

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 17 SEPTEMBER 2019 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.05 PM

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Alison Swaddle (Chairman), Jenny Cheng (Vice-Chairman), Prue Bray, Andy Croy, Ken Miall, Andrew Mickleburgh and Malcolm Richards

Officers Present

Luciane Bowker, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist
Carol Cammiss, Director of Children's Services
Gillian Cole, Service Manager Schools
Viki Elliot-King, Children's Improvement Programme Manager
Nick Hammond, Service Manager, Intelligence and Impact
Jim Leivers, Interim Assistant Director for Education
Sal Thirlway, Service Manager for Disabled Children and Early Help

15. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Darryl Ward and Councillor Pauline Helliars-Symonds.

16. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 18 June 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Matters arising

Members asked why the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Strategy had not been included in the Agenda. Jim Leivers, Interim Assistant Director for Education stated that one of the recommendations made by Ofsted was that the strategy should be co-produced. Therefore the strategy was being revisited through the SEND Improvement Board to include the element of co-production. The strategy would be submitted to the Committee in the new year.

Councillor Miall asked for information relating to the number of first preferences for schools in the Maiden Erlegh ward. Jim Leivers stated that Maiden Erlegh School had received 42% of first preferences for Year 7 and Addington Primary received 36% of first preferences for first entry to school.

Councillor Miall asked for an audit report on the Members' Christmas collection for Children In Care. Carol Cammiss, Director of Children's Services agreed to circulate this information to Members of the Committee.

In response to a question Jim Leivers stated that the SEND Improvement Board had held its first meeting and that Health professionals were taking part in the development of the SEND Strategy.

17. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

18. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

19. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

20. CHILDREN'S CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The Committee received the Children's Services Improvement Action Planning report which was set out in Agenda pages 15-19. Viki Elliott-King, Children's Improvement Programme Manager presented the report.

Viki Elliott-King stated that the service regularly undertook self-evaluation to determine its priorities. The last self-evaluation had been undertaken in January 2019, and the service had also been through a full Ofsted inspection in June 2019. The analysis of both of these evaluations had helped to shape the priorities for the service which were presented in the report.

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

- Members were pleased with the layout of the report;
- Members noted that the report covered a lot of areas and asked what the hierarchy of priorities was. Viki Elliott-King stated that sometimes the service had to react to situations and the priorities could change, one of the most pressing priorities currently was to stabilize the workforce;
- Carol Cammiss stated that the sequencing of priorities might change, but they would not come off the list;
- In response to a question Carol Cammiss stated that it was always challenging to make sure the finance was robust whilst making improvements to the services. The service was continually re-addressing its priorities and identifying areas that it wanted to focus on. For example, one area of improvement was the development a service for the children in the edge of care;
- Councillor Croy asked how improving the brand would benefit the service. Viki Elliott-King stated that this was in relation to improving communication internally and externally. She stated that it was important to build trust and break barriers to communication;
- Members were interested to know more about the process of identifying vulnerable children. Carol Cammiss stated that there were different processes, and cross reference of information. For example monitoring the children who attracted Pupil Premium, children with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP) and Looked After Children;
- Councillor Croy asked if there was a risk of an overload of reviews within the service. Carol Cammiss stated that the new leadership team had to reassure itself that the service was running in the way that it should be. She explained that some of the reviews were part of a three year programme, she believed the reviews were necessary;
- In response to a question Carol Cammiss stated that the next Placement Strategy was currently being developed. This Strategy was going to include the development of a service for children in the edge of care and a service to support foster carers looking after children with high needs. There was an aspiration to reduce the number of children who were placed outside of the area as it was a known fact that children who were placed closer to home achieved better outcomes.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The Children's Services Strategy and Delivery Priorities be noted; and
- 2) The intent of improvement action planning to deliver priority actions, improving outcomes for children and young people and resulting in an Ofsted grading of "Good" be noted.

21. OFSTED INSPECTION OUTCOMES AND ACTION PLAN

The Committee considered the Ofsted Inspection Outcomes and Action Plan report which was set out in agenda pages 21-40. Viki Elliott-King presented the report.

