

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
HELD ON 22 JANUARY 2019 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.41 PM**

**Committee Members Present**

Councillors: Ken Miall (Chairman), Prue Bray and Philip Houldsworth

**Parent Governor Representatives**

Darryl Ward

**Other Councillors Present**

Councillors: Pauline Helliard Symons

**Officers Present**

Luciane Bowker, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist  
Carol Cammiss, Director of Children's Services  
Paul Doherty, Assistant Director for Education  
Jim Leivers, Interim Assistant Director for Children's Social Care  
Jannie Goussard, Team Manager Brambles Social Care Team  
Nick Hammond, Research and Information Officer

**32. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillors Kate Haines and Graham Howe.

**33. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 20 November 2018 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**34. DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**35. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no public questions.

**36. MEMBER QUESTION TIME**

There were no Member questions.

**37. CHILDREN'S SERVICES PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

The Committee considered the Children's Services Performance Indicators report which was set out in agenda pages 15-26. Nick Hammond, Research and Information Officer presented the report.

The red indicators were discussed in more detail as follows:

**1. EA1i: Percentage of Wokingham Borough State-Funded Primary Schools with a current Ofsted Rating of Good or Better**

Nick Hammond stated that this indicator was red as a result of two primary schools having been judged as 'Requires Improvement' and one school as 'Inadequate'. He informed that all these three schools had been previously rated as 'Good', these schools were on the Local Authority risk register and had been identified as vulnerable to the judgements received, one of the schools had been issued with a warning notice.

Nick Hammond stated that when schools were rated 'Inadequate' they were automatically subject to an academy order and the Governing Board was removed to be replaced by a School Improvement Board.

Nick Hammond stated that the Local Authority continued to work with the schools through the school improvement team to bring about positive change to these schools.

**2. EA2: Percentage of children who attend a Wokingham State-Funded School (Primary, Secondary or Special) which is 'Good' or better**

Nick Hammond stated that the reason for the decline in this indicator was the recent Ofsted ratings of 'Requires Improvement' and 'Inadequate', as explained above.

**3. EA11: 12-Month Rolling Voluntary Turnover of Qualified Social Workers within Children's Social Care and Early Intervention Service**

Nick Hammond stated that this was a new measure which had been introduced for monitoring during 2018/19. Turnover was an indicator of the staff morale. The proposed targets assigned to this measure (green if less than 16%) suggested it was currently red. The service was monitoring this new measure and would provide a further update in the next performance report.

**4. VP4: Percentage of referrals in 2018/19 which are repeat referrals within 12 months of the previous referral to Children's Social Care**

Nick Hammond believed this indicator was red as a result of an expected increase in referrals just before the summer holidays. The target of 20% or less was met for the other two months in the quarter, August and September.

**5. VP7: Percentage of children leaving care who achieved permanence (adopted, returned home or special guardianship order is granted)**

Nick Hammond stated that in Q2 four of the ten children leaving care achieved permanence. The other six children left care at the age of 18, three moving into independent living, one staying put with their foster carer and two remaining in residential care due to health needs. Those who leave care at the age of 18 will have a transition plan in place.

**6. VP8: Percentage of child protection visits due in the period which were completed on time (within 10 days of the previous visit)**

Nick Hammond stated that this was a local target. The drop in performance coincided with increased workloads and the main impact of this was that social workers were not always recording their work in a timely manner, it did not necessarily mean that the visits were not occurring.

Councillor Bray stated that it was meaningless analysing out of date data, and asked that future reports presented to the Committee contain more up to date data.

Councillor Helliar-Symonds asked Members to be mindful of the fact that some of the targets that were harder to achieve had been set locally and were aspirational.

