local Authorities and the target was 10 days;
- Lisa Humphreys stated that it was necessary to have a degree of flexibility, and that it was more important that the children were visited in accordance to their plan;
- Councillor Miall was of the opinion that it was more important to make sure the first visit was undertaken as soon as possible;
- In response to a question Lisa Humphreys stated that staff had mixed feelings about this red indicator.

Members were asked to consider changing this target to 15 days, however there was no consensus, therefore it was decided to keep it at 10 days.

Paul Senior reassured the Committee that if risk was identified, the correct processes would be set in motion to deal with it, it was important to manage expectations.

It was suggested by Councillor Rowland and agreed by the Committee that it would be useful to include arrows in the report to indicate the direction of travel.

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Members were reminded that there would be a training session before the next meeting. This session would include data analysis, child sexual exploitation, children missing and possibly other items.

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) The Local Indicator: Percentage of child protection visits due in the period which were completed on-time (within 10 days of the previous visit) would continue at 10 days;
- 2) Future reports would include arrows indicating the direction of travel;
- 3) The Committee would receive a training session before its next meeting.

**65. POLICY UPDATE FROM EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

The Executive Member for Children's Services, Councillor Ashwell thanked the Committee for its critical friend advice and updated the Committee on the development of current policies.

Councillor Ashwell informed that:

- The Council Tax exemption for Foster Carers was due to be submitted to the next meeting of Executive for approval;
- The proposal for Council Tax exemption for Care Leavers was being finalised and would be brought back for discussion at the next meeting of the Committee;
- Work was being undertaken on the development of the following policies:
  - **Education Vision Strategy** – Wokingham Learning Partnership (WLP) had been set up with a view to develop an education strategy for the whole Borough. The WLP included schools, academies, colleges, post 16 education providers and the Local Authority. WLP was hoping to also include participation from local businesses and young people. An independent chair for WLP was in the process of being recruited. **Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Strategy** – a draft SEND Strategy had been drawn up and had been submitted for consultation. Following the consultation the report would be amended accordingly and brought to this Committee for consideration.
  - **Primary School Place Strategy** – a short, medium and long term primary school place strategy was being developed. A cross party group with the participation of key stakeholders had been formed to design the strategy. In the short term pressures had been identified in the Woodley area, however it was important to identify and plan for future pressure areas in the Borough.
  - **Secondary School Place Strategy** – it was recognised that the opening of Bohunt School had created pressure for secondary schools, and this was one of the aspects that was being considered by the secondary school strategy.

Councillor Ashwell stated that it was important to find a way to include the voice of young people and enable their participation in the development of the education strategy. The service was considering the best way to engage young people.

Members of the Committee were very interested in the development of the policies and wished to continue receiving regular updates. The Chairman asked that updates on the policies be included in the Forward Plan for the Committee.

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**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) The update report be noted;
- 2) Update reports in relation to the following policies would be included in the Forward Plan:
  - a) Care Leavers Council Tax Exemption
  - b) Education Vision Strategy
  - c) Primary Place Planning Strategy
  - d) SEND Strategy

**66. ADOPT THAMES VALLEY: REGIONALISED ADOPTION AGENCY**

The Chairman explained that the Adopt Thames Valley report was presented for information, the Committee raised no concerns in relation to this service.

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) The report be noted;
- 2) Progress reports would be regularly submitted to the Committee

**67. INNOVATIONS PROGRAMME**

The Committee considered the Innovation Programme update report which was set out in agenda pages 31-36.

Lisa Humphreys explained that this was a two year research programme, designed to pilot new approaches to social work practice and intervention with families.

The Chairman was interested to know how the service would measure the achievement of targets. Lisa Humphreys stated that the model was built around adult learning and that Wokingham had set its own benchmarking which would be presented at a conference. It was difficult to quantify the outcome of this programme, but it was important find out if it delivered better outcomes in the long term and consider the cost/benefit of the project. The results would be discussed with the other participants of the programme.

**RESOLVED** That the report be noted and that a progress report would be submitted in six months' time.

**68. CROSS BOROUGH SECONDARY PLACE PLANNING/SDL**

The Committee received the Cross Borough Secondary Place Planning report which was set out in agenda pages 37-40. Piers Brunning, Strategy and Commissioning Places Specialist offered to answer any questions, however the Committee had no concerns in relation to the report.

**RESOLVED** That the report be noted.

**69. CHILDCARE SUFFICIENCY UPDATE**

The Committee received the Childcare Sufficiency Strategy report which was set out in agenda pages 41-46.

Please note: amendments were made to these minutes at the meeting on 22 May 2018.

The Chairman was pleased to note that there had not been a shortage of places following the implementation of the additional free childcare hours from September 2017 as it had been feared.

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

- Councillor Rowland was concerned about the availability of places and how providers were managing the extra places, she questioned if the extra free hours were being subsidised by paid hours;
- Piers Brunning stated that the charging rate for paid hours were significantly higher than the rate paid by the government for the free hours;
- In response to a question Piers explained that it was difficult to predict where places would be needed in the future as it was impossible to know how many people would move in or out of the area;
- Members noted the difficulties listed in the report (page 44 of the agenda) in relation to receiving the payment from central government which had caused delays in the system; and
- Councillor Soane asked to receive figures of the uptake by parents in future reports. Piers Brunning agreed to add figures in update reports, however he pointed out that some parents used childcare at their place of work which could be out of the Borough, so it was difficult to find a precise set of figures.

