

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON 21 MARCH 2017 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.50 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Pauline Helliar-Symons (Chairman), Shahid Younis (Vice-Chairman), Laura Blumenthal, Richard Dolinski, Ken Miall, Beth Rowland, Bill Soane and Alison Swaddle

Other Councillors Present

Councillors: Charlotte Haitham Taylor and Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey

Officers Present

Luciane Bowker, Democratic Services Officer
Paul Feven, Head of Strategic Commissioning
Lisa Humphreys, Head of Social Care and Intervention
Judith Ramsden, Director of People Services
Alan Stubbersfield, Interim Head of Learning and Achievement

51. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence received.

52. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 17 January 2017 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the following corrections:

Alison Swaddle's statement regarding Governors training on page 9 should read: '...the support through the Headteacher recruitment process offered by Children's Services was very good.

Correction of typing error on page 11, where it said 'careers faires' it should say 'careers fairs'.

Matters arising

Not all Members of the Committee had received a list of governors' vacancies. Judith Ramsden, Director of People Services agreed to circulate a list of governors' vacancies to all elected Members.

53. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor Rowland declared a personal interest in Agenda item 61, Schools Causing Concern, on the basis that her daughter is a teacher at Emmbrook Secondary School, her granddaughter is attends Lambs Lane Primary School and she is a governor at Highwood Primary School. Councillor Rowland remained in the meeting during discussions but did not vote in the matter.

Councillor Soane declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 58, Coombes School Task and Finish Group and Agenda item 61, Schools Causing Concern on the basis that his daughter is a teaching assistant at the Coombes CE Primary School and also his grandson attends the same school. Councillor Soane remained in the meeting during discussions but did not vote in the matter.

54. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

55. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

56. INNOVATIONS PROGRAMME

The Committee received the Innovations Programme report which was set out in agenda pages 15-22. The Chairman praised the report and invited Members to comment.

During the discussion of the item Lisa Humphreys, Head of Social Care and Intervention clarified points raised by Members:

- Councillor Rowland asked what MTM stood for; Lisa informed that this related to Munro, Turnell and Murphy;
- Councillor Blumenthal asked when MOSAIC would be implemented. Lisa stated that there was ongoing work developing this with IT, she believed it would be fully implemented by September this year;
- Lisa clarified that MOSAIC was an upgrade from framework and not a completely new system;
- Councillor Younis would like to have the opportunity to scrutinise this system before it went live;
- Judith explained that the system was being tested, and that professional Social Workers would influence its development;
- The Chairman asked if other Members were interested in scrutinising the system before it went live. Councillor Blumenthal expressed an interest;
- Judith offered to share the Social Workers' survey with the Committee, as that would demonstrate the effectiveness of the system based in real practice;
- The Chairman suggested that Councillors Blumenthal and Younis contact Councillor Pauline Jorgensen in order to obtain more information through the IT Task and Finish Group led by her;
- Judith explained that this was still subject to approval by the DFE. This was a collaborative piece of work, Wokingham was part of a group of 10 Local Authorities that were seeking to implement it;
- In response to a question, Judith stated that Wokingham was likely to be approved for this initiative because of the following factors: the Chief Executive's reputation; being small Local Authority and having strong senior leadership support;
- The Chairman asked for future updates on this programme, Judith suggested bringing an update report in April 2018;
- Councillor Younis asked what performance measures would be used. Lisa stated that this would be monitored in three levels: by the DFE; by the consultants rolling it out and by the service's own measurements.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The Committee endorses the implementation of the Signs of Safety Practice Framework and supports the next steps identified in the report;
- 2) An update report outlining how the programme continues to make a difference will be brought to the Committee in 2018.

57. ELECTIVE HOME EDUCATION

During the meeting it was noted that Alan Stubbersfield was leaving the Council as his contract was ending. The Chairman expressed sincere gratitude for all his work and his contribution to the education in the Borough, and wished him well in the future.

The Committee considered the Elective Home Education report which was set out in agenda pages 23-28. During the discussion of the item the following comments were made:

- Councillor Soane expressed concern as to how children being educated at home would develop social skills;
- Alan explained that the Local Authority's powers in relation to children being educated at home were limited. Alan stated that some families arranged for offsite activities and used facilities in the community for learning;
- Alan informed that there was a new Officer working with monitoring Elective Home Education. This Officer was a teacher, therefore well equipped to supervise the level of education being achieved at home;
- It was noted that home educated children should learn in all dimensions, social and academic development were both monitored;
- Councillor Soane shared an example (not in Wokingham Borough) where a family had decided to home educate their child because the child was being bullied at school and the school had not dealt with the bullying;
- In response to a question Alan confirmed that if a child had never been registered at a school, there was no way of knowing and monitoring this child's education;
- Councillor Swaddle stated that a resident in her ward had not been able to obtain a suitable place at a local school and as a result was considering home education;
- Councillor Dolinski was interested to know the reasons for parents choosing to home educate, and also any trends;
- Alan stated that the reasons were not always known. Some of the reasons included: parents not wanting a special school for children with SEN; bullying and no accessible school offer;
- Councillor Dolinski observed that more children were taken out of school to be home educated in transitional points, for example in Year 6. He asked if schools were being pro-active in addressing this trend. Alan stated that this related to a very small number of children, schools monitored vulnerable children very closely. Alan also stated that the trend was not linked to an area, but to groups of people, for example the Gipsy Roma Traveller (GRT) community had a large percentage of children not in school;
- Councillor Blumenthal asked for information regarding the grades of home educated children. Alan stated that there was no data available, historically this related to a very small number of children. However, this information could be collated for future analysis;
- Members were concerned about the limited powers of the Local Authority in relation to the education of children not at school;
- Judith stated that the current legislative framework caused much debate and challenges amongst professionals;
- Judith stated that most parents acted with their child's best interests at heart. Cases of abuse were rare;
- Councillor Soane believed the Local Authority should be able to bring home educated children for assessment. Judith was in disagreement and believed this would be an abuse of power;
- Councillor Haitham Taylor, Executive Member for Children's Services stated that she had written to the Secretary of State expressing concern over this issue. She believed

the number of SEN children choosing to be educated at home was disproportionately high, comparing with the overall number of SEN children in the Borough. She believed the legislation needed updating. Unfortunately there was a group of people lobbying against change;

- Councillor Haitham Taylor urged any Member/ person who felt concerned about a child to contact the services and raise the alarm;
- Councillor Haitham Taylor stated that where possible, creative school places were offered, for example offering a school place in a school on the way to parents work. However, sometimes parents refused to take such offers;
- The Chairman stated that the school leaving age was not 16 anymore, and would like to know what happened to children over that age that were not at school. Alan stated that this age group tended to engage in work experience, apprenticeships or other alternative arrangements;
- Councillor Younis stated that he knew of two examples where families had chosen to home educate and their children had done very well. Home education required a lot of commitment and hard work from parents. He believed that cases of abuse were very low;
- Councillor Swaddle expressed concern that there may be a trend relating to SEN children choosing to home educate.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The report be noted;
- 2) Further reports including trends will be submitted to the Committee annually.

58. SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT AND OFSTED REPORTS

The Committee received the schools' performance and Ofsted school reports which was set out in agenda pages 29-36.

The Committee noted that four schools had been inspected since the last meeting as listed below.

Southfield Special School

The school was closed at the end of December 2016. It was now part of Northern House as part of a multi-academy trust and has no formal designation (NFD) until it gets inspected in its third year of operation.

Lambs Lane Primary School

The school was inspected on 11-12 January 2017 and the outcome was a move from 'Requiring Improvement' to 'Good'. Alan stated that the school had effective governors and attendance was improving.

Willow Bank Infant School

The school was inspected on 9 February 2017 and the outcome was that the school continued 'Good'. Alan pointed out that the Headteacher had been in the school for less than a year, so this was an excellent result.

Hatch Ride Primary School

The school was inspected on 28 February 2017 and the Ofsted report had not yet been published.

Alan stated that over the last three months there had been various communications with Ofsted and The Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC). The Regional Director's initial contact in the autumn related concerns about Wokingham's disadvantaged children at key stage 1 in phonics and reading. The actions to address the challenges were outlined; these were predominantly around sharing information, awareness raising, support, strategies, challenge, professional development, training and research. The collaborative work with the region was positive.

Alan stated that although the number of disadvantaged children in Wokingham was small, it was important to undertake the necessary work to close the gap.

In response to a question Alan stated that Wellington College worked collaboratively with Wokingham schools, mainly with secondary schools.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

59. COOMBES SCHOOL TASK AND FINISH GROUP ACTION PLAN

The Committee considered the Coombes School Task and Finish Group Action Plan report which was set out in agenda pages 37-42. Councillor Younis informed that a final meeting had taken place and an action plan had been discussed with senior Officers.

Councillor Younis stated that a number of the recommendations listed in the final report had already been implemented; therefore the action plan presented a reduced number of recommendations.

Councillor Rowland pointed out that in page 38 where Woodley School was mentioned, it should state Woodley CE Primary School.