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

- In response to a question Paul Doherty, Assistant Director for Education stated that Interim Executive Boards (IEB) tended to be small and were not meant to be

representative, they were meant to be composed of knowledgeable, capable and experienced people to help the school improve quickly. The choice of the IEB was within the gift of the Director of Children's Services. IEBs were typically made up of volunteers, however some Councils were starting to pay for this service;

- In response to a question Paul Doherty stated that he was not aware of failure by an IEB;
- Members were informed by Paul Doherty that the academisation process run alongside the work of the IEB;
- In response to a question Paul Doherty stated that positive changes could happen quickly, usually with changes in leadership and management;
- Paul Doherty stated that the Northern House School had a trust who was interested in become its sponsor. It could be difficult to secure a trust to sponsor special schools due to the complexities and risks involved.

**RESOLVED** That the report be noted.

### **38. QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK/ANNUAL QUALITY ASSURANCE REPORT**

Jim Leivers, Interim Assistant Director for Children's Social Care presented the Quality Assurance Framework/Annual Quality Assurance report which was set out on Agenda pages 27-38.

Jim Leivers stated that due to the various changes in the senior leadership structure in the past year, this report was omitted from the Committee's work programme. It was now being presented to the Committee for the purpose of historical correctness and to enable the Committee to compare current and future performance with that of previous years. He stated that another report would be presented to the Committee around April time.

Jim Leivers stated that the Quality Assurance was critical monitor the performance of children's social care, to assess the quality of the work being undertaken to safeguard children.

Jim Leivers stated that Officers were looking at examples of best practice in other local authorities on how best to obtain information.

Jim Leivers tabled a copy of Appendix 1 of the report.

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

- In response to a question Jim Leivers stated that the audit exercise was spread across the service, he explained that the three outstanding cases did not relate to the same social worker;
- Carol Cammiss stated that it was known to the management team which social workers needed more help and support, and this was not necessarily linked to caseload, it could be due to inexperience;
- Members were interested to know how up to date the information was. Carol Cammiss stated the weekly reports with indicators were sent to all managers in all teams, issues were identified immediately. However, she pointed out that the increase in demand for services had impacted in the timeliness of recording;
- Carol Cammiss stated that the service had identified its priorities and that work was being undertaken to improve where necessary;

- Carol Cammiss stated that performance managers knew when things did not look good and would interrogate accordingly.

Councillor Helliar-Symons stated that social workers would be equipped with tablets to facilitate their admin work. She also stated that social worker recruitment was particularly difficult in this area, a Social Worker Task and Finish Group was currently looking to find possible solutions to this challenge. Some of the ideas to improve social worker recruitment were:

- Conversations were taking place to find a way to facilitate car parking for social workers
- Discussions were being held about offering housing for key workers
- Oxford Brook University would be encouraging social workers to stay in Wokingham
- A recruitment agency had been engaged
- It was hoped that by increasing the number of social workers the caseloads would be reduced, therefore making Wokingham more attractive to social workers

The Chairman pointed out that it was not always easy to move social workers' caseloads due to the fact that it was important to cultivate stable relationships between families and social workers.

**RESOLVED** That the report be noted and that future Quality Assurance reports will be submitted to the Committee.

### **39. INNOVATIONS PROGRAMME UPDATE**

The Committee received a presentation by Jannie Goussard, Team Manager Brambles Social Care Team on the Innovations Programme.

Some of the points made by Jannie Goussard are highlighted below:

- This programme first started in Australia by Andrew Turnell and Steve Edwards, they really struggled with the concept of how to build a good working relationship with families and at the same time to be rigorous about safeguarding;
- One of the differences between this programme and others was that this programme was developed by practitioners;
- One of the core elements of the programme was to be able to get the family to understand what the local authority's concerns were for the safety of the children;
- It was important to break down the language to basic levels so that families could understand, and that children could understand in order to contribute to their own safety;
- Another element of the programme was to create a balance between the professional judgement and the family's understanding of the situation;
- When developing a plan it was important to look not only at the problems, but to consider the strengths and build a plan with the family, so that this plan could work for the family;
- It was important to look at the network around the children and the family, and to support not just one individual, but the whole network of families and friends (like a lightening system);
- The Signs of Safety Practice Principles were aligned with the Council's own priorities and values;
- One of the principals was to respect everyone who we work with as individuals (we do not agree with the abuse but still work with the person);

