

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON 1 NOVEMBER 2023 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.42 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Andrew Mickleburgh (Chair), Jane Ainslie, Ian Pittock, Anne Chadwick, Graham Howe, Phil Cunnington and Andrew Gray

Other Councillors Present

Councillors: Prue Bray, Pauline Helliard-Symons, Tony Skuse and Shahid Younis

Officers Present

Luciane Bowker, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist
Michael Bateman, Complaints Manager
Gillian Cole, Service Manager, Schools
Adam Davis, Assistant Director for Children's Social Care and Early Help
Wesley Hedger, Assistant Director Adult Social Care Strategy
Lajla Johanson, Lead for All Age Mental Health, LD, Autism and SEND
Daneet Penny, Customer Relations Officer
Helen Watson, Interim Director for Children's Services
Jonathan Wilding, Safety Valve / SEND Consultant
Ming Zhang, Assistant Director for Education and SEND

Diocesan Representative

Father Richard Lamey, Church of England Representative

Community Representative

Sarah Clarke, SEND Voices Wokingham

Guests

Terri Walsh, SEND Voices Wokingham

42. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

43. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 6 November 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

44. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

45. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

In accordance with the agreed procedure the Chairman invited members of the public to submit questions to the appropriate Members.

It was explained that the Executive Member for Children's Services, Councillor Bray, had been invited by the Chairman to answer some of the questions.

45.1 Alexandra Smith asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

What is happening for the resource bases, SEND unit plans and 2 new free schools (approved by the DFE) that were discussed at the SVW AGM in March?

Answer

Resource Bases/SEND Units

In Autumn 2022 Strategy and Commissioning Service completed a review of the SEND Provision attached to mainstream schools.

The review proposed that WBC should:

1. Re-purpose some existing Wokingham resourced provision to better meet demand and needs identified in the needs analysis.
2. Create new type of provision – SEND Units, which seek to narrow the gap in levels of support offered by resource bases and special school provision.
3. Implementation of robust accountability, monitoring and review mechanisms.

Current Status

- The Local Authority received early expressions of interest from several schools. However, due to complex reasons beyond the control of the Local Authority, the current mainstream school provider decided not to apply to continue delivering the new resource base provision.
- Intensive one-to-one discussions with schools have taken place during the summer and autumn terms. As a result, we are now expecting or have received formal applications from four primary schools to deliver Radstock Primary School, Hillside Primary School, Loddon Primary School, and Walter Infant School.
- The Panel to consider applications is scheduled for 6th November 2023.
- We can confidently project that we will be able to appoint a provider to deliver the SEND unit and the resource base at primary level by September 2024 as planned.

Challenges

- Despite significant work and attempted engagement with various secondary schools across Wokingham, we have not received a formal application to deliver the secondary SEND Unit. This poses an official risk that this element of the project will not be deliverable by September 2024.

Next Steps

- The LA will be holding a panel on 6th November to consider the applications to run the primary provision. SEND Voices Wokingham will be represented on the panel.
- Once a school host is appointed for each new provision the Commissioning and SEND Team will work with the school to mobilise plans, including any capital requirements to deliver a phased opening from September 2024.
- The LA is currently considering alternative options to deliver the secondary SEND provision and continues to work with three schools on how to make the provision viable and attractive propositions for secondary schools. We still hope to deliver this by September 2024.

SEND Free Schools

In June the executive approved the location of the two new free schools at Rooks Nest Farm just outside Finchampstead. In August, following negotiations with the DfE the council were delighted to receive approval for both schools to be increased in capacity

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from 100 to 120 each, not only will this bring 40 more much needed places to the borough, but significantly more investment and associated jobs.

As we move forward we will be submitting a proposal to the DfE that the council is in charge of the project to build the schools. We are aware they have capacity issues associated with the RAAC issues faced by over 200 schools across the country and feel this route offers the best opportunity to deliver the Schools for a September 2026 opening.

Over the next few months we'll be undertaking various site surveys and consultations as we move forward with a planning application. In advance of this we have already met with a number of contractors who expressed an interest on working with us in the development of the schools. Initial feedback is positive that the schools can be delivered within the anticipated timescales, subject to the DfE decision on which Trust or Trusts will run the schools.

