



# WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

A Meeting of the **CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** will be held in the Council Chamber - Civic Offices, Shute End, Wokingham RG40 1BN on **MONDAY 10 JANUARY 2022 AT 7.00 PM**

Susan Parsonage  
Chief Executive  
Published on 31 December 2021

The role of Overview and Scrutiny is to provide independent “critical friend” challenge and to work with the Council’s Executive and other public service providers for the benefit of the public. The Committee considers submissions from a range of sources and reaches conclusions based on the weight of evidence – not on party political grounds.

**Note:** Although non-Committee Members and members of the public are entitled to attend the meeting in person, space is very limited due to the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic. You can however participate in this meeting virtually, in line with the Council’s Constitution. If you wish to participate either in person or virtually via Microsoft Teams, please contact Democratic Services. The meeting can also be watched live using the following link:  
<https://youtu.be/Oqg4MsB4jPY>



# WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

## Our Vision

*A great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business*

### Enriching Lives

- Champion outstanding education and enable our children and young people to achieve their full potential, regardless of their background.
- Support our residents to lead happy, healthy lives and provide access to good leisure facilities to complement an active lifestyle.
- Engage and involve our communities through arts and culture and create a sense of identity which people feel part of.
- Support growth in our local economy and help to build business.

### Safe, Strong, Communities

- Protect and safeguard our children, young and vulnerable people.
- Offer quality care and support, at the right time, to prevent the need for long term care.
- Nurture communities and help them to thrive.
- Ensure our borough and communities remain safe for all.

### A Clean and Green Borough

- Do all we can to become carbon neutral and sustainable for the future.
- Protect our borough, keep it clean and enhance our green areas.
- Reduce our waste, improve biodiversity and increase recycling.
- Connect our parks and open spaces with green cycleways.

### Right Homes, Right Places

- Offer quality, affordable, sustainable homes fit for the future.
- Build our fair share of housing with the right infrastructure to support and enable our borough to grow.
- Protect our unique places and preserve our natural environment.
- Help with your housing needs and support people to live independently in their own homes.

### Keeping the Borough Moving

- Maintain and improve our roads, footpaths and cycleways.
- Tackle traffic congestion, minimise delays and disruptions.
- Enable safe and sustainable travel around the borough with good transport infrastructure.
- Promote healthy alternative travel options and support our partners to offer affordable, accessible public transport with good network links.

### Changing the Way We Work for You

- Be relentlessly customer focussed.
- Work with our partners to provide efficient, effective, joined up services which are focussed around you.
- Communicate better with you, owning issues, updating on progress and responding appropriately as well as promoting what is happening in our Borough.
- Drive innovative digital ways of working that will connect our communities, businesses and customers to our services in a way that suits their needs.

## **Appendix Acronyms**

CPD	Continuous Professional Development
EYFS	Early Years Foundations Stage
FGB	Full Governing Body
KS1	Key Stage 1
KS2	Key Stage 2
MAT	Multi Academy Trust
NLE	National Leader of Education
NLG	National Leader of Governance
RI	Requires Improvement
RSC	Regional Schools Commissioner
SDP	School Development Plan
SEF	Self Evaluation Form
SIB	School Improvement Board
SIO	School Improvement Officer
SLT	Senior Leadership Team
TSA	Teaching School Alliance
WLP	Wokingham Learning Partnership

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

### Councillors

Prue Bray  
Norman Jorgensen  
(Chairman)  
Morag Malvern

Anne Chadwick  
Rebecca Margetts (Vice-  
Chairman)  
Jackie Rance

Pauline Helliar-Symons  
Andrew Mickleburgh

### Substitutes

Sam Akhtar  
David Hare  
Alison Swaddle

Phil Cunnington  
Sarah Kerr

Guy Grandison  
Barrie Patman

### 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.
30.		<b>APOLOGIES</b> To receive any apologies for absence.	
31.		<b>MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING</b> To confirm the Minutes of the Meeting held on 4 November 2021.	7 - 12
32.		<b>DECLARATION OF INTEREST</b> To receive any declarations of interest.	
33.		<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>34.</b> |               | <b>MEMBER QUESTION TIME</b><br>To answer any member questions   |                |
| <b>35.</b> | None Specific | <b>REVIEW OF HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT PROCESSES</b><br>To receive and consider the Review of Home to School Transport Processes report. | <b>13 - 18</b> |
| <b>36.</b> | None Specific | <b>EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP TERMS OF REFERENCE</b><br>To receive and consider the Education Partnership Terms of Reference report.         | <b>19 - 28</b> |
| <b>37.</b> | None Specific | <b>CHILDREN'S SERVICES COVID TASK FORCE</b><br>To receive and consider the Children's Services Covid Task Force report.                 | <b>29 - 36</b> |
| <b>38.</b> | None Specific | <b>FORWARD PROGRAMME</b><br>To receive and consider the Committee's Forward Programme.  | <b>37 - 40</b> |

**Any other items which the Chairman decides are urgent**

A Supplementary Agenda will be issued by the Chief Executive if there are any other items to consider under this heading

**CONTACT OFFICER**

**Luciane Bowker**  
**Email**  
**Postal Address**

Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist  
luciane.bowker@wokingham.gov.uk  
Civic Offices, Shute End, Wokingham, RG40 1BN

This page is intentionally left blank

## MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 4 NOVEMBER 2021 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.20 PM

### **Committee Members Present**

Councillors: Anne Chadwick, Pauline Helliar-Symons, Norman Jorgensen (Chairman), Andrew Mickleburgh, Morag Malvern and Jackie Rance

Councillor Prue Bray took part virtually

### **Other Councillors Present**

Councillors: Graham Howe took part virtually

### **Officers Present**

Matthew Booth, Children's Services Consultant

Luciane Bowker, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist

Carol Cammiss, Director of Children's Services

Adam Davis, Assistant Director of Children's Social Care and Early Help

Heather Tomlinson, Interim Assistant Director for Learning and Partnerships

### **21. APOLOGIES**

An apology for absence was submitted from Councillor Rebecca Margetts, she was substituted by Councillor Sam Akhtar.

### **22. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 15 September 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Matters arising

In response to a question, Heather Tomlinson, Interim Assistant Director for Learning and Achievements stated that there was no further information on how the A-Levels and GCSE's would be assessed this year. However, it was believed that the government's intention was to re-instate exams.

In response to a request, Heather Tomlinson agreed to circulate data in relation to the catch-up fund outside of the meeting.

### **23. DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **24. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no public questions.

### **25. MEMBER QUESTION TIME**

There were no Member questions.

### **26. CHILDREN MISSING EDUCATION**

Heather Tomlinson stated that the Children Missing Education (CME) report showed a mostly positive picture in the Borough. However, of concern was the disproportionate number of Special Educational Children (SEN) who were subject of permanent exclusions.

