

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON 22 MAY 2018 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.57 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Pauline Helliar-Symons (Chairman), Laura Blumenthal (Vice-Chairman), Parry Bath, Ken Miall and Shahid Younis

Other Councillors Present

Councillors: Rachel Burgess, Andy Croy and Carl Doran

Officers Present

Luciane Bowker, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist
Carol Cammiss, Assistant Director Quality Assurance and Safeguarding Standards
Patricia Davies, Interim Assistant Director for Education
Lisa Humphreys, Assistant Director of Children's Social Care
Paul Senior, Interim Director of People Services

77. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillors Kate Haines and Bill Soane.

The Chairman thanked all the Members of the Committee for their work during the past year and wished them well in their roles in the new municipal year.

78. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 20 March 2018 were confirmed as a correct record, subject to the amendment below, and signed by the Chairman.

The wording on the second bullet point under item 65 Policy Update from Executive Member for Children's Services be changed to:

The proposal for Council Tax exemption to Care Leavers was going to be presented to Executive for approval. Councillor Ashwell informed that a sliding scale from 21-25 was introduced to prepare young people to pay on their own. The final proposal would be submitted to the next meeting of Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

79. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There no declarations of interest.

80. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

81. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

82. CARE LEAVERS COUNCIL TAX UPDATE

The Committee considered the Care Leavers Council Tax update report which was set out in agenda pages 15-17.

The Chairman expressed dissatisfaction that the report did not include details and options of the sliding scale as had been requested.

Lisa Humphreys, Assistant Director of Children's Social Care explained that the report had been submitted to the 29 March 2018 Executive and a decision had been made to give Care Leavers council tax exemption to the age of 21. Lisa pointed out that it was administratively very difficult and not cost effective to deliver a sliding scale and means test this benefit between the ages of 21 to 25.

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

- The Chairman stated that those points raised by Lisa Humphreys should have been included in the report, she also stated that means testing had not been considered at any point;
- Councillor Miall confirmed that the idea was not to means test this benefit. He stated that the initial proposal had the intention to prevent Care Leavers from gaining a criminal record as a result of no payment of Council tax. He also agreed that the options should have been listed in the report and that means testing was not to be considered;
- Lisa Humphreys stated that the report had been submitted to various boards and it had evolved and changed as a result;
- Councillor Shepherd-DuBey pointed out that care leavers were unlikely to be high earners and that the intention of this proposal was to give Care Leavers the help that would have been given by parents;
- Councillor Younis had expected more details to have been submitted in the report, with options;
- The Chairman stated that this Committee had been involved in the development of this policy and the expectation was that it would be also involved in any recommendations;
- Paul Senior, Director of People Services stated that Lisa Humphreys had amended this report in response to comments from various boards, and that this latest version captured the evolved policy. He pointed out that the policy had received positive feedback from the Department of Education;
- The Chairman pointed out that the report did not include the Executive decision;
- Lisa Humphreys informed that Executive had approved the exemption up to the age of 21, with a caveat that the sliding scale would be considered at a later stage;
- The Chairman's understanding was that Councillor Ashwell was going to bring back the proposal for a sliding scale from 21-25 to this Committee.

Upon being put to the vote the Committee agreed to ask that a report containing options for a sliding scale from 21-25 be brought back to the next meeting of the Committee. The Committee asked that the relevant financial information be included in the report, however it was noted that the finance was not a major issue in this case. The Committee would then make a recommendation to the Executive.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The Care Leaver Council Tax report would be brought back for consideration to the next meeting of the Committee; and
- 2) The report would include options for a sliding scale Council Tax exemption from the ages of 21-25.

83. ANNUAL CONVERSATION WITH OFSTED

The Committee considered the report which was set out in agenda pages 19-22.

Paul Senior informed that this was not a formal inspection, but it was an opportunity for Ofsted to hold the Local Authority to account. The conversation had taken place with the Regional Lead Inspector and lead directors. This conversation had focused on education and social care. The service had been asked to fill in a self-evaluation form prior to the meeting. Paul felt that this had been a mature and candid conversation, the headlines were listed in the letter and there were a lot of positive comments. The letter also showed the direction of travel.

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

- Members noted that the letter contained many positive comments;
- Councillor Miall was interested to know more about the service's research involvement with Goldsmiths University;
- Lisa Humphreys stated that the service had been invited to take part in a research into social work practice and management of child protection and neglect in affluent areas. Wokingham was one of six Local Authorities involved in the project. Wokingham was comparable to Kensington and Chelsea in terms of social work practice. There were in the Borough a large number of people who owned a second home and often went abroad for work, not being available to see the social worker. It was important to train Social Workers on how to conduct unannounced child protection visits to very secure properties and how to measure safeguarding for these children. There was an assumption that in affluent areas children were not at risk of harm, but this was not necessarily the case;
- Lisa Humphreys stated that increased legal capacity was needed to manage people who had access to their own lawyers;
- Councillor Blumenthal asked if there had been any challenges or concerns raised by Ofsted. Officers felt that there had not been any major challenges but it had been a useful conversation;
- Paul Senior stated that the service had been well prepared for this conversation;
- Carol Cammiss, Assistant Director Quality Assurance and Safeguarding Standards stated that Ofsted asked if the service would prefer a themed inspection, it had been useful to talk about key lines of enquire;
- Patricia Davies, Interim Assistant Director for Education stated that Ofsted affirmed that the service was on the right track; the service had been honest and had presented evidence to back the information provided to Ofsted;
- Councillor Shepherd-DuBey asked how the service dealt with the wealthy families that were able to hide abuse from the service. Lisa Humphreys stated that the service had to apply the law in the same way that it applied to anyone else. It was important to train and develop Social Workers to carry out unannounced visits. It was important to raise awareness amongst all the professionals that may come into contact with children, such as teachers to work together through the Local Safeguarding Children's Board to protect the children. Lisa also informed that the private sector was involved in the Local Safeguarding Children's Board;
- Lisa stated that there were reciprocal agreements with the private sector, they were also legally required to report safeguarding issues;
- Councillor Shepherd-DuBey asked if the increase in multi-academy schools would make it more difficult to monitor abuse. Lisa Humphreys stated that safeguarding arrangements were often revised as a result of enquires and serious case reviews and a lot of learning lessons had occurred in relation to safeguarding;