Viki Elliott-King stated that the service had undergone a full Ofsted inspection in June 2019 and the outcome was 'Requires Improvement'. Ofsted had identified five areas for improvement and required that an action plan be submitted by 17 October 2019. Ofsted had also identified many areas of good practice, however the result reflected the fact that quality was not consistent across the board. Ofsted recognised that the service was on a trajectory of improvement.

Carol Cammiss stated that Ofsted the findings were in line with the service's own self-evaluation. The leadership team understood where the challenges were and the work to improve those areas that were identified by Ofsted as needing improvement had already started. Additionally, Ofsted was pleased with the progress made since the earlier inspection.

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

- In response to a question Carol Cammiss Social Workers' caseload was reduced as a result of a review of all the children in need cases;
- Carol Cammiss explained that an added difficulty in Social Worker recruitment was that it could be more difficult to recruit Social Workers to work in certain areas;
- Carol Cammiss stated that the recent churn in senior leadership had been unsettling for staff and impacted the recruitment of staff. She also stated that poor practice was not accepted in order to retain permanent members of staff;
- Councillor Mickleburgh asked if there were any areas of concern that had not been identified by Ofsted. Carol Cammiss stated that the inspection had been very rigorous and that many areas of good practice had also been identified. She stated that she had been honest with Ofsted in saying where the service was and what was being done to address areas that needed improving. She stated that, provided that the senior leadership team remained stable, the service was on course to achieve its targets as outlined in the improvement plan;
- In response to a question Carol Cammiss stated that a more robust reporting system was being put in place to monitor the adoption service provided by Adopt Berkshire;
- Members asked for more information on the comments relating to Corporate Parenting Board (CPB). Carol Cammiss stated that Ofsted felt unsure that CPB was adding value to the children. The service was aware that CPB needed reforming before Ofsted's visit and had already been working on a proposal to make it more efficient. This proposal would be submitted at the next meeting of CPB;
- Councillor Bray agreed that CPB needed to improve the way it operated in order to gain Members' commitment;
- Members asked for more information relating to recording systems. Carol Cammiss stated that the service used two systems: MOSAIC, which was the information system where most children's information was recorded and Electronic Document and

Records Management System (EDMRS). Ofsted identified a difficulty in navigating between the two systems. This was known to the service and it would be necessary to work with the provider to find a system that could do everything that was needed;

- In relation to the issue of parental consent, Carol Cammiss stated that parental consent was sought in most cases. However, sometimes due to the very high statutory responsibility, the service might have intervened without parental consent;
- Members asked about the monitoring of children being home educated. Carol Cammiss stated that when the local authority was informed that a child was being home educated they would contact the family and assess the child if there was parental consent, however parents were not obliged to agree. Jim Leviers stated that the legislation stated that this was a matter of parental choice, therefore the local authority did not have the right to intervene. Also, there was limited data on the number of children being home educated;
- Members asked to receive information on the number of children being educated at home, including age groups and any other information that is available;
- In response to a question Jim Leviers stated that home educators would have to register with Ofsted when they reached a certain number of children.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The outcome of the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services 2019 be noted;
- 2) The action taken so far in response to the identified areas for improvement and the next steps be noted;
- 3) A report containing information on home educated children in the Borough be brought to the Committee; and
- 4) Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee will review the proposals to strengthen the work of the Corporate Parenting Board.

22. CHILDREN'S SERVICES PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The Committee received the Children's Services Performance Indicators report which was set out in Agenda pages 41-52. Nick Hammond, Service Manager, Intelligence and Impact presented the report.

Nick Hammond stated that it had taken a long time to address the issues in relation to EHCPs. The service had struggled over the last 12 months to appoint appropriately qualified and experienced workers and since 2018 was operating at less than 50% capacity. This had severely impacted on the service's ability to issue EFCPs within the required timescales. He was confident that all outstanding plans would be finalised by December 2019 and that by March any new plans would be issued within the required 20 weeks. Jim Leviers stated that two Task and Finish Groups had been set to address the issue of timeliness and quality of reports.

In response to a question Jim Leviers stated that the local authority should aim to have nil children out of the Borough. Some initiatives had already been put in place to increase the capacity within the Borough, for example the expansion of Addington School. He also stated that the Northern House School was in negotiations to break a deal with another academy trust.

In response to a question Jim Levers stated that the introduction of the Children and Family Act 2014 had had a huge impact on the demand for services.