- One of the principals was to help families understand that they have strengths and are capable of changes;
- It was important to understand what motivates families to help them move forward;
- It was important to treat every engagement as an opportunity for growth. Most assessments models follow a sequence where there is an assessment, followed by a plan and then intervention. With the Signs of Safety Practice the intervention starts at the first point of contact, and every contact with the family incorporates intervention, which runs alongside assessment;
- It is a statutory duty of local authorities to use a recognised evidence based practice framework;
- The Sign of Safety model was a recognised programme, and was now adopted by approximately 50 Councils in England and 17 countries;
- Research showed that with Signs of Safety families felt more empowered and more able to understand the concerns and what needed to change;
- One of the concerns of Signs of Safety was that only the right children came into care, and as far as possible families and wider networks were supported to keep the children in their care;
- Practitioners that worked with the programme felt more job satisfaction;
- Wokingham was now in the second phase of implementation of the Innovations Programme;
- 44% of staff had had advanced training in the programme, 41% had had the basic training and 15% had not had the training;
- The score card was presented and how the programme was measured.

Following the presentation the following comments were made:

- Councillor Bray asked what could be done when the victims of domestic abuse did not recognise they were being victims of abuse. Jannie Goussard stated this happened by involving the family and everybody around them, by asking a lot of questions not just to the family and the victim but to the wider network around them. Secrecy was a problem, the safety plan involved questioning a wide network around the family and enabling the child to learn about who to talk to;
- Members asked what the scorecard was. Jannie Goussard stated that officers looked at all the files and checked if all the tools were used to involve the network. This was measured in a quarterly basis and gave a quantity measure;
- Jannie Goussard stated that the challenge was to develop questioning skills within the workforce;
- In response to a question Jannie Goussard stated that the service was becoming more robust in accessing risk, the assessment process was rigorous. However no practitioner could ever guarantee 100% no risk;
- Members pointed out that taking a child away from the family was the last resort.

**RESOLVED** That the report be noted.

#### **40. SEND STRATEGY**

The Committee received the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Strategy report which was set out in Agenda pages 55-70.

Paul Doherty, Assistant Director for Education stated that the service would like to consult with partners in regards to the proposed SEND Strategy. He was seeking the Committee's

endorsement to go out to consultation, and stated that the result of the consultation would be brought back to the Committee for consideration. T

Paul Doherty stated that the strategy would bring existing policies and priorities up to date and it included forward planning for the next three years.

Paul Doherty stated that Wokingham schools were good, with achievements above the national targets. However, there was a growth in the demand for places for SEND children and young people, in particular children and young people with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs, this growth was in line with the national picture.

Paul Doherty stated that one in 40 children in Wokingham had an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP), meaning that they had a statutory need of special education. There was also a large number of children (2,799) who were categorised as needing Special Educational Needs (SEN) support. It was anticipated that an additional 125 SEND places would be required by 2023. Currently the Council educated 60% of children and young people requiring special education within the Borough. However, 133 were educated outside of Wokingham, with half of those in expensive independent or non-maintained special schools.

Paul Doherty stated that there was a current overspend in the High Needs Block (HNB) funding of 2.8 million. Most local authorities were facing an overspend in the HNB. This strategy was one way to address this overspend.

Paul Doherty highlighted the five principles listed in the strategy which were:

- Encouraging independence
- Communicating well
- Working in partnership
- Identifying need early
- Ensuring financial sustainability

Paul Doherty stated that the strategy included the expansion of Addington School, which was due to go through the formal Executive approval and the planning application process.

Paul Doherty stated that the cost of supporting all the children and young people in Wokingham with SEND was 18 million. With increased demand it was important to develop a strategy to deal with the demand. He informed that a Strategic Board had been formed to develop the strategy.