On that note the other aspect of the schools is who is awarded the opportunity to run them. Following a period of engagement with various Trusts in the region, bids to run the schools were submitted in August and the DfE has confirmed that strong interest resulted in the submission of a number of formal bids for both schools. In November and December the DfE will review those bids and invite the strongest applications to be interviewed. Our Head of SEND, Jamie Conran will sit on the panel and be critical to the decision on who ultimately runs both schools. Subject to ministerial sign off, we hope to formally announce the outcome of this in January 2024.

45.2 Helen Corbett asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

What are the SEND team doing to resolve the significant issue with COMMUNICATION?

I spoke with Prue and Jamie at the Local Offer Live event about this and other issues due to significant concerns regarding the rise in very unhappy Wokingham parents within the 'SEND Carers United' community. These families have still seen no improvement in communication and this is not only totally unacceptable, but it contradicts the message being sent to families during Wokingham Borough Council's Progress Update at SVW AGM in March.

Families have lost trust as so many promises never materialise and the same issues keep happening i.e despite it being mentioned several times in the past, parents are still receiving automatic response emails that informs them that their case officer has left, leaving them with no idea who to contact or if there has been any handover. We were also told at SVW AGM in March that meetings with parents to ask questions would be a 'regular feature across the calendar' yet there hasn't been one in the 8 months following that statement being made.

Answer

Helen and I had quite a long conversation at the Local Offer Day, as a result of which I made a lot of notes. Communication featured prominently in them, and I know it is a priority area of development for the SEND Team.

Officers recognise how important it is to maintain dialogue with families, even on occasions where conversations may be challenging or providing a decision that parents/carers may not agree with.

The SEND team obviously have a lot of contact with a lot of parents. They do in fact regularly get compliments from families who have appreciated the care and support they have received from SEND Case Officers, who made a tricky process easier to navigate.

But we do recognise that some parents/carers have had a different experience. SEND Management has noted the contents of the parent/carer forum survey (2023) which further illustrates the disparity between excellent practice and areas for the service to develop further. We want to get to a place where good communication is a consistent feature of everyone's experience.

We have a range of activities aimed at supporting and maintaining good quality and consistent communication for all families in Wokingham, such as:

- The SEND Management Team coordinates training for Officers every term (or quarter).
- Communication is also a standing agenda item for the SEND Management Team.
- A series of 'You said, we did' has been planned with the parent/carer forum, the first of which will be published on their website shortly.
- A Local Offer Coordinator has also recently joined the service and is using the feedback received from the Local Offer Live Day to develop the Council's own website and version of 'You said, we did'.

We see this as a journey, which will never be finished, as there is always something more we could do. But we are making progress.

45.3 Maggie Carroll asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Since WBC started on Safety Valve; please can you provide the numbers by month of EHCP request to assess, number of 'nos' to assess number of 'nos' to issue, also the number of way forward meetings and mediation meetings that then resulted in assessment happening and plans being issued. How many appeals were registered which resulted in a tribunal hearing and the number of EHCP assessment have taken place and EHCP's issued as a result of appeal and tribunals.

Answer

Data Period: April-Sept 2023

EHCP requests:

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
2023	26	35	35	37	6	31

Number of 'nos' to assess each month:

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
2023	20	4	12	10	10	5

Number of 'nos' to issue each month:

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
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2023	5	5	8	8	5	3
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Issuing a plan following way forward meetings:

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
2023	5	2	4	5	3	5

Issuing a plan following mediation meetings:

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
2023	1	2	0	2	1	0

Issuing a plan following tribunal:

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
2023	0	0	0	0	1	0

That is the information that I have got.

Sarah Clarke, SEND Voices Wokingham asked that the difference between 'mediation meetings' and 'way forward meetings' be explained.

Jonathan Wilding, Safety Valve and SEND Consultant explained that a 'way forward meeting' was a Wokingham specific type of informal meeting, the 'mediation meeting' was a statutory meeting and more formal.

The Chairman advised that if further information was required, this could be sought with Jonathan Wilding outside of the meeting.

45.4 Anwen Page asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

What are the aims and objectives of each of the safety valve workstreams and projects (as listed in the summary update on 6th September 2023)? I am particularly concerned that stakeholder organisations that work with parents such as SEND Voices are not aware of the detail regarding the workstreams and projects, and feel that a greater degree of openness and transparency is needed.