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

- In response to questions Heather Tomlinson stated that it was the Local Government's statutory responsibility to ensure that children were not missing education. In order to reduce the number of CME it was important to ensure that there was sufficiency of suitable places to meet the children's needs. The issue of CME was complex and encompassed a broad accountability across services. The Education Welfare Service (EWS) and the Virtual School were more directly involved in working with issues relating to CME;
- Councillor Mickleburgh asked if the service was following up/concerned about children who missed less than 20 consecutive days of school. Heather Tomlinson stated that schools should monitor patterns of poor absences and support to schools was given through the EWS. The School Improvement Service also monitored school attendance. She pointed out that it was important to identify needs early, with a graduated response to needs to avoid CME later on;
- Carol Cammiss, Director of Children's Services stated that therapeutic thinking was being rolled out to all schools, both academies and maintained. Additionally, a member of staff was employed to act as a mentor to schools and undertake reviews of plans for all Year 9 children with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP);
- Carol Cammiss informed that the graduated response programme would be completed by March and it involved supporting schools to identify their needs and provide the assistance required;
- It was noted that a large number of children were re-engaged with education;
- Councillor Akhtar asked if a lack of IT equipment during the pandemic had prevented children from engaging in remote learning. Carol Cammiss explained that all children in the Borough were given access to IT equipment, either through the Local Authority or the school;
- Councillor Bray asked to have the CME data split into boys and girls and secondary and primary;
- In response to a question, Heather Tomlinson stated that there were no trends in relation to CME;
- Councillor Bray asked for further information on trends relating to permanent exclusions of children with additional needs who did not meet the threshold for EHCPs;
- Councillor Mickleburgh asked for more information on the permanent exclusions data, including a breakdown of ethnicity;
- Carol Cammiss agreed to provide further information outside of the meeting.

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) The report be noted; and
- 2) Officers would circulate the additional information requested.

## **27. CHILDREN'S SERVICES STRATEGY**

The Children's Services Strategy was presented by Matthew Booth, Children's Services Consultant and Carol Cammiss, Director of Children's Services.

The Strategy covered a period of three years, and it was designed to align the service delivery of the priorities. The report included details of the governance arrangements and the action plan.

The vast majority of children in Wokingham achieved very good outcomes, however it was important to acknowledge and address the needs of those children that needed additional help. One of the strategic priorities was to deliver excellent outcomes for all children, young people and families in Wokingham.

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

- Councillor Mickleburgh felt that there could be more mention of the ‘voice of the children’ within the Strategy. He asked that consideration be given to supporting the most talented children in the Borough. He also asked about support to parents struggling with child rearing;
- Carol Cammiss explained that there were various services that sat underneath the Strategy which covered those areas mentioned;
- Carol Cammiss stated that the Unicef project was one of the ways in which the voice of the children was going to be taken into account, there was also the Youth Council and other initiatives to include the voice of the children;
- In response to a comment, Adam Davis, Assistant Director of Children’s Social Care and Early Help stated that there were a range of Early Help and Early Intervention Services being provided in the Borough. These services included universal and targeted interventions;
- Matthew Booth stated that Early Intervention was very important in order to protect the most vulnerable children in the Borough;
- Councillor Helliar-Symonds stated that in the past, a strong relationship had been developed with the Fire Services with the aim of supporting the most vulnerable children in the Borough. She was interested to know if this relationship was still strong. Carol Cammiss stated that there had been changes in the Fire Service’s personnel, and the relationship was not as strong as previously. However, they still did the fire safety checks and referred into the services through the front door service. Councillor Helliar-Symonds agreed to speak to the manager of the central hub about strengthening the partnership with the Fire Services;
- Councillor Bray asked for information about the implications of the recent announcement by the DfE that the new SEND school would not open next year;
- Carol Cammiss stated that negotiations with the DfE were ongoing, including alternatives for the children. She re-assured the Committee that children’s needs would be met;
- Members were sympathetic to the challenges being created as a result of the delay in the opening of the new school;
- In response to a question, Carol Cammiss stated that Children’s Services was moving towards a more holistic approach to delivering services to children, with more integration of education and social services;
- Matthew Booth stated that the Strategy was being designed in such a way as to promote integration of services and communication between departments and partners;
- In response to a question Carol Cammiss stated that the live interactive action plan did have RAG ratings, she agreed to include RAG ratings in future report updates;
- In response to a question Carol Cammiss stated that a business case model was used for identifying efficiencies;
- In response to a question Carol Cammiss informed that there were many partnership opportunities that the service was involved in, for example: the Children and Young People’s Partnership, the Health and Wellbeing Board, the Berkshire West Safeguarding Board, the Violence Reduction Strategy Partnership Group and others;

- In response to a question Matthew Booth stated that the service intended to complete the Strategy to tackle serious youth violence, child sexual exploitation and extra familial harm before the end of this financial year, a lot of work had already been undertaken with stakeholders;
- Carol Cammiss informed that Wokingham's training and continuous development offer for the workforce was very comprehensive and an area of strength;
- In response to a question, Carol Cammiss stated that audit reports were submitted for quality assurance purposes, however because of confidentiality these reports could not be shared with the Committee. Adam Davis added that there were core audits and themed audits;
- In relation to a question about Elective Home Education, Matthew Booth stated that the service had to be respectful of parental choice and to ensure that children were having access to good quality education, and this could be tricky. There was no legal obligation for parents for elected home educated children to engage with the Local Authority;
- In response to a question Carol Cammiss stated that IT systems were updated regularly in order to improve systems and to enable better use of data;
- Matthew Booth explained that Power BI was a data management system.

**RESOLVED** That the report be noted.

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

The Committee discussed the Children's Services Performance Indicators report and the following comments were made:

### Dashboard Item 3 – Children's Social Care Front Door

- In relation to the number of cases that progressed to an assessment, Adam Davis explained that over the last 18 months it has been difficult to draw trends from the data. It was noted that the number of referrals went up and down, but the number that progressed to an assessment was reducing, the service was monitoring the data in order to gain a better understanding;
- In relation to the number of assessments completed in the timeframe, Adam Davis explained that some cases were being closed from Q1, others may be going into court proceedings and could take longer to process, the service was monitoring this. He stated that it was possible that the target was too high, the service was comparing it to the national average.

### Dashboard Item 4 – Child Protection

- Councillor Mickleburgh noted that the data showed small decreases if compared to the last quarter, however there were significant differences if compared to other quarters. He suggested including yearly averages in the report, in order to gain a fuller picture of the situation.

### Dashboard Item 5 – Children In Care

- % of children in care who have more than 1 allocated social worker in 12 months – Members were interested to know the trend in relation to this item. Adam Davis informed that one social worker had progressed to become a team manager, this was a positive career progression as it brought stability and knowledge to the team. However, as a result, those cases had to be moved to another part of the team and had a significant impact on statistics as the numbers were very small.

### Dashboard 1 – Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP)

- Members asked about the implication of the raising numbers of EHCPs. Heather Tomlinson confirmed that the numbers were going up, and this followed a national trend;
- Carol Cammiss stated that a lot of work was being undertaken to support schools and their SENCO coordinators. She stated that there was intelligence that suggested that there would be some levelling off, however it was a complex picture. The additional duties and financial implications of the Children's Act 2014 had not been fully comprehended by Local Authorities and it was a national challenge. The service was developing a number of strands of work to tackle this challenge, there was not a single solution.