Alan announced that a partnership between Earley St Peters CE Primary and Coombes CE Primary had been approved. The schools would form a trust.

Councillor Dolinski stated that the Coombes School Task and Finish Group was a good example of cross political party work.

The Chairman thanked all Members that took part in the Task and Finish Group.

The Committee agreed that the actions proposed in the report would be included in the forward programme for monitoring.

RESOLVED That the Committee acknowledges what has already been done, accepts the report and agree to the action plan.

60. CHILDREN'S SERVICES PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The Committee received the Children's Services Performance Indicators report which was set out in agenda pages 43-55.

The Committee noted that there were no changes from the previous report presented to the last meeting and were content with the explanations given to red and amber indicators.

The Chairman asked that an indicator relating to '*children getting into trouble*' / '*re-offenders*' be included in the report for future monitoring.

RESOLVED That the Children's Services performance indicators be noted.

61. CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered the forward plan which was set out in agenda pages 55-62.

The Committee considered the list of possible items and the following items were included to the next meeting's agenda:

- Children and Young People Plan – refresh
- Early Years Strategy

The Chairman asked that when the Secondary School place planning report is produced, that this include information regarding places for children living in the Wokingham Without ward. She advised Officers to liaise with Bracknell Council about this.

Judith proposed to discuss the list of possible items with Officers in Children's Services and agree the timings of reports accordingly. She would work with Luciane Bowker, Senior Democratic Services Officer to update the forward plan. Once this was completed, Judith suggested circulating it via email to Members of the Committee.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The report be noted and
- 2) The updated forward plan will be circulated to Members once completed.

62. EARLY EDUCATION AND CHILDCARE SUFFICIENCY

The Committee received the Early Education and Childcare Sufficiency presentation by Paul Feven, Interim Head of Strategic Commissioning.

Paul went through the slides and the main points made by him are listed below:

- From September 2017 working parents would be entitled to an additional 15 hours of free childcare per week for 2 to 4 year olds;
- There were ongoing discussions about the duty of Local Authorities in relation to this entitlement;
- The additional hours did not have to be delivered in term time only;
- It was important to make the local market attractive to providers;
- The National Funding Formula determined a £4.15 per hour rate per child;
- The Local Authority had no formal power to direct providers to offer the additional hours;
- The Local Authority could not increase funding over the national allocation;
- Most parents in Wokingham were satisfied with the local provision but would like more flexible childcare, for example outside of 9am-5pm and holiday childcare;
- There had been briefings and individualised support for providers through visits and surgeries.
- The provision of flexible childcare was being explored with providers;
- The Local Authority was successful in obtaining capital funding for new provisions. There were three successful bids for 94 places;
- There was continued involvement in national and regional networks;

There was a robust discussion of the item and during discussion the following points were made:

- Councillor Blumenthal pointed out that there was a gap between the market rate of £5 per hour and the funded rate of £4.15 per hour. She was concerned about the implication of this gap;
- Councillor Miall was disappointed that a report had not been submitted prior to the meeting with the agenda. Judith stated that this was not the strategy, but just an initial 'heads up' on the initial arrangements for the provision;
- Councillor Miall expressed concern that providers would not be able to deliver the additional 15 hours free childcare a week. He stated that he had had conversations with providers who mentioned they would not be able to offer the additional hours;
- Judith stated the service was looking into ways to promote the market to respond to the challenge, the Local Authority was not a direct provider;
- The Chairman raised the following concerns:
 - Are local providers happy with £4.15 per hour? Is this enough to subsidise the offer?
 - Have we done an honest survey?
- Paul Feven confirmed that one survey had already been undertaken, and there would be another;
- In response to a question Alan stated the providers had the liberty to decide to continue offering 15 hours a week, to increase the hours or stop altogether;
- Judith confirmed that the provision was market driven, a further survey would hopefully reveal providers intentions;
- Members would like a report containing the strategy to be submitted to the Committee, including providers' names. Judith stated that this information may be sensitive;
- The Chairman pointed out that Crowthorne, which was listed as one of the places for planned expansion, was not in Wokingham Borough and asked Paul to double check. Paul agreed to look into it;
- Judith stated that the capital funding for expansion was from a national pot and not from Council money;

There was much interest in this item. The Chairman asked Members to forward any questions directly to Paul Feven.

RESOLVED That

- 1) The report be noted and
- 2) A report containing the strategy will be submitted to the Committee for further analysis.

63. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

64. SCHOOLS CAUSING CONCERN

This item was considered and discussed in a part 2 session.

RESOLVED That the contents of the report be noted.

The Committee also received clarification regarding the offer of adoption support to a family in Wokingham.

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