Answer

There are four workstreams of Safety Valve with multiple ambitious aims and objectives. Obviously the workstreams are too wide ranging to give you a comprehensive reply tonight but I would like to give you a summary of what each workstream aims to deliver and share with you some green shoots at this early stage of our Safety Valve programme:

1. **Early Intervention** – through this workstream, we want to address unsustainable increases in requests for statutory assessment by providing improved access to early intervention services as follows:
 - Local Offer Website & Support – to increase parental confidence and improve access to information.
 - Early Years Strategy – improving support provided to private voluntary and independent sector early years providers.
 - Implement New SEN Support Service (including recommissioning and extending specialist outreach for schools). For this, I am delighted to report that our new Area SENCO was appointed on 20/10/23 and will take up the role in January 2024. We

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have also jointly commissioned a Speech and Language outreach service in partnership with BOB Integrated Commissioning Board (Health) providing outreach support from Highwood Primary School who have a trained specialist teacher. We have also increased investment in Addington Special School outreach and the Foundry outreach offer for SEMH (Social Emotional and Mental Health).

2. **Sufficiency & New Provision** – through this workstream, we want to improve the range of provision, address gaps in local specialist places and reduce over-reliance on expensive independent sector specialist provision by delivering:
 - New Resource Bases & SEND Units attached to mainstream schools. For this project, I detailed progress in my reply to a previous question.
 - Addington Special School Expansion; I am pleased to share with you that the new satellite site at Farley Hill will open in the next few weeks (after half-term). It has in fact now opened, it was help up by bats, very annoying.
 - Oak Tree Special School, which you may share my delight in that we have successfully delivered this new school in partnership with Reading BC, and I attended the opening last month with the Mayor.
 - Special Free School Bids and Implementation. We made successful bids for two new special schools which will deliver an extra 240 places by September 2026. I detailed this exciting development in my answer to an earlier question on Resources Units and new free schools.
 - Alternative Provision & Education Other Than At School 'EOTAS' Review. The project is progressing well with SEND Voices directly involved in the AP remodelling project.
 - Post 16 / Preparation for Adulthood Strategy – progressing well in improving access to information and guidance as well as in developing proposals for new and additional post-16 provision (details TBC subject to our needs assessment and gap analysis)
3. **Commissioning** – through this workstream, we aim to achieve closer integration with our partners in Health and Social Care:
 - Joint Commissioning of Therapeutic Services & Ordinarily Available Health Provision. I just now highlighted the visible green shoots of this project in the launch this term of a speech and language outreach in place in Wokingham.
 - Improved commissioning and contract management of independent sector provision has been implemented to ensure oversight and quality.
4. **System and Operations** – This workstream has the following objectives:
 - Revise High Needs Banding Framework to ensure consistency, clarity and transparency of funding across all schools (mainstream and special) in Wokingham.
 - Digital Improvement – to better align our data across finance, operations and school place planning to ensure consistency, minimise duplication and improve planning and control.
 - Strengthen Multi-Agency Panel Decision Making – ensuring that our partners across health and social care are integrally involved in all decisions regarding funding and placements.

That is a summary outline, I will stop there.

Supplementary question:

Thank you for the summary, so is there more detail available than that? Because you said this is very high level.

Supplementary answer:

If you wanted to contact me after of the meeting, there is various bits of information, I cannot promise we will send you the whole thing because there is a vast array of spreadsheets and costings and things like that. But there is I am sure more information that we can give you if you would like some. We will see what we can find.

Helen Watson, Interim Director for Children's Services informed that there was an information sharing event for parents happening, which was being facilitated by SEND Voices on the evening of 8 November on Zoom at 8pm. This session would clarify with a lot more detail, this will be an opportunity for parents to have much more detail.

45.5 Samantha Kelleway asked the Chair of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny the following question:

Please can you clarify where you get your figures from in relation to Complaints and Compliments? If the Compliments come from emails and the Complaints from those who follow the formal Complaints Procedure, this doesn't truly reflect the satisfaction of service users. So many parents have to juggle so much that they don't have the capacity to write a formal complaint but may have stated their dissatisfaction via general email communication and phone calls. A true reflection of customer satisfaction would involve using the same platforms to obtain data for Complaints and Compliments. In my opinion there should be a regular customer satisfaction survey sent to families with simple tick boxes to gage their feedback in the quickest way possible, but also offering the opportunity to provide further feedback. Formal complaints letters are not something everyone feels comfortable in putting together.