Carol Cammiss stated that it was necessary to develop more provision of places within the Borough. She pointed out that the service would not bring back children from out of the area who were settled and doing well, so even with more places it would take time to reduce the number of children being educated out of the area. However, there would always be a small number of children with very complex needs for whom the local authority would not be able to provide. Also, there were no colleges in Wokingham.

In relation to Early Help, Nick Hammond stated that that indicator was only red because it was higher than the last quarter, however it was still within the target of 45 days.

Carol Cammiss stated that a piece of work was underway to understand the reason for the increased number of re-referrals and to address it.

In relation to the percentage of children in care who had had more than one social worker in 12 months, Carol Cammiss stated that the service was more effective now. She stated that strengthening the service for children on the edge of care was an area of focus.

Members asked about the number of Care Leavers who were placed in B&Bs. Carol Cammiss stated that in the past if there was no other alternative, Care Leavers would have been placed in B&Bs. It had now been agreed that Wokingham would not put Care Leavers in B&Bs. She stated that the number of Care Leavers varied, in April there were 22 Care Leavers between the ages of 18-22, and that was a significant number.

In relation to Social Workers recruitment, Carol Cammiss stated that staff looked for stability in leadership, good working conditions and learning and development opportunities. The long term aspiration was to reduce the number of agency workers to 10%.

Members asked to be informed of the number of excluded children in the Borough, including those with SEND. Jim Levers stated that in the 2018/19 academic year there were two permanent exclusions and 141 fixed term exclusions (excluding data from the Forest, Bohunt, St Crispins and St Teresa's). Carol Cammiss explained that academies were not obliged to let the local authority know this information.

RESOLVED That;

- 1) The report be noted; and
- 2) The number of permanent exclusions in the Borough, including the number of those that relate to SEND children, will be brought to the Committee for information.

23. SCHOOL PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND OFSTED REPORTS

The Committee received the School Performance Indicators and Ofsted reports report which was set out in Agenda pages 53-60. Gillian Cole, Service Manager Schools presented the report.

Gillian Cole stated that due to the summer break there had not been many school inspections.

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

- Gillian Cole stated that Floreat Montague Park was a new school that was building up year by year. A new headteacher of a successful school had been recruited and started this September. The school had pulled out of the Floreat Trust and was now part of GLS trust. She stated that the new headteacher would engage with the local authority;
- Gillian Cole stated that Bohunt School had had its first inspection and achieved a 'Good' rating, there were no concerns about Bohunt;
- Gillian Cole stated that the 2019 outcomes listed in the report were provisional at this stage. She would bring the final outcomes as soon as they became available. Wokingham remained with above the national average results in all measures;
- Gillian Cole explained that in the new 1-9 GCSE grading system a 4+ was a pass result;
- Members asked for information on post 16 (non A-Level) education. Gillian Cole stated that she would contact the relevant officer to provide this information to the Committee. However, many Wokingham post 16 children attended colleges outside of the Borough which made it difficult to gather data;
- In response to a question, Gillian Cole stated there was no further breakdown of the data for Early Years, she also informed that the terminology was moving to 'meeting the expected standard or not meeting the expected standard';
- Gillian Cole stated that children that were not achieving the expected level in the Early Years would become the focus in order to establish why they had not achieved the required standards;
- Members were surprised that the Holt School had not been inspected by Ofsted since 2008. Gillian Cole explained that there was no statutory obligation to inspect outstanding schools.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The Committee notes the outcomes of relevant Ofsted reports and the provisional outcomes of the 2019 statutory assessments;
- 2) The Committee will be informed of the indicative Year 11 destination and of post 16 non A-Level education; and
- 3) The final outcomes of the 2019 statutory will be provided to the Committee as soon as these become available.

24. FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered its Forward Plan which was set out in Agenda pages 61-64.

The following items were added:

19 November 2019

- Year 11 destination, Post 16 non A-Level education
- Review of Ofsted Action Plan

21 January 2020

- SEND Strategy
- Support for Young Carers

17 March 2020

- Children and Young People's Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing – Members talked about the possibility of inviting HOSC Members to join the discussions on this item.

25. 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 item 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.

26. SCHOOLS CAUSING CONCERN - PART 2

The report was discussed in a part 2 session.

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