#### Dashboard Item 2 – Early Help

- Members asked if there was a reason for the fluctuation on the number of referrals. Adam Davis stated that the service was monitoring this fluctuation. It was possible that the increase in the number of referrals to the Children's Social Care Front Door services had had an impact on the referrals for Early Help.

#### Dashboard Item 7 – Children Missing from Home/Care

- Members were interested to know if the number of children not currently on a school roll was known to the service. Heather Tomlinson stated that this figure should be known to the service and was monitored by the Local Authority as part of its statutory obligation in relation to children's education;
- Members asked how the service tracked children that had gone missing from the school roll. Carol Cammiss stated there was a cross over of different service areas in relation to this issue. Managed moves were tracked, and schools informed the service if there was a particular worry about a child not being in school. The service would work collaboratively if there was a concern of risk to a child;
- Carol Cammiss suggested that Members ask more detailed questions in writing for a fuller response.

#### Dashboard Item 6 – Care Leavers

- Members were encouraged to note the high percentage of care leavers who remained in touch with the Local Authority and the decrease in the Not in Employment Education or Training (NEET) percentage.

**RESOLVED** That the report be noted.

### **29. FORWARD PLAN**

The Forward Plan for the Committee was considered and the Chairman informed that a significant number of items had been added since the last meeting.

Carol Cammiss stated that the service had a Delivery Plan with items that were being worked on. The proposed timeline of items in the Forward Plan allowed for discussions to take place at the right time to provide meaningful overview and scrutiny of the service.

The following items were added:

21 March 2022

Strategy to Tackle Serious Youth Violence, Child Sexual Exploitation and Extra Familial Harm

May 2022

Fostering Transformation (moved from March 2022)

It was requested that the Education Update item in May include information about narrowing the gap.

Members were interested to add an item about child domestic violence. Callum Wernham, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist informed that the Community Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee was receiving an update on the domestic violence contract at its meeting in March. He suggested adding this topic to that item, inviting Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Members to participate in the discussions. Members were in agreement with this suggestion.

The Committee wished to express gratitude to Carol Cammiss for her work at Wokingham Borough Council and wished her well in her new role.

# Agenda Item 35.

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Review of Home to School Transport Processes</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 10 January 2022
<b>WARD</b>	None Specific
<b>LEAD OFFICER</b>	Director, Children's Services - Helen Watson

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

Clarity on the transport arrangements for September 2022 and to ensure clear, consistent, and early communication to parents.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an overview of the key outcomes from the review of the home to school transport processes.

## **SUMMARY OF REPORT**

This review was prompted by the significant problems that occurred when the newly commissioned home to school transport system was implemented in September 2021. The review focuses on the decisions leading up to the changes, the implementation of the new system and the council's response to the disruption and distress caused by the changes.

## **Background**

Typically, over 900 children living in the borough are transported to school, daily, on council commissioned transport. In the summer term of 2021, the council reviewed and re-tendered all home to school transport (HTST) contracts to ensure they continue to meet needs and represent best value. As part of this work, some technical route optimising was also carried out to ensure all transport routes were as efficient as possible.

## **Analysis of Issues**

Transport services are commissioned to provide dedicated school transport for those pupils who are determined by community transport to be eligible for free home to school transport and where the volume of pupils is sufficient to justify a dedicated bus service. These bus services can only be used by those students allocated to the service and not by members of the public. The eligibility requirements to receive free transport from home to school are set out in the Local Authority Home to School Transport Policy.

The re-commissioning of home to school transport had not been carried out for over 5 years prior to the 2021 programme of work. Therefore, it was imperative that the Local Authority evaluated the service it provides and identified ways to provide an excellent service, as well as being cost effective, whilst reducing the environmental impact of the service.

The recommissioning and route optimisation programme of work brought about significant changes to historic transport routes. For secondary school pupils, it meant that there was a change to most school coach routes, to better accommodate those students eligible for travel assistance, and to ensure the most efficient use of vehicles, and an overall reduction in the number of coaches was seen.

Students from different schools who previously received sole transport to an individual school, were placed on shared transport with other schools, meaning that transport, although was still available and accessible, reduced the number of vehicles on the road during peak traffic times, improving air quality and reducing carbon emissions.

For primary school pupils, many of the routes were changed from September 2021, as routes were optimised for efficiency and to make the best use of available resources. For some pupils, this meant that they were travelling with different children, a different operator, or different staff. As with secondary schools, this reduced the number of vehicles on the road.

## **SEND – Special Educational Needs and Disability**

There are currently over 350 children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities in the Wokingham Borough, with agreed transport for September. The historic data held by the council regarding children's needs, was limited, incomplete and at times inaccurate.

As a result of the introduction of the new Dynamic Procurement System and route optimisation programme, many children and young people saw new staff taking them to and from settings and began travelling with different children/young people or in different vehicles, and on different routes.

For children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities, the council reviewed all transport needs and provisions and re-commissioned the transport routes. The re-commissioning of transport for children with SEND had not been carried out prior to this.

A wider review is currently being carried out within SEND, the innovation and improvement program (IIP), and transport provision forms part of that ongoing piece of work. Early findings in relation to the IIP are clear that more support is needed around communication. The expectations around sole transport are high because it has never been questioned by SEND or Community Transport (CT) in the past. Consequently, there is a limited audit trail for decisions surrounding sole transport. This is part of the review specifically for SEND and is due to be completed in January 2022.

## **Key Issues**

### **The system**

The new purchasing system and procurement of operators was introduced between April and June. It took longer than expected to write, as the Local Authority, Community transport and the Procurement team, had not used, or written a Dynamic Procurement System (DPS) before.

The timetable for implementation created several risks that flowed from such a tight timetable, as all recommissioning and route optimisation had to be completed before the start of the new school term in September 2021. Moving to a very different system, with so little lead in time was likely to cause significant problems which were not foreseen. A combination of the implementation of a new DPS, late installation of new route optimisation software and the vast amount of administration associated with the new tendering process produced several issues in the home to school transport process for September 2021. The SEND review also highlights numerous flaws in this system from a statutory point of view, and these issues will be detailed in the SEND review due in January 2022.

Two pre-DPS marketing events with transport operators (suppliers) took place, however, some transport operators failed to realise that they had to register to use the new system, which resulted in a significant number of applications being submitted once the DPS was up and running. There were 13 rounds of transport operator applications, some running concurrently. Statutory procurement rules only allow for 10 calendar days to assess a submission. It was found that DPS applications were time consuming to assess, with 9 policy documents, credit checks, financial checks, references, and licence checks for each application. The new system also led to some suppliers struggling to use the new procurement system, which delayed the process further.

In terms of tendering for routes, it was considered that the DPS was a quicker and more efficient way to tender contracts. Ultimately it was found to be more time consuming than the “quick quotes” function which has historically been used in Community Transport. There are 12 steps for awarding a contract, most of which require lengthy forms to be filled. These steps must be done for each and every contract awarded, bearing in mind, there were 350 contracts.

The finance step for tendering contracts requires approval by finance, within the Local Authority. This approval is needed before being able to move the process on. The structure of the DPS workflow is complex and onerous and this process needs reviewing by procurement.

One of the biggest problems was the speed of which the route optimisation software was approved through the IT processes. Market research needed to be done and attendance at numerous IT boards had to be carried out before the software was allowed to be installed.