Answer

Thank you very much for submitting this important question. This has been reviewed and the following is our answer to the points raised.

Where do the figures come from?

The figures provided in the complaints and compliments overview are all those that have (i) been formally recorded on the Council's complaints and compliments management system/solution and (ii) have been handled in accordance with either the statutory children's social care complaints process or the corporate complaints process.

Further details can be found in the report in the next agenda item.

This will include any complaints or compliments reported to us via any of the following channels:

- the online complaints form on our website;
- e-mails outlining feedback sent directly to complaints officers;
- e-mails outlining feedback sent to the services to which they relate;
- letters sent in via post; or
- verbal feedback provided in discussion – either face to face or over the phone/Teams calls.

Is this an accurate reflection of all feedback that the Council receives?

As has been suggested above, the data provided in the overview is those complaints and compliments that have been handled within the highlighted complaints processes.

Whilst it is accepted that this is not a reflection of all feedback received within Children's Services, we find that generally when someone either wishes to raise a concern with us or to give us positive feedback on the services provided, they will tell us about it.

In addition to this, the channels by which they can do so – i.e. the complaints processes – are detailed on our website and are accessible via a number of different means.

Customer satisfaction surveys

We are always keen to make our services as easy to access as possible for our residents – especially with regard to feedback, as this is essential in helping us understand what we are doing well and where we need to improve.

It is accepted that not everyone is comfortable with pulling together formal letters/e-mails of complaint. The suggestion around use of a survey could well improve and expand the means by which residents can share their feedback with us.

The Council has a 'Complaints Working Group', which is used as a platform to discuss practices around responding to and managing complaints. Your items of concern will be brought up as an item for discussion at next meeting scheduled for 7 November.

46. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

47. COMPLAINTS REVIEW

Michael Bateman, Complaints Manager presented the Complaints Review report. He highlighted the following points:

- The report contained information about the statutory Children's Social Care complaints process and the corporate complaints process;
- The volume of complaints in the first two quarters of the year were consistent with what was observed in the previous two financial years;
- Most cases were resolved in the early stages of the process;
- Those cases that could not be resolved at the early stages of the process were escalated to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman for the statutory Children's Social Care complaints or to the Customer Relations Team for corporate complaints;
- The complaints relating to Children's Social Care were evenly distributed across the teams;
- For Children's Social Care, the number of the compliments received outweighed the number of complaints received;
- Most of the corporate complaints received in the first two quarters of the year were in relation to SEND, and one of the themes was communication;
- The leadership team was aware of the issues raised, and a bespoke training session had been held with SEND Teams to address this issue, follow up catch up sessions had also been organised;
- There were many compliments to the services received which were included in the report;

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- This was the first time the report was presented to the CSO&S Committee, and feedback was welcome to improve the report.

The Chairman thanked Michael Bateman and his team for the presentation and report.

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

- Sarah Clarke asked how were complaints and compliments received via direct emails to managers or assistant directors registered and recorded?
- Micheal Bateman explained that anything that could be classified as a complaint should be sent to the complaints team so that it could be logged through the correct complaints process;
- Terri Walsh of SEND Voices stated that families felt that there were a lot complaints being raised via direct emails to officers which were not being logged into the system, therefore they believed that the figures were not correct;
- Michael Bateman confirmed that the report contained information about formal complaints only. He offered to be a point of contact for families who wished to raise concerns that they wanted to be recorded formally. He confirmed the email addresses that could be used: Michael.bateman@wokingham.gov.uk or ChildrensServicesComplaints@wokingham.gov.uk
- Councillor Bray stated that more clarity in the reporting system was welcome, however there was a distinction between people sending multiple emails about the same issue and different issues;
- The Chairman suggested that future iterations of the report could include a couple of examples with anonymised cases so that the Committee could get a feel for what the complaints process looked like;
- Terri Walsh suggested that information about the complaints process be included in the local offer website;
- Ming Zhang stated that a Communications Plan was being developed, in co-production with SEND Voices, and the comments made would be considered in the development of the plan;
- Sara Clarke stated that more clarity around the complaints process was needed, parents were not sure when to escalate to a formal complaint;
- Richard Lamey asked for clarification on the statement made in page 31 of the agenda, in relation to the increase in number of SEND complaints. He asked if the raise in complaints was because of the greater scrutiny of assessments or if it was because things that had been funded in the past were no longer being funded due to budget constraints?
- Michael Bateman agreed to clarify this point with the SEND specialists and report back to the Committee;
- The Chairman asked if there were any groups of people that were underrepresented in the data presented in the report, and if any measures were being taken to address potential inequalities?
- Helen Watson stated that this question required reflection and would be a written answer would be provided to the Committee;
- Sarah Clarke stated that families were exhausted and some felt that there was no point in complaining as they were not being listened to. It was important to simplify the complaints process to facilitate it for parents;
- Councillor Gray asked what actions were being taken to reduce the timeline for resolution of complaints;

