

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON 18 JUNE 2019 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.32 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Jenny Cheng, Andy Croy, Pauline Helliar-Symons, Graham Howe, Ken Miall, Andrew Mickleburgh and Alison Swaddle

Other Councillors Present

Councillors: Sarah Kerr

Officers Present

Luciane Bowker, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist
Adam Davis, Assistant Director for Children's Social Care
Jim Leivers, Interim Assistant Director for Education
Gillian Cole, Principal Primary Advisor

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Councillor Alison Swaddle was elected Chairman for the 2019/20 municipal year.

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

Councillor Jenny Cheng was appointed Vice-Chairman for the 2019/20 municipal year.

3. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Carol Cammiss, Director of Children's Services.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 25 March 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

5. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Members raised concerns that Deputy Executive Members should not be members of scrutiny committees.

Luciane Bowker, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist stated that the Overview Scrutiny Management Committee was aware of the issue and was going to discuss and make a decision about scrutiny membership at its next meeting. Members were satisfied that the Overview and Scrutiny would consider the matter at its next meeting.

A declaration of interest was submitted from Councillor Graham Howe on the basis that he was the Deputy Executive Member for Children's Services.

6. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

7. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

8. CHILDREN'S SERVICES PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The Committee considered the Children's Services Performance Indicators report which was set out in Agenda pages 13-18.

Adam Davies, Assistant Director for Children's Social Care stated that the dashboard on page 17 had been produced in an effort to present more up to date information to the Committee following comments which were made at the previous meeting.

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

- Members were unclear as to what the information in the dashboard meant;
- Adam Davies stated that the information compared data from the same three month period in 2018;
- Members were not certain if '*better than*' or '*greater than*' meant a good result;
- Members asked if the increase in the number of Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) was good or bad and questioned why this indicator was being monitored if its increase or decrease did not reflect the service's performance;
- Members agreed that a summary of key performance indicators in the format of a dashboard was a good idea, but the current format was not yet what the Committee was looking for;
- Members stated that the font size used in the narrative overleaf was too small and not readable, Members asked that the standard 12 point size be used in the future;
- Members stated that the Committee should be monitoring the key performance indicators that were important for residents and Members;
- Jim Leivers, Interim Assistant Director for Education stated that there was much information available, the service had tried to pick the most important key performance indicators and condense them into an A4 size, but perhaps it would be better to go back to a format which included more narrative;
- It was agreed that the format of the report would be reviewed, taking into account the comments made, and tweaked for the next meeting;
- Members were interested to know more about the timeliness of return interviews, especially given the fact that it related to a small number of children. Adam Davies stated that a single officer was now conducting return interviews;
- Members noted that there seemed to be a reoccurring problem with timeliness of reporting and asked what the difficulties were;
- Adam Davies stated that part of the challenge was workforce stability. He informed that a Task and Finish Group had been formed to strengthen recruitment and retention of staff;
- In response to a question Adam Davies stated that the aspiration was to recruit more permanent staff, he also stated that around 20% of staff were not permanent and this was a national issue.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The Children's Services Performance Indicators be noted; and
- 2) The format of the report will be revised taking into account the comments made above.

9. REVIEW OF SEND OFSTED INSPECTION

The Committee received the report outlining the findings of the SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection which took place in March 2019.

Jim Leivers presented the report. He stated that the inspection found a number of shortcomings and weaknesses, identifying a need for improvement. As a result, the Local Authority and the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) were required to prepare a written statement of action aimed at addressing the identified areas of significant weaknesses. He would meet with representatives from the Department of Education (DfE) this week to discuss the improvement plan.

Jim Leivers stated that one of the difficulties was the overspend of 2 million in the SEND Budget, however, the improvement process had already begun, including the establishment of a SEND Improvement Board. This Board included himself, representatives from Health, Headteachers and representatives from the voluntary sector. The Board would meet monthly, and would be overseen by the DfE and Ofsted.