To carry out effective route optimisation, the system also only works with a high percentage of transport requests being received. The Community Transport team then require a specific time to commission the routes.

### **Communication and Lateness**

The late return of transport request forms by families of children and young people with SEND was the biggest contributor of the issues relating to SEND transport. Ultimately it was this that led to the number of complaints received.

Most transport request forms were returned in August and September, which caused issues for both Community Transport and SEND. All families were contacted in advance, explaining the need to return an application form by the end of June 2021, but the lack of response was not anticipated. Only 30% of forms were received on-time, by June 2021.

This meant that routes could not be tendered as there were insufficient children on the routes to enable effective route planning and route optimization.

### **Commissioning**

Commencing work on re-commissioning and reviewing all transport needs and provisions for children with SEND in April 2021, with the new routes due to be in place for September 2021, meant that there were limited opportunities to engage with parents, carers, and schools, before the new system was implemented.

As a result, the changes were not effectively communicated to all stakeholders, and as such, systems of communication between the council and key stakeholders needs to be improved going forward.

As part of this review, it was found that further shared understanding and clarity is needed regarding the definitions and boundaries of informing, consulting, and co-production. To rebuild trust and to ensure genuine co-production of solutions with parents/carers, and schools, more time is needed to work with stakeholders collaboratively, which will be a key part of the home to school transport process for 2022.

## Key recommendations

1. System to be reviewed as fit for purpose for tracking and accommodating needs. This will be discussed at the Corporate Transport Board along with available options. Community Transport to decide whether to implement recommendations from the SEND Review with support/direction from Assistant director and Director of Transport.
2. Agree clarity on communications and how that process works as business as usual and communicate to all stakeholders. Current issues are communication driven as well as systems but are not clear.
3. Development of a decision-making matrix for transport linked to SEND and removal of expectation that transport will be simply given out.
4. Panel to meet at the end of each month with Community Transport, Admissions, SEND, and Finance involved to approve and justify transport forms. At this stage SEND only.
5. All new transport requests from phased transfers, changes due to panel decisions, and movers in for example, to have new transport request forms.

**Options:** to be picked up at Corporate Transport Board in January 2022. Current transport agreements are rolled on through the commissioning process with no new forms needed unless a change of need is highlighted or via movers in for example. Community Transport to communicate to families that they will have different drivers or routes for example, on an annual basis because of this process.

6. Joint funded officer to link Community Transport, SEND and Admissions on transport.
7. Local Authority must manage the expectations of parents, clearly highlighting what the statutory responsibility of the LA is and manage the expectations for sole transport. Support from comms needed.
8. **Rebuild trust with schools and settings parents/carers, members and officers from other departments.** The Home to School Transport Service needs to set out clear roles, responsibilities and expectations between parents/carers and the Council. This will be done in collaboration with SEND voices.
9. **More support and oversight from senior managers when significant changes are being made to council services:** Children and young people must be at the heart of all considerations and the service should operate in a way that allows children to arrive at school stress free and ready to learn. Therefore, timings of service decisions (e.g., who will be offered transport) need to allow for a fit for-purpose service being ready by each September.

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

*The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.*

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

<b>Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision</b>
None

<b>Cross-Council Implications</b>
N/A

<b>Public Sector Equality Duty</b>
N/A

<b>Climate Emergency – <i>This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030</i></b>
N/A

<b>List of Background Papers</b>
None

<b>Contact</b> Zoe Storey, Heather Tomlinson	<b>Service</b> Learning Achievement and Partnerships
<b>Telephone No:</b> 07876554688	<b>Email</b> zoe.storey@wokingham.gov.uk, heather.tomlinson@wokingham.gov.uk

**TITLE** Establishment of a Wokingham Borough Education Partnership

**FOR CONSIDERATION BY** Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny

**WARD** None specific

**LEAD OFFICER** Director Children's Services Helen Watson

**OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY**

This development aims to strengthen educational vision, strategy and collaboration with school leaders to improve inclusion and educational outcomes for children and young people.

**RECOMMENDATION**

To note the decision by Schools Forum to support the establishment a Wokingham Borough Education Partnership.

**SUMMARY OF REPORT**

This report explains the rationale for, and the outcomes expected from, the establishment of a Wokingham Borough Education Partnership.

## **Establishment of a Wokingham Borough Education Partnership**

### **01. Purpose**

This development seeks to:

- Re-establish work to co-produce strategic partnership arrangements between Wokingham education leaders and the local authority.
- Set out the case for strengthening whole system educational leadership in Wokingham, drawing on the pre-Covid work and recent conversations with school leaders.
- Propose next steps to address the system issues identified by school leaders.

### **02. Recommendation**

To note the decision by Schools Forum to support establishment of a Wokingham Borough Education Partnership.

### **03. Introduction**

The Lead Member for Children's Services convened and three meetings, two on 8 October & one on 4 November 2021, to seek the perspective of an invited group of primary and secondary school leaders on the strategic partnership between schools and the local authority and how school leaders would wish it to be strengthened.

The first two meetings were also attended by the Leader and Deputy Leader of the council, the elected members who attend Schools Forum and the Corporate Parenting Board, the Director of Children's Services and the Assistant Director, Learning Achievement & Partnerships (LAP).

These conversations sought to build on strategic work undertaken in 2019, prior to the Covid pandemic. Paul Brennan, a consultant, was then commissioned to work in conjunction with Headteachers to consider the future role of the local authority in Wokingham, and to identify the education system issues requiring development. These findings were shared with Headteachers at the termly briefings before COVID.

The outcome of the meetings with school leaders in October and November 2021 was a proposal to establish a Wokingham Borough Education Partnership

with terms of reference as set out below. This proposal was formally considered and unanimously supported by Schools Forum on 8 December 2021.

#### **04. The Case for System Leadership Change**

The borough's political and education leaders are ambitious for children and young people. Whilst there is much to be proud of with regard to Wokingham's education provision and the outcomes being achieved for children and young people, the education system is facing increasingly complex challenges that require whole system engagement and strategic thinking to manage and overcome.

The education landscape has changed in recent years and will continue to change. Government policy is for all schools to be Academies within larger Multi-Academy Trusts. Academies and Multi-Academy Trusts share the accountability for educational system leadership with the local authority. There is no vehicle in Wokingham to enable this joint accountability and respective roles and responsibilities are not yet clearly defined.

Whilst individual schools and settings are strong in Wokingham, the education system is fractured and needs to work as a cohesive whole. Strategic decisions need to be collectively shared, explored and owned, as decisions made to improve one part of the system have impact on other parts of the system. The Pandemic has made it even more essential that schools and the local authority work together as one education system.

Having a shared and agreed strategic vision for education is essential to bring everyone together with common purpose. We need to know what we are collectively working towards to get strategic decisions right. As yet no truly shared educational vision for the borough has been defined, collectively agreed and communicated.

The fact that the local authority has embarked upon a major improvement programme is hugely welcomed, but school leaders report mixed levels of understanding about, and engagement with, the change process.