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- Ming Zhang stated that it was a whole system effort, and this was a journey of improvement.

RESOLVED That;

- 1) Officers be thanked for their work in the production of this report and that future iterations of the report will include the suggestions made during the discussions;
- 2) The Committee supports the development of a co-produced Communications Plan with SEND Voices;
- 3) The Committee suggests that the development of a survey to gather data on complaints and compliments relating to SEND be considered; and
- 4) The complaints and compliments process be included in the local offer.

48. DRAFT SEND STRATEGY

The Draft SEND Strategy report was presented by Ming Zhang, Jonathan Wilding and SEND Voices.

Jonathan Wilding drew attention to the following points:

- The current SEND Strategy had been drawn up largely in response to an Ofsted SEND inspection, and was due to be updated;
- Many changes were being made, mostly as a result of the Safety Valve programme;
- The document was being developed in collaboration with SEND Voices and Me Too, it aimed to include young people's voices;
- The priorities identified in the strategy were in line with the feedback received by young people and included the following points:
 - Communication, transition and planning for the future were areas for development;
 - 32% of young people said they did not feel that they attended a local school or college that met their needs fully - it was recognised that a more mixed local provision was needed;
 - Young people asked for more transition days and earlier transition days for SEND pupils, as they found it difficult to navigate mainstream schools;
 - Young people asked that more information and a timetable to be provided before the start of term;
 - More flexibility for SEND pupils in mainstream schools, more reasonable adjustments were required;
 - A better range of mental health support for all learners was needed;
 - More support for pupils suffering from anxiety which was preventing them from attending school, this problem had increased post pandemic;
 - Access to a wider range of opportunities outside of school, such as leisure and community activities.

Sarah Clarke and Terri Walsh provided feedback from the SEND Voices survey and some of the points raised are listed below:

- 408 responses were received and the details could be found in the link which had been circulated to Members;
- 44% of families said that their needs were being met, this corresponded with the previous statement that around 32% of pupils were not having their needs met;

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- Only 28% of families felt that their needs were being met in relation to community activities;
- In relation to mental health support, Terri Walsh did not believe that the needs were necessarily linked to covid; she stated that ordinarily available and graduated responses were not being made in mainstream schools. This was driving a raise in request for assessments as parents believed that this was the only way to get the help that was needed;
- There results were significantly different for special schools and mainstream schools. Families felt that their needs were being met in special schools, but not so much in mainstream schools. For example, 85% of families said that their special school was well resourced, this compared to 48% in mainstream schools;
- Communication continued to be an area for improvement;
- Transition for adulthood was an area for improvement;
- The service provided by the CTU was an area for improvement. SEND Voices continued to be willing to help with letters or any other communication for parents, but had not yet heard from CTU.

Jonathan Wilding stated that there were many measures being put in place to improve the services being provided, it was hoped that improvements would start to be noticed in the next year. The strategy was being produced in partnership with schools, parents and carers and taking into account young people's ambitions. The aim was to present a draft strategy for consultation to the next meeting of CSO&S prior to its approval, and in time for the next financial year.