**RESOLVED** That the report be noted.

#### **70. SCHOOL PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND OFSTED REPORTS**

Patricia Davies, Interim Assistant Director of Education presented the School Performance Indicators and Ofsted reports which were set out in agenda pages 47-50.

Patricia Davies stated that since the publication of the agenda three Ofsted reports had been released:

- Foundry College remained 'Good'
- Loddon Primary remained 'Good'
- Radstock Primary remained 'Good'

The reports would be circulated to the Committee at the next meeting.

The Chairman pointed out that two secondary schools 'required improvement' and that it was the Council's ambition that all of its schools were 'good' or better. It was recognised that Wokingham's results were above the national average, however Wokingham's parents' expectations were also above average.

**RESOLVED** That the report be noted.

#### **71. INFORMATION ON SCHOOLS' PERFORMANCE AND NARROWING THE GAP**

The Chairman expressed her dissatisfaction that the information contained in the Schools Performance report did not include the exam results for Edgbarrow and Yately Schools, as per request recorded in the minutes of the last meeting. She explained that although these schools were not within Wokingham Borough, many Wokingham children who lived in the Wokingham Without and Finchampsted wards attended those schools, and the Committee had asked for this information many times before. *(Subsequently the Committee was provided with this information.)*

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Councillor Rowland asked if the results in the report were in respect to Maiden Erlegh Wokingham or Maiden Erlegh Reading. Patricia Davies agreed to investigate and report back. *(Subsequently Patricia Davies confirmed that the results were in respect to Maiden Erlegh Wokingham only.)*

In response to a question Paul Senior stated that the Local Authority had no jurisdiction over academy schools, therefore it was important to be realistic in relation to the expectations as to how the Local Authority could help to improve academies' performance.

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) The report be noted;
- 2) All future school performance reports would include the exam results for Edgbarrow and Yeately Schools.

## **72. EDUCATION HEALTH AND CARE PLAN REVIEW**

The Committee considered the Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) report which was set out in agenda pages 65-70.

The Committee was informed that since the production of the report (December 2017) most of the challenges identified had already been addressed. Paul Senior confirmed that all EHCP's would be completed by the end of March. He stated that Addington Special School was performing well above the national average.

The Committee recognised that the report had been written in December 2017 and that the current picture was much improved.

**RESOLVED** That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny supports the recommendations listed in the report.

## **73. CHILDREN IN CARE AND CARE LEAVERS QUESTIONNAIRE**

The Committee received a paper which had been produced by the Children In Care Council (CICC), the paper contained an analysis of the results of the Children In Care and Care Leavers annual questionnaire.

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

- 24 responses had been received out of a possible 80;
- The report had already been considered by Corporate Parenting Board (CPB)
- Councillor Ashwell pointed out that the logo had been designed by the CICC themselves;
- Councillor Rowland informed that representatives from the CICC had attended the last meeting of CPB and given a presentation to the Board. She praised the children's confidence in presenting to the Board;
- Councillor Soane was concerned with comments in relation to the lack of birth certificates and passports. Lisa Humphreys stated that CPB had had a robust discussion around this issue and that the service was aware of the difficulties. Lisa stated that this issue was complex and it related mainly to unaccompanied asylum seekers, for whom there was no documentation available. Lisa informed that CPB would continue to monitor this issue;

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- In response to a question Lisa Humphreys stated that a life skills programme was available to prepare care leavers for adult life;
- Members were pleased to note that most CIC attended their school of choice and that the health report was positive;
- In relation to the comment that not all CIC had gone on holiday with their Foster Carer, Lisa Humphreys stated that it was possible that these children had not been in care for a whole year;
- In response to a question Lisa Humphreys stated that sometimes birth certificates had to be obtained through the courts; and
- Lisa Humphreys assured the Committee that CIC were able to raise any concerns, and that Debbie Laflin, Children's Rights and Advocacy Officer would contact her team if there were any issues.

The Chairman wished to thank Debbie Laflin for her work with the CICC and for the paper presented at the meeting.

In response to a question, Paul Senior stated that this paper had been produced by the CICC and only they could give permission to share this document, therefore this paper was not to be shared.

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) The report be noted;
- 2) The Committee would like to receive this report on an annual basis.

#### **74. FORWARD PLAN**

The following items were added to the Forward Plan:

22 May 2018

- Care Leavers Council Tax Exemption
- GCSE results for Edgbarrow and Yatley Schools
- SEND Strategy
- Primary Place Plan Strategy

18 September 2018

- Education Vision Strategy – Wokingham Learning Partnership

20 November 2018

- Innovations Programme update

#### **75. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

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.

#### **76. SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT AND EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS: SCHOOL CAUSING CONCERN PART 2**

This item was discussed in a part 2 session.

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**RESOLVED** That the contents of the report be noted.