There are growing pressures on resources at all levels of the education system. The level of pressure on an increasingly limited resource is unsustainable. Long-standing reliance on out-of-borough specialist provision and its cost is crippling High Needs budgets. Effective in-borough solutions are required to release the funding required to operate a fully graduated response to meet additional and special needs. These can only be achieved through whole system engagement and co-construction.

The demand for early and specialist intervention to meet additional needs, especially with regard to social, emotional and mental health, is increasing in scale and complexity. This pressure is having a negative impact on the whole education system; on operational capacity, system coherence and inclusion. School leaders require a coherent whole system map of provision to support

them in meeting children's additional needs. The range of existing provision and processes to access support for inclusion are not well understood and some support offers are perceived by school leaders to no longer match need.

The attainment gap between vulnerable and non-vulnerable pupils is increasing. There is huge commitment to closing the gap but a borough-wide legacy of silo working. Closing the gap requires a coherent borough-wide approach as so many factors impact on outcomes for vulnerable children.

Wokingham schools are popular schools, but this brings pressure on school places. A whole system approach is required to school place planning as one decision in one part of the system has huge impact on other parts of the system.

## **05. Priorities Identified for Collective Action**

1. Ensure a partnership mechanism to deliver strategic whole system leadership of education in Wokingham, effective engagement and transparency of communication with all education leaders.
2. Clearly define the local authority's role and statutory duties to underpin the above in the context of legislation and the growth of academies and multi-academy trusts.
3. Ensure collective understanding of high-level data and analysis with regard to key issues: e.g.: school places, exclusions, specialist provisions; to support prioritisation and informed decision-making.
4. Ensure collective understanding, engagement and change management with regard to critical strategic priorities, for example:
  - (a) Securing sufficient school places to meet need and address SEND pressures with an immediate focus on Secondary Strategy
  - (b) Admissions and Fair Access policy: systems, processes and protocols
  - (c) Support to meet pupils' additional and special educational needs, with particular focus on meeting social, emotional and mental health needs and minimising exclusions
  - (d) Closing the Achievement Gap, including arrangements to strengthen sector-led school improvement
  - (e) Early intervention and prevention in the early years

## **06. Proposal**

The proposal is to establish a new body called the Wokingham Borough Education Partnership.

The role of this new body will be to strengthen educational vision, strategy and collaboration to improve inclusion and educational outcomes for children and young people.

The Education Partnership's core values will include: ambition for children & young people; fairness; professionalism; transparency; collective accountability & collaboration.

The Education Partnership will build on and draw from existing groups such as Wokingham Schools Forum, Wokingham Primary Heads Association and Wokingham Secondary Heads Federation. Proposed core membership is set out in terms of reference.

To fulfil its role, the Education Partnership will have:

- An independent Chair who is an experienced educationalist with whole system knowledge and understanding.
- A clear definition of role and functions, accountability and authority to influence strategic priorities and to make decisions.
- Operational arrangements that enable system-wide transparency: all education leaders have access to the information received and what is being discussed at meetings and the outcomes of those discussions.
- A clearly defined programme of work matched to collectively agreed priorities.
- Routine access to high level data to inform strategic discussions.
- Clear arrangements for local authority officer attendance to support/observe strategic discussions as appropriate.
- Operational arrangements and protocols that enable system-wide communication with all education leaders.
- Arrangements to evaluate the impact of the partnership.
- Administrative and/or programme management support arrangements to ensure high quality meetings and communications, informed by high quality data and information.

In carrying out its role the Education Partnership will have the following functions:

- Consider and advise regarding the development and implementation of strategic proposals, identifying systemic and change management concerns that need addressing and/or improvements that should be made (not individual cases).
- Identify and consider any further information and/or data required to inform the above.
- Commission working groups to co-construct aspects of strategic proposals where required.
- Share the work of the Education Partnership and its outcomes openly and transparently with all Wokingham school leaders.

- Receive updates on any refinements to strategy / implementation for consideration and challenge.
- Evaluate the impact of the Education Partnership.

Core members of the Education Partnership will:

- be persons with appropriate levels of authority to act on behalf of the Partner group that they represent.
- seek to achieve what is best for the Wokingham education system and not for any individual Partner group.
- appoint a proxy member to attend meetings of the Education Partnership in the absence of the appointed member.
- not have any delegated statutory powers or functions of the Partners. Nothing in these arrangements shall be construed as a delegation of statutory powers by any of the Partners to the Education Partnership and nor shall any Partners be deemed to have delegated any other powers to the Education Partnership.

The Education Partnership will work with an identified Operational Group which will include officers of the local authority and other representatives seconded to the group as required by specific pieces of work.

The role of the Operational Group will be to:

- Present strategic proposals, procedures or systems, ensuring a concise and transparent rationale including relevant high-level data and information.
- Identify how information required by the Education Partnership will be gathered, and commission this with clear timescales for delivery.
- Respond to feedback on proposals from the Education Partnership, or from working groups commissioned for the purpose; refine and improve procedures and systems and present these improved options to the Education Partnership.
- Note concerns from the Education Partnership with regard to any systemic concerns and propose how to resolve these.
- Implement agreed strategy, procedures or systems following the Education Partnership's consideration, drawing up a precise implementation plans showing clear accountabilities and timescales.  
Provide updates to the Education Partnership and to wider Education Partners as agreed.

## **07. Expected Outcomes**

1. The education system is co-developed by all Wokingham school leaders for all Wokingham children. All partners share a clear educational vision that underpins all strategic decisions.
2. The education system is increasingly responsive to the needs of Wokingham's children, young people and families, and to the needs of schools as front-line

services for them. Key indicators include reduction in the achievement gap between vulnerable and non-vulnerable pupils.

3. The education system is capable of adapting to changing needs, demands and financial pressures and has built-in review processes.
4. Capacity to continuously improve outcomes for children is built across the whole education system.

## **08. Proposed Next Steps**

- Three initial Education Partnership meetings take place by **31 March 2022**.
- Emergent partnership model & work programme reviewed in **April 2022** to finalise Terms of Reference and work plan for 2022-23.
- Independent Chair appointed by 1 April 2022.

## **Draft Terms of Reference**

Wokingham Borough Council, Wokingham Primary Heads Association, Wokingham Secondary Heads Association and Wokingham Schools Forum have established a strategic partnership body to be known as the Wokingham Education Partnership.

These are its terms of reference.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of the Wokingham Education Partnership is to strengthen educational vision, strategy and collaboration to improve inclusion and educational outcomes for children and young people.

### **Role**

The Education Partnership's key role is to act as a strategic advisory board on behalf of all Wokingham school leaders; to advise on and influence the development and implementation of strategy to improve outcomes for children and young people in Wokingham.

### **Values**

The Partnership is underpinned by the core values of: ambition for children & young people; fairness; professionalism; transparency; collective accountability & collaboration.

### **Membership**

The Education Partnership will build on, and draw from existing groups such as Wokingham Schools Forum, Wokingham Primary Heads Association and Wokingham Secondary Heads Federation as follows:

Wokingham Primary Heads Partnership	4 representatives
Wokingham Secondary Heads Federation	3 representatives
Wokingham Special Schools	1
Foundry	1
Schools Forum	3 representatives - to include early years
Multi-Academy Trust Executive Heads	Elected representation required; mechanism to be discussed / identified at first meeting
Wokingham Borough Council	Director of Children's Services Assistant Director, Learning, Achievement & Partnerships
Independent Chair	Process for appointment to be determined by the Partnership

The Education Partnership has an independent Chair who is an experienced educationalist with whole system knowledge and understanding. This person is appointed by the Education Partnership for a 2-year term.