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

- Members noted that the Ofsted letter stated that there was an underlying sense of mistrust between parents and senior leaders. Jim Leivers confirmed that this was one of the areas for improvement;
- Members asked how many additional places would be made available with the expansion of Addington School. Jim Leivers stated that there would be 50 to 60 extra spaces;
- In response to a question Jim Leivers stated that there were 113 pupils in out of area placements, and approximately 900 EHCPs in the Borough, with significant challenges in relation to funding and an overspend of 2 million in the High Needs Block (HNB). The proposals to address these challenges would be discussed at the next meeting of Schools Forum;
- Jim Leivers stated that this situation was not unique to Wokingham and that there was an unprecedented demand for SEND places;
- Members asked if there were other blockages apart from the financial one. Jim Leivers stated that there were other issues, such as the number of SEND professionals available and the fact that Wokingham was in competition with other local authorities. It was important to find ways to make Wokingham attractive to the workforce;
- Members noted that it was positive that the strategic leadership was now more stable;
- Members noted the comments in the report about the quality of the EHCPs and asked what was being done to improve them. Jim Leivers confirmed that the quality of EHCPs remained an issue, there were some outstanding plans, but others were not as good as they should be. One of the comments by Ofsted was the lack of cooperation with parents. The services were aware of the comments and partners were committed to improving the quality of EHCPs;
- Members were interested to know the numbers for permanent exclusions relating to SEN children. It was agreed that this information would be included with the minutes;
- Members agreed that they would like to monitor the number of permanent exclusions at every meeting.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The report be noted; and
- 2) The Committee will be informed of the number of permanent exclusions in the Borough in future reports.

10. SEND STRATEGY

Jim Leivers presented the SEND Strategy report which was set out in Agenda pages 35-52.

Jim Leivers stated that this was a draft strategy, the service was taking into account the regulator's comments and including more elements to the strategy. He expected that the strategy would go back to Executive in early Autumn and come back to this Committee for a further review.

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

- In response to a question Jim Leivers stated that two applications had been made to the DfE for new schools, one had been turned down. The other application was for a joint school with Reading had been approved. This was now pending identification of suitable land to build the school. It was anticipated that this school would be able to offer 150 places;
- In response to a question Jim Leivers stated that the strategy had been consulted upon and that around 20 responses were received, mostly by parents;
- In response to a question Jim Leivers stated that in order to create a system to collect money from placements, it would be necessary to spend a lot of money setting it up, and he was of the opinion that this option was not cost effective;
- In response to a question Jim Leivers stated that Reading had been asked to identify the land for the new school. However, the discussions were ongoing and there would be no major impact until 2022/23. Places would be split between authorities;
- Jim Leivers stated that there was a need to work together with health and parents in developing the strategy;
- Members noted that on page 50 it stated that *'the delivery of this strategy was not the responsibility of a single agency'*, they felt that the Local Authority should be the primary agency with responsibility for the strategy. Jim Leivers agreed to review the wording;
- In response to a question Darryl Ward confirmed that school governors had been consulted on the strategy.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The SEND Strategy be confirmed as the basis for further work with key partners;
- 2) Detailed consideration is given by the newly established SEND Improvement Board to the advice of Ofsted/CQC regarding the development of the future SEND Strategy; and
- 3) The SEND Strategy will be brought back to the Committee for consideration at the September meeting.

11. SCHOOL PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND OFSTED REPORTS

Gillian Cole, Principal Primary Advisor went through the report which contained Ofsted letters from schools that had undergone inspections since the last meeting of the Committee.

Gillian Cole explained that Section 5 (S5) inspections lasted five days and were capable of changing a school's grading; Section 8 (S8) inspections lasted one day and could not change the school's grading, therefore S8 inspections were more like a monitoring visit.