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

- In response to a question Johanthan Wilding explained that 32% of young people who responded to the survey felt that the school they attended did not fully meet their needs. However, it was believed that schools could easily make adjustments which would make that figure go down;
- Councillor Chadwick asked what was the percentage of SEND children who were not attending school;
- Jonathan Wilding stated that this number was very small. There was a small number of children in Education Other Than in School (EOTAS). This number was monitored, and it was hoped that with the development of improvements this number would reduce;
- Terri Walsh stated that there was also a number of pupils in mainstream schools who should be in specialist places;
- Councillor Ainslie asked if transition for adulthood was a priority in the strategy?
- Jonathan Wilding confirmed that this was a priority and work was ongoing to widen the range of options for young people;
- Sarah Clarke informed that a transition to adulthood working group had been in place since 2018. However, she pointed out that there were a lot elements to this transition. She mentioned that there was a difficulty for those that were not in receipt of SEND support and those in mainstream schools without access to adult social care;
- Terri Walsh expressed concern that the transition to adulthood team only dealt with children transitioning from Children's Social Care to Adult Social Care, there was a gap for other cohorts of children who would never be eligible to Adult Social Care;
- Councillor Bray stated that the Children and Young People Partnership recognised that improvements needed to be made in relation to preparing all young people for

adulthood, not just SEND young people. This has had been identified as a priority as it needed strengthening;

- Councillor Howe asked about mainstream schools' representation in the SEND partnership arrangements (page 63 of the agenda);
- Ming Zhang stated that schools' representatives and SEND Voices were taking part in the Strategic SEND Partnership Board;
- In relation to governance, Sarah Clarke suggested that it would be helpful to the Committee to be informed how often the boards met, their membership and how they fed into each other;
- Councillor Howe was interested to know the roles and responsibilities of each group;
- Councillor Pittock referred to the report where it said that Wokingham had an EHCP rate of 3.6%, compared to an average of 4.3% in all English unitary authorities, he was not sure if this was good or bad?
- Councillor Bray explained that the number of EHCPs in Wokingham had been historically suppressed due to a number of factors. The increase now was as a result of the service catching up with demand and operating in a reasonable way;
- Jonathan Wilding added that higher numbers of EHCPs was linked to levels of deprivation, as Wokingham is an affluent area, it was not expected to have the same numbers as the national average;
- Sarah Clarke added that the demand had always been there, the numbers were now increasing because the need was being acknowledged;
- Councillor Gray wondered if there was a conflict of ideas, in that demand was increasing and service was trying to catch up with the demand, and on the other hand the Safety Valve programme was trying to contain the increase;
- Councillor Bray explained that early intervention was a very important part of the plan; by meeting the needs of a child earlier, it was possible to prevent escalation to an EHCP, which was a better outcome for everybody, not just financially;
- The Chairman confirmed that the aim was to deliver the right support in the right places at the right time;
- The Chairman suggested that housing should be added to the list of principles listed on page 39 of the agenda;
- The Chairman wondered if more detail about what was meant by improving the quality of EHCPs (page 40 of the agenda) should be included;
- Terri Walsh was of the opinion that it was important to also review plans and hold schools into account to make sure plans were being properly implemented; there should be an assessment of plans;
- The Chairman wondered if there should be a mention of youth voices within the proposed strategic priorities;
- Jonathan Wilding confirmed that the aim was to include young people's voices and increase their participation, this was part of the strategy;
- The Chairman suggested including partnership within the smart commissioning priority;
- In response to a comment, Jonathan Wilding explained there was a Transition into Adulthood Task and Finish Group in place already;
- The Chairman asked if SEND Voices were included in the governance arrangements;
- Ming Zhang stated that they were involved in the SEND Strategic Partnership Board. The Chairman suggested that the membership for this Board should be shared with the Committee;
- Helen Watson stated that the Board was co-chaired with Health colleagues;

Please note: amendments were made to these minutes at the meeting held on 10 January 2024

- Layla Johansson, Lead for All Age Mental Health, LD, Autism and SEND confirmed that Health colleagues were working closely with WBC on the implementation of improvement plans.

It was recognised that there was a lack of funding to support schools to provide SEND specialist services to children and young people. Councillor Bray added that WBC was part of a lobbying group called F40, which aimed to raise awareness and persuade the government to address the funding gap that some areas were experiencing.

She added that there was also a chronic problem with a shortage of specialists willing to work in SEND, solutions such training and pay award were needed to be considered in order to solve this problem.

Councillor Howe stated that this was a national and local problem, he suggested that gathering data from other local councils may be a useful way to strengthen the argument.

Sarah Clarke informed that there were several programmes of training and retention in place, as this was a national issue.