The Education Partnership has administrative & programme management support to ensure high quality meetings and communications, informed by high quality data and information. This support is provided & funded by Wokingham Borough Council.

Core members of the Education Partnership:

- Are persons with appropriate levels of authority to act on behalf of the partner groups that they represent.
- Seek to achieve what is best for the Wokingham education system and not for any individual partner group.
- Appoint a proxy member to attend meetings of the Education Partnership in the absence of the appointed member.
- Do not have any delegated statutory powers or functions of the partners. Nothing in these arrangements shall be construed as a delegation of statutory powers by any of the partners to the Education Partnership and nor shall any partners be deemed to have delegated any other powers to the Education Partnership.

Decisions require a meeting to be quorate: e.g.: attendance includes a minimum of two representatives for each of Schools Forum, Primary Heads Association and Secondary Heads Federation.

The Education Partnership works with an identified Operational Group which includes officers of the local authority and other representatives as required by specific pieces of work. Those identified attend meetings as required by the priorities of the work programme.

## **Functions**

The Education Partnership has the following functions:

- Consider and advise regarding the development and implementation of strategic proposals, identifying systemic concerns that need addressing and / or improvements that should be made (not individual cases).
- Identify and consider any further information and/or data required to inform the above.
- Commission working groups to co-construct aspects of strategic proposals where required.
- Share the work of the Education Partnership and its outcomes openly and transparently with all Wokingham school leaders.
- Receive updates on any refinements to strategy / implementation for consideration and challenge.
- Review, on a regular basis, its own performance and terms of reference to ensure it is operating at maximum effectiveness.

## **Authority**

The Education Partnership is authorised to consider any strategic issue within its terms of reference and to seek any information it requires from the local authority and school leaders to fulfil its role. Local authority officers are directed to cooperate with any request made by the Education Partnership.

The Education Partnership is authorised to take decisions to:

- Set and steer the strategic direction for partnership working between the LA and Wokingham Schools to improve educational outcomes for all children and young people in the borough.
- Commission working groups to address key issues and improve educational outcomes.
- Govern, steer and quality-assure the above work (including sign-off on completion) to ensure any activity commissioned by the partnership delivers the intended outcomes.

## **Meetings**

The Education Partnership determines a clearly defined programme of work matched to collectively agreed priorities.

It shall meet on such dates as determined by the Education Partnership and at such other time as the clerk shall specify at the request of any member of the Education Partnership.

Unless otherwise agreed, notice of each meeting confirming the venue, date and time together with an agenda shall be sent to each member of the Education Partnership and any other person invited or required to attend no fewer than seven working days prior to the date of the meeting.

The clerk minutes the proceedings and resolutions of the Education Partnership. Minutes of each meeting are sent to all members of the Education Partnership within seven working days of the meeting.

### **Communications**

The Education Partnership is committed to ensuring system-wide transparency with all school leaders. The Partnership determines its arrangements to ensure that all school leaders have access to the information being received by the Partnership, what is being discussed at meetings and the outcomes of those discussions.

<b>Contact</b> : Heather Tomlinson, Consultant, Learning, Achievement and Partnerships
--

<b>Service</b> : Learning Achievement and Partnerships
--

<b>Email</b> : Heather.Tomlinson@wokingham.gov.uk
---

## Children's Services Covid Task Force

**FOR CONSIDERATION BY** Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 10 January 2022

**WARD** None Specific;

**LEAD OFFICER** Director, Children's Services - Helen Watson

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

The Children's Services Task Force assists in providing support and guidance to the community supporting pupils in relation to Covid-19 Pandemic response.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

For Information.

### **SUMMARY OF REPORT**

#### **Outline of Childrens' Services Covid- 19 Task Force**

The taskforce has been established as a response to the second wave of Covid-19 (Coronavirus); its purpose is to provide support to education and children's social care settings across Wokingham, and those outside of the Borough either commissioned by WBC for Wokingham children or other formal settings that are used by Wokingham children for educational or social care purposes.

The taskforce provides support by:

- Being the frontline for advice and queries sent by schools, settings and providers and to respond to these promptly.
- Managing and coordinating a response and communications from schools and settings where there are positive cases of coronavirus
- Daily communication to schools and settings regarding positive cases and updates in local and national guidance
- Government guidance will be understood, summarised and examined for changes from the relevant government agencies
- Proactively contacting providers, schools and settings
- Gathering, receiving and analysing data and information regarding positive cases, outbreaks and to understand attendance and teaching capacity to identify early schools at risk of becoming vulnerable due to their staff to pupil ratio
- Providing support to schools and settings to develop the bubbles approach
- Developing a relationship/arrangement with independent and non-maintained schools, in the borough and just outside of the borough, similar to that kept with maintained, academy and free schools currently.
- Understanding learnings taken from schools and settings
- Utilising existing experience and networks within the Local Authority to carry out the operational activity within the taskforce

The Membership of the Children's Taskforce is comprised of Wokingham Borough Council staff:

- Assistant Director of Children's Services for Learning, Achievement and Partnerships  
**Taskforce Sponsor**

- Head of School Improvement  
**Taskforce Lead**

- School Improvement Team  
**Taskforce support and Schools response**

- Early Years Consultant and Team  
**Taskforce support and Early Years and Childcare response**

- Children's Services Strategic Project Officer  
**Taskforce support and Project Officer**

- Commissioning Team  
**Taskforce support and Provider response**

- Call Handling

The group also calls on support from Schools HR and WBC Corporate Health and Safety Team. It is advised on all public health matters by WBC Public Health Consultant.

### **Gathering Data**

One activity that the task force undertakes is to track positive cases in schools and settings. Positive case notifications are received from an education setting, usually via the dedicated taskforce mailbox. These notifications are then processed for onward action as relevant. Summary information is shared with school settings in a daily update sent direct to headteachers. School leaders have welcomed and appreciated the transparency of data sharing in this manner across the system. The data enables the Task Force to understand where additional support and guidance is required and where the energies of the Task Force support need to be directed.

Data is then provided as appropriate to GOLD on a weekly basis.

### **Action to support schools**

Much of the work is guided by frequently changing government guidance for schools and settings: [Actions for early years and childcare providers during the COVID-19 pandemic \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/781247/actions-for-early-years-and-childcare-providers-during-the-covid-19-pandemic.pdf)

The work of the task force can be seen as distinct areas:

1. Signposting and dissemination of information
2. Providing support and guidance on interpretation of guidance into action at a wider local level or in a specific setting
3. Working with partners in other agencies including co-ordination of additional resources
4. Managing support for schools with outbreaks

## **1. Signposting and dissemination of information**

Everyday since the start of the pandemic the task forces has sent a daily update email direct to all headteachers in the borough. This has served to keep everyone apprised of cases locally and to collate all government and local guidance into one central communication. Summaries of new guidance have been provided as handy guides to enable school leaders keep abreast of constantly changing requirements.