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

- Councillor Bray pointed out that on page 65 there was mention of SEND children aged 5-16, she believed that SEND was up to 18 years of age. Paul Doherty stated that most EHCPs were up to 18, but could go up to 25, however it was not statutory after 18;
- Councillor Bray asked that the wording be modified to make it clearer that there was provision after 16;
- Councillor Bray was concerned with the language used in the bottom of page 68 of the Agenda, where it said that '*...these will all be **investigated** as part of this strategy.*' She believed that the strategy should not only investigate the options, but make decisions and progress them;

- Councillor Helliar-Symonds stated that she agreed with the point about the language, however things were being progressed, for example the Addington expansion and the extension of Foundry College. Also, the local authority was requesting a grant from the government to open a new school;
- In response to a question Paul Doherty stated that there was a range of views in relation to SEND, some parents' ambition was not in line with the strategy. Parents were entitled to a view and had the right of appeal, some parents did not support inclusion;
- In response to a question Paul Doherty stated that a placement on a local resource space school within the Borough could cost between £10k to £20k, and out of Borough specialist places could cost between £50k to £250k per year, and this was a not means tested provision;
- Jim Leivers confirmed that health services could be means tested, but not SEND;
- Some Members were concerned that other children were potentially being deprived as a result of this large expense;
- Paul Doherty informed that the law stated that the local authority had to meet the child's needs;
- Carol Cammiss stated that the assessment of a child was based on needs;
- Members were interested to know how successful parents were when challenging the local authority's decisions at appeals. Paul Doherty stated that the results were mixed, sometimes parents brought their own private psychologists to argue their case;
- Councillor Bray was interested to know how many requests for EHCPs were turned down by the local authority. Paul Doherty agreed to find out the numbers and report back;
- Paul Doherty informed that two parent groups would be involved in the consultation: REACH and Special Educational Needs and Disability Information Advice and Support Service (SENDIAS);
- Paul Doherty informed that the legislation stated that when making a decision regarding SEND placements the local authority must consider the two customers: the parent/child and the tax payer funding the placement;
- In response to a question Paul Doherty stated that often when local authorities lost on appeals, it was due to not following processes correctly. He stated that statutory processes could be very complex.

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) The Committee approves the draft strategy as suitable for consultation with those interested parties living in Wokingham; and
- 2) The outcome of the consultation be reported to a future meeting of the Committee.

**41. SCHOOL PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND OFSTED REPORTS**

The Committee considered the Schools Performance Indicators and Ofsted Reports paper which was set out in Agenda pages 71-77.

Paul Doherty informed that since the last meeting of the Committee there had been two Ofsted inspection, one was rated 'Good' and the other was rated 'Inadequate' and was now in special measures.

Paul Doherty pointed out that Northern House (special school), which had been rated 'Inadequate' by Ofsted was an academy and therefore not the responsibility of the local

authority. The Regional Schools Commissioner, on behalf of the DfE was accountable for state funded academy schools.

Paul Doherty stated that he had visited the Northern House School and had had a conversation with the Headteacher, the local authority was engaged with the school. He believed that the children's behaviour was improved from what he had seen during his visit.

Paul Doherty went through the provisional outcomes at KS2 during the summer of 2018, as described in the report. He pointed out that Wokingham scored higher than the national average in all measurements, however the aspiration was to improve even more.

Paul Doherty stated that based on the English Baccalaureate average point score (shown on page 76 of the Agenda) every child in Wokingham achieved one grade higher than the national average.

**RESOLVED** That the report be noted.

#### **42. FORWARD PROGRAMME**

The Committee considered the Forward Plan and no changes were made.

Councillor Bray advised that as she would be unable to attend the February meeting Councillor David Hare would substitute her.

Members expressed concern over the low level of attendance at meetings.

The Chairman pointed out that the Regional Schools Commissioner was due to attend the next meeting and urged Members and Officer to think of relevant questions to ask him ahead of the meeting.

#### **43. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

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

#### **44. SCHOOLS CAUSING CONCERN - PART 2**

The report was discussed in a part 2 session.