After a robust discussion, the Committee decided to make a few recommendations.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Officers and all those involved in the co-production of this iteration of the draft policy be thanked for their work;
- 2) Transition into adulthood will be included in the Forward Programme;
- 3) The Leader of the Council be requested to:
 - I. speak formally with neighbouring local authorities to gather data in relation to the lack of funding for schools to deliver SEND services; and
 - II. speak to the Berkshire Prosperity Group about the lack of funding for schools to deliver SEND services.

49. SCHOOLS UPDATE

Gillian Cole, Schools Service Manager presented the Schools Update report. She drew attention to the following points:

- There had been no new Ofsted reports since the last meeting of the Committee;
- The diversity in local schools was to be celebrated – a recent census data revealed that there were around 40% of children from Black, Asian and Ethnic Minorities in schools across the borough;
- The number of children with English as an additional language was 23%, with over 114 different languages being spoken within schools in the borough;
- The most spoken language was Chinese, reflecting the fact that Wokingham was the area in the South East with the highest number of Hong Kong immigrants. Over 800 children of Hong Kong families had been admitted to local schools in the last 12 months.

During discussions of the item the following comments were made:

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- Councillor Gray asked if there was a framework for recording racist incidents in schools across the borough;
- Gillian Cole explained that headteachers were required to report racial incidents to their governing bodies. However, there was no further requirement to report to the local authority. Therefore, there was no framework for schools to report into. The report contained information based on soft intelligence;
- Councillor Bray informed that the Wokingham Borough Education Partnership was looking into ways to improve data sharing, work was ongoing to build trust in the relationships in order to enable more data sharing;
- Councillor Howe added that the issue of data sharing was further complicated by different interpretations of GDPR;
- The Chairman noticed the mention of the development of a protocol for approaching all discriminatory incidents (page 71), and he wondered if more detail on this could be shared with the Committee;
- In response to a comment, Gillian Cole stated that the list of Ofsted report could be sent to Members in Excell format so that it could be sorted;
- In response to a question, it was explained that the hospital school was the CAMHS Phenix School, which was based in Wokingham Community Hospital. The school was a Pupil Referral Unit, however only medical staff could refer pupils to it. The school was currently located in Reading due to building work at the site in Wokingham Community Hospital. It was anticipated that they would return to Wokingham by the end of this month.

RESOLVED That the Schools Update report be noted.

50. EXECUTIVE MEMBER UPDATE

Councillor Bray informed that the second payment (out of three) of the Safety Valve for this year has been received. It had been a huge amount of work to achieve this stage of the process.

The information management systems were now much improved and there was much more confidence in the data.

The Indigo Resource Space in Maiden Erlegh School had now formally opened. It was now at full capacity with 25 students. Of note was the fact that the children had been able to contribute to the design of the space.

The recruitment process for a permanent Director of Childrens' Services had started.

RESOLVED That the verbal updated by the Executive Member for Children's Services be noted.

51. FORWARD PROGRAMME

The following items were added to the Forward Programme:

8 January 2024

- SEND Strategy

20 March 2024

- Transition into adulthood

Please note: amendments were made to these minutes at the meeting held on 10 January 2024

Safety Valve is to continue as a standing item, with focus on one workstream at each meeting.

Helen Watson stated that the leadership team had a number of suggestions of items for discussion at future meetings, these suggestions could be presented to the Chairman, with timings, outside of the meeting.

Richard Lamey asked that the Safeguarding Berkshire Partnership Annual report be included in the forward programme. Officers agreed to would look into that.

RESOLVED That a revised Forward Programme, including suggestions from the Children's Services leadership team would be circulated to the Committee.

52. ACTION TRACKER

A discussion was had about the length of time that actions should be left on the Action Tracker took place.

Councillor Bray suggested that the outstanding actions be placed at the top of the report, and that the tracker starts again in the beginning of each new municipal year, only keeping carry forward actions.

There was no consensus, and this would be discussed outside of the meeting and brought back to the Committee for a decision.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The Committee notes that many actions have been completed; and
- 2) The length of time that actions remain in the report will be decided at later meeting.

53. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That, under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for Item 41, on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information, as defined by Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of schedule 12A of the Act.

54. SCHOOLS CAUSING CONCERN – PART 2

This item was considered in a Part 2 session.