Early Years team colleagues have also provided regular manager newsletters to suit the needs of the Early Years Sector.

The task force has worked closely with colleagues in the WBC Communications and Engagement Team to enable messaging to the wider community to be undertaken. This has included production of fliers for parents to help them understand how to socialise safely over the half term break, what to do if you are worried that a family member may have Covid- 19, explaining the different testing processes, and making clear local approaches to infection control in schools and settings. These messages have been linked with the wider corporate community messaging on social media and other channels to ensure a coherent and consistent message in the community.

Schools and settings have also been linked into communication and information on local PCR and LFT testing sites so that this information is readily available to families including promotion of [Covid-19 testing \(Lateral Flow Testing\) - Wokingham Borough Council](#)

The task force has also acted as a two-way conduit for information, taking information and feedback from schools and settings on the impact of the pandemic on their operations and feeding this into wider local and national agencies. This has included working closely with the WBC Public Health Consultant and Director of Public Health to identify where infection control measures have needed adjustment. Regular meetings with regional DfE colleagues have also been influenced by feedback from schools and settings to indicate where further guidance and support would be welcomed. A recent example would be the chasing of non-delivery of DfE C02 monitors to schools.

Close liaison with the WBC Health and Safety team has also enabled effective messaging on risk assessment processes as well as information sharing such as on effective use of C02 monitors.

The Task Force also have established regular information sharing with independent providers located within the borough and whilst these settings are not obliged to share information with the us- they have been increasingly doing so and have also benefitted from support and guidance. Not only has this brought about increased public health protection within the locality it has also strengthened relationships between WBC and the independent sector.

Our dedicated call handler has been making calls to providers who educate or look after our children for whom we are the corporate parents. These calls have checked in on provision and been a means of signposting any further guidance. In addition, during the autumn term all childminders and wrap around care providers have been contacted with a courtesy check in regarding business continuity, infection control measures and to signpost key information produced by the Task Force.

## **2. Providing support and guidance on interpretation of guidance into action at a wider local level or in a specific setting**

A regular weekly online drop in was set up with headteachers at the start of the pandemic in March 2020 and this has continued every week since, attendance levels remain high (c50+ attendees per week in December 2021). This is a highly effective support mechanism for school leaders, giving opportunity for discussion and sense making in relation to guidance as well as group problem solving and practice sharing. Heads report that it has been an extremely valuable support as one headteacher recently took the time to email in

*'Please know that the Tuesday briefings are a great support for us all'.*

The Children's Services Covid-19 inbox has also been used as a point of contact for schools and settings enabling them to seek specific help on interpretation of guidance or next steps in action. Queries are responded to by officers supporting the task force work – attached School Improvement Officers or Early Years colleagues follow up with their schools and settings building on established relationships and using their local knowledge of the context to help guide leaders. This local knowledge has been crucial in planning effective contextualised responses.

As a result of the intelligence held by the Task Force, it has been possible to liaise with other actor agencies in the field to influence local action. In October the Director of Public Health advised additional measures for schools and settings in the borough to adopt in order to protect education offers and minimise infection transmission. The strengthened advice in relation to household contacts and engaging in remote learning whilst awaiting a PCR outcome certainly prevented significant onward transmission and consequential loss of days of education.

An early small-scale review of the data in two settings demonstrated that outbreak was reduced from 4 weeks to 1 week and the number of positive cases halved.

Following an emergency meeting of the Berkshire West Health Protection Board measures were then regularised across the Berkshire West area and put in place to run to the end of the autumn term.

The Task Force has also fielded public enquiries regarding measures adopted in schools and settings. These have ranged from those seeking to understand why further action cannot be taken to mitigate onward transmission to those who disagree with the measures being taken as too restrictive.

In early October 2021 a Covid-19 vaccination programme for 12–15-year-olds was announced. This was to be delivered on school sites by the Community Immunisation Nursing teams. The Task Force provided support to schools in managing operational aspects of this delivery with Covid Marshalls deployed to support marshalling and also to provide security against anti-vaccination demonstrations. Some locations were targeted with anti-vaccination propaganda and a demonstration was held in the borough. Materials from anti-vaccination campaigns sent direct to schools were collated and forwarded to the DfE for their legal review. Marshalls were able to provide security for

schools on vaccination days enabling the business of vaccination and most importantly – education to continue uninterrupted.

### **3.Additional action for schools with outbreaks**

During the autumn term 2021 much of the work of the Task Force has centred on the support for schools and settings when they trigger the Contingency Framework Threshold as set out in DfE guidance [Contingency framework: education and childcare settings - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/contingency-framework-education-and-childcare-settings). This relates to the point at which schools and settings should consider additional measures and these thresholds are whichever is reached first:

- 5 children, pupils, students or staff, who are likely to have mixed closely, test positive for COVID-19 within a 10-day period
- 10% of children, pupils, students or staff who are likely to have mixed closely test positive for COVID-19 within a 10-day period

For special schools, residential settings, and settings that operate with 20 or fewer children, pupils, students and staff at any one time:

- 2 children, pupils, students and staff, who are likely to have mixed closely, test positive for COVID-19 within a 10-day period

Identifying a group that is likely to have mixed closely will be different for each setting.

The data held by the Task Force is used to help schools and settings identify if they have reached threshold.

During the second half of the 2021 autumn term, significant increase was seen in the numbers of schools and settings that met the above Contingency Framework Thresholds. In early December the Task Force was managing a group of schools representing c50% of the entire number in the borough.

For each setting that reaches the above thresholds the Task Force convenes a local Management meeting, this is usually a multi-disciplinary meeting (IMT) with the Task Force lead, project officer, school leaders and Public Health and for large scenarios potentially also UKHSA colleagues. The IMT reviews the situation in the context and looks at risk factors and the potential epidemiological curve. No two scenarios have been the same. This is because sites and groupings vary. We have also reviewed risk assessments for residential visits planned to go ahead with a group identified as having an outbreak for example and looked at how schools might continue to be able to run key events in the weeks leading up to Christmas. Following each IMT the school or setting is allocated an officer who acts as a conduit and support between Task Force, health and school leaders. The officer acting as the school or settings attached 'Covid Buddy' makes contact with the setting daily reviewing impact of action and providing support and guidance. This contact continues until outbreak measures are ceased in that organisation. Schools and settings have found this level of support invaluable.

*'Just a quick email to say a huge thank you to you for supporting us through our COVID outbreak. It was so helpful to have your advice and knowledge to get to grips with the guidance and how to manage the situation. Thank goodness we are out the other side now and fingers*

*crossed we may not experience it again in January. Thanks also for our COVID Buddy , who supported me to keep a tight track on each year group.'*

#### **4. Working with partners in other agencies including co-ordination of additional resources**

Sometimes supporting an organisation experiencing a complex or wide-ranging outbreak requires liaison with external agencies for support. We have successfully worked with partner agencies to source Mobile PCR Testing Units (MTU) to be deployed onsite at affected schools enabling the community to access immediate testing to screen out those affected and enable school to get back to normal as fast as possible. This work has also included the use of Covid Marshalls and the WBC testing support team.