- Patricia Davies stated that academies bought into safeguarding services from the Local Authority and that any parental complaints that were received were be investigated;
- The Chairman was very encouraged to hear that the service worked closely with teachers, as unfortunately that had not been her experience as a teacher at another Local Authority.

In response to a question Paul Senior stated that the service had an improvement plan which was regularly submitted to this committee.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

84. POLICY UPDATE FROM THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER

This item was not discussed as the new Executive Member for Children's Services had not yet been appointed.

85. CHILDREN'S SERVICES PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The Committee received the key performance indicators report which was set out in agenda pages 23-24.

Councillor Blumenthal was interested to know more about PS2 and PS3. Lisa Humphreys stated that there was a blunt tool in relation to PS2 and PS3 to make sure things were resolved the first time around. However, there were a number of issues to be considered, for example the service would not avoid issuing a Child Protection Plan (CPP) to improve the indicator, a CPP would be issued if this was needed. There were many variables to be considered, each child was in a different situation, and all alternatives were looked at. Paul Senior stated that the comment gave the context and Ofsted would not be interested in looking into it because of the low level or risk.

The Chairman noted that PS57, which was red, was disingenuous. The narrative explained the situation and it did not seem as if it should be red.

Lisa Humphreys explained that due to the legal definition for permanency, although these children were in very stable settings, they could not be labelled permanent.

The Chairman asked about the list of additional indicators which were discussed at the previous meeting. Lisa Humphreys explained that due to the imminent changes to membership it had been decided to postpone the training session from this meeting to the next one. This training session would focus on data and it would be an opportunity for the Committee to decide which indicators it wished to continue monitoring.

The Chairman stated that she would like to see an indicator in relation to the number of children offending and re-offending. She would also like an indicator in relation to the number of youngsters who re-offend after they had a custodial sentence. The Committee was informed that the number of children who were in custody was very low in Wokingham.

Paul Senior read out a list containing the information on children offending and re-offending.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The report be noted; and

- 2) There would be a training session at the next meeting where key performance indicators would be discussed.

86. INFORMATION ON SCHOOL OFSTED OUTCOMES AND GCSE AND A LEVEL RESULTS

The Committee received hard copies of the Ofsted results for the schools that had been inspected since the last meeting of the Committee. Patricia Davies explained that the reason for the web links in the report was that she was under the impression that the Committee had asked to have more than just the front page of the Ofsted reports. The Chairman clarified that what the Committee wanted was the executive summary of the reports.

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

Emmbrook Infant School – the school continues to be **good**

The school had undergone a short inspection. Councillor Batth asked why this was only a short inspection if the school had last been inspected in 2013. Patricia Davies stated the maximum time between inspections was four years, but this could vary depending on the regime in force at the time. Paul Senior added that it also depended on the level of risk.

Foundry College – the school continues to be **good**

The school had undergone a short inspection. Patricia Davies informed that Foundry College was technically not a school but a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU), this meant that pupils stayed there for short periods of time only.

Shinfield St Mary's CofE Junior School – the school continues to be **good**

The school had undergone a short inspection. The Chairman noted that good schools always seemed to have strong leadership.

The Ofsted reports for Highwood and Keep Hatch schools were to be discussed in the part 2 session.

The Committee noted the GCSE and A-Level results attached to the report.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

87. FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered its forward plan as set out in agenda pages 25-29.

The Committee noted that a number of items which were in the forward plan had not been submitted to the agenda for this meeting. Paul Senior stated that the Primary Place Strategy, SEND Strategy and Data Demand for Services reports had not been ready for submission. It was agreed to move these items to the next meeting.

Lisa Humphreys explained that Child Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) was not under her responsibility, this sat with Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) Berkshire. Councillor Miall informed that CAMHS had presented a report to Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) in the past, in his experience it was difficult to receive information which related to Wokingham specifically.

Paul Senior confirmed that there was generally great concern over mental health services on a national level. He informed that the Health and Wellbeing Board had also engaged CAMHS.

It was agreed that senior CCG leaders be invited to the September meeting of the Committee, and that the possibility of having a joint HOSC and CSO&S would be investigated.

Members of the Committee were interested to know the reasons for the increase in the demand for services. Paul Senior stated that there were a number of reasons, for example the increase in the number of asylum seekers and the increase in the population were some of the reasons. He predicted an increase to 140 Looked After Children in the future.

The Chairman noted that the September meeting might have too many items and it may be necessary to include another meeting in the timetable before September.

88. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

That under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of the Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act as appropriate.

89. SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT AND EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS: SCHOOLS CAUSING CONCERN

This report was discussed in a Part 2 session.