Gillian Cole went through the report and highlighted the following points:

Bearwood Primary School – S5 Good

Gillian Cole stated that this school had been previously rated 'Requires improvement' and that this result was a significant success for the school. The Local Authority had worked closely with this school.

St Nicholas Hurst CE Primary School – S8 Good

This was a monitoring visit and the school maintained its good grading.

St Dominic Savio Primary School – S8 Good

This school continued to be good and the regulator called for a S5 inspections with the expectation that school will achieve outstanding.

Beechwood Primary School – S8 Monitoring visit – appropriate action and satisfactory progress

The school is taking effective action towards improvement.

Northern House Academy – S8 Monitoring visit

Gillian Cole stated that as this was an academy school, its support and challenge were received from the academy trust.

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

- Members were pleased with Bearwood School's achievement and wished to congratulate all that were involved in achieving this success;
- Members asked if Northern House would accept training for governors from the Local Authority. Gillian Cole stated that the Local Authority kept an open door and the school could buy support if they wished to;
- Members were interested to know at what point a new trust would be sought if there were no improvements;
- Gillian Cole stated that the Local Authority was keeping the channel open with the school;
- Gillian Cole stated that the trust was not using the support within the trust to help the school;
- Jim Leivers stated that he had had conversations with the Education Funding Agency (EFA) and the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) about concerns in relation to the school. The school was a resource that the Local Authority did not want to lose. He would keep the Committee informed of any developments;
- Jim Leivers stated that this was an academy school, and as such the Local Authority had no power to intervene, the school was under the remit of the RSC;
- Councillor Croy was concerned that Wokingham children were being failed by the system;
- In response to a question Gillian Cole stated that if a Councillor wished to take part in the governing body of the school they should contact the trust directly;
- In response to a question Jim Leivers stated that the school, as an academy, was independent of the Local Authority and he would be reluctant to spend the Local Authority's already stretched resources into an independent resource;
- Members pointed out that the children were the responsibility of the Local Authority;
- Members expressed frustration that the Local Authority had no power and yet was still responsible for the educational outcomes of children attending academy schools;

- The Committee asked that future school improvement reports include a list of all schools in the Borough with their current Ofsted rating and with a column showing if this was an academy or a maintained school. Councillor Helliard-Symonds also asked that this list and also include Edgbarrow School as many Wokingham children attended Edgbarrow;
- Members asked what monitoring was being currently undertaken with St Nicholas Primary in view of some of the comments made by Ofsted. Gillian Cole stated that the school received a challenge and support visit from the Local Authority once a year. However, as a church school they would also receive some support also from the Diocese. Gillian stated that the Ofsted report related to a small level of disparity and the Local Authority was not concerned.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The report be noted; and
- 2) Future reports would include a list of all schools in the Borough and Edgbarrow. This list is to include the schools' current Ofsted ratings and indicate the type of school (if academy or maintained school).

12. FORWARD PLAN

The Committee noted dates of meetings and asked that the following items be added to the forward plan:

- Educational outcomes (GCSE and A-Level results)
- Ofsted inspection review
- SEND Strategy
- Feedback on how the Christmas collection for Children In Care was spent
- Northern House College update
- Children's social and leisure activities, sports take up
- Children and young peoples' mental health
- Youth offending
- Child obesity
- Children carers

It was agreed that Luciane Bowker would organise a meeting with the Chairman to decide where this items would sit in the forward plan.

Councillor Miall asked for information relating to the number of school applications for Maiden Erlegh School. Gillian Cole agreed to send him an email with this information.

At this point Jim Leivers read out a letter which was sent out from Northern House to parents informing that the school was seeking a new academy trust. Jim expressed serious concern about this situation and stated that the Committee would receive an update at the next meeting.

Members expressed frustration and concern that the Local Authority had no power to intervene to help academy schools and yet it was responsible for the educational outcomes of the children.

13. 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.

14. SCHOOLS CAUSING CONCERN - PART 2

The report was discussed in a part 2 session.