*'I cannot express our gratitude enough for those who have helped put the MTU in place yesterday.*

*You all do an amazing job and behind the scenes possibly don't get the recognition you all deserve but THANK YOU. It is very much appreciated. Your professionalism, service, compassion and understanding are a credit to the service and we are very lucky to have people like you working to help us all through these challenging times.'*

To support continued public health protection and in response to clusters of outbreaks across a wider community area, the Task Force has liaised with the WBC testing team to arrange dedicated pop-up Lateral Flow Test sites. This enables communities to access this additional support for screening before socialising or attending community events. St. Sebastian's Primary School hosted an onsite pop-up during December and colleagues provided specifically translated materials to support that community in accessing testing. Additionally dedicated pop-up clinics at the start/end of the school day were facilitated at Finchampstead Baptist Centre and Woodley Library where adjacent schools were able to signpost parents.

During the summer of 2021 the Task Force supported the local Surge Testing requirements. Drafting in additional resource, the group identified and then made telephone contact with parents of key vulnerable children offering them support and guidance. Personal delivery and collection of the surge testing kits by Childrens Services officers was arranged to these households in order to relieve pressure on these families. This was a well-received service by residents who appreciated the care and attention afforded them by the council.

#### **Impact of the work of the Task Force and next steps**

It is clear that the work of the Task Force is well received by the schools and settings across the borough.

From feedback received from the system impact can be described as:

- Sustained provision across the schools and settings in the borough
- Supported and sustained school leadership
- Swift action undertaken to disrupt onward viral transmission
- Actions designed to minimise educational disruption thus enabling pupils continued learning
- Sense making for school/setting leaders of changing government guidance and how that can be transacted at local level
- Strong sense of a Wokingham community of schools and settings working in partnership

- Strong appreciation of the supportive approach taken by the council
- Strong links with Public Health colleagues enabling a consistent approach at a local level
- An open dialogue enabled for leaders bringing about increasing consistency of practice
- Clear borough wide communications for schools and settings meaning parents have clarity

**Next steps:**

Before the arrival of Omicron, the Task Force were already examining how its work could be scaled into Business-as-Usual operations going forward. The arrival of the Omicron variant challenges that planning. In the last week of the autumn term the Task Force support to schools looked at business continuity planning for the sector. This will be crucial for the return to school in January 2022. Already by late December 2021 business continuity was a present issue with several schools experiencing provision disruption due to staff illness leading to the transfer of some provision to remote learning.

## Background

### Analysis of Issues

#### FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

***The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.***

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

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

N/A

#### Cross-Council Implications

N/A

#### Public Sector Equality Duty

Please confirm that due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty has been taken and if an equalities assessment has been completed or explain why an equalities assessment is not required.

#### Climate Emergency – ***This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030***

Please state clearly what the impact of the decision being made would be on the Council's carbon neutral objective.

#### List of Background Papers

N/A

**Contact** Gillian Cole

**Service** Learning Achievement and Partnerships

**Telephone No** Tel: 07909998224

**Email** gillian.cole@wokingham.gov.uk

## CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2022 WORK PROGRAMME

DATE OF MEETING	ITEM	PURPOSE OF REPORT	REASON FOR CONSIDERATION	RESPONSIBLE OFFICER / CONTACT OFFICER
21 March 2022	Adoption services	To review the adoption services.	Challenge item	Children's Services/ Adam Davis
	Specialist Accommodation	To review progress with development of Specialist Accommodation.	Challenge item	Children's Services/ Hayley Rees
	Strategy to Tackle Serious Youth Violence, Child Sexual Exploitation and Extra Familial Harm	To review and comment on the strategy.	Challenge item	Children's Services/ Matthew Booth
	Resource Base Units at Schools – Sufficiency Review	To consider the sufficiency of school places.	Challenge item	Children's Services/ Sal Thirlway
	CSO&S Forward Plan	To consider the forward plan of the Committee.	Standing item	Democratic Services/ Luciane Bowker
DATE OF MEETING	ITEM	PURPOSE OF REPORT	REASON FOR CONSIDERATION	RESPONSIBLE OFFICER / CONTACT OFFICER

<b>May 2022</b>	<b>Education Update</b>	To update the Committee on developments relating to Education and Learning Achievement and Partnerships, including information about narrowing the gap.	Challenge item	Children's Services/ Sal Thirlway
	<b>Early Years' Service Review</b>	To review the provision of Early Years, including pre-school planning of provision.	Challenge item	Children's Services/ Sal Thirlway
	<b>Fostering Transformation</b>	To review progress with Fostering Transformation.	Challenge item	Children's Services/ Adam Davis
	<b>CSO&amp;S Forward Plan</b>	To consider the forward plan of the Committee.	Standing item	Democratic Services/ Luciane Bowker
<b>DATE OF MEETING</b>	<b>ITEM</b>	<b>PURPOSE OF REPORT</b>	<b>REASON FOR CONSIDERATION</b>	<b>RESPONSIBLE OFFICER / CONTACT OFFICER</b>
<b>July 2022</b>	<b>SEND Innovation and Improvement Programme Update</b>	To update on progress with delivery of the SEND Innovation and Improvement Programme.	Challenge item	Children's Services / Sal Thirlway
	<b>Update on Children's Strategy Delivery</b>	To update on progress with delivery of the Children's Services Strategy.	Challenge item	Children's Services / DCS
	<b>Schools Causing Concern – Part 2</b>	To consider the working being undertaken to support schools causing concern in a part 2 session.	Challenge Item	Children's Services / Sal Thirlway
	<b>CSO&amp;S Forward Plan</b>	To consider the forward plan of the Committee.	Standing item	Democratic Services/ Luciane Bowker

<b>DATE OF MEETING</b>	<b>ITEM</b>	<b>PURPOSE OF REPORT</b>	<b>REASON FOR CONSIDERATION</b>	<b>RESPONSIBLE OFFICER / CONTACT OFFICER</b>
<b>September 2022</b>	<b>Fostering Transformation update</b>	Update on progress with Fostering transformation.	Challenge item	Children's Services/ Adam Davis
	<b>Schools Causing Concern</b>	To consider the working being undertaken to support schools causing concern in a part 2 session.	Challenge item	Children's Services / Sal Thirlway
	<b>CSO&amp;S Forward Plan</b>	To consider the forward plan of the Committee.	Standing item	Democratic Services/ Luciane Bowker
<b>DATE OF MEETING</b>	<b>ITEM</b>	<b>PURPOSE OF REPORT</b>	<b>REASON FOR CONSIDERATION</b>	<b>RESPONSIBLE OFFICER / CONTACT OFFICER</b>
<b>November 2022</b>	<b>Travel Assistance Policy Implementation</b>	Update on outcomes from implementation of the Travel Assistance Policies (formerly Home to School Transport policies).	Challenge item	Children's Services / Sal Thirlway
	<b>Schools Causing Concern</b>	To consider the working being undertaken to support schools causing concern in a part 2 session.	Challenge item	Children's Services / Sal Thirlway
	<b>CSO&amp;S Forward Plan</b>	To consider the forward plan of the Committee.	Standing item	Democratic Services/ Luciane Bowker

Unscheduled item: Key Performance Indicators (KPI)

This page is intentionally left blank