

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
HELD ON 21 JULY 2015 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.35 PM**

**Committee Members Present**

Councillors: Pauline Helliard-Symons (Chairman), Lindsay Ferris, Ken Miall, Bill Soane, Alison Swaddle and Malcolm Richards

**Other Councillors Present**

Councillors: Charlotte Haitham Taylor, Ian Pittock and Tim Holton, Chairman Overview & Scrutiny Management Committee

**Officers Present**

Tricia Harcourt, Senior Democratic Services Officer  
Felicity Budgen, Interim Head of Social Care and Intervention  
Judith Ramsden, Director of Children's Services  
Kathy Roberts, Service Manager Access and Inclusion  
Brian Grady, Head of Strategic Commissioning  
Gillian Ward, HR Business Partner (for Item 6)  
Gill Walker, Service Manager, Standards in Learning  
Joe Kidman, Detective Superintendent, Thames Valley Police (for Item 8)  
Linda York, Detective Chief Inspector, Thames Valley Police (for item 8)

**60. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were submitted from Chris Bowring, substituted by Malcolm Richards, and Shahid Younis.

**61. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 2 March 2015 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**62. DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest. Pauline Helliard-Symons confirmed that she was no longer doing consultancy work for CfBT Education Trust.

**63. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

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

**63.1 Lynn Boba has asked the Chairman for Children Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee the following question:**

**Question**

How do you plan to secure Earley places for all 29 children in catchment without places (mentioned in the strategy) with one expansion, considering you still need to follow waiting lists?

**Answer**

The Council can guarantee that any new capacity created in Earley would be intended to benefit Earley resident children, with the aim that children would not be diverted out of Earley. It is acknowledged though that there are significant challenges that must be addressed. Any plan to increase capacity in Earley will need to take account of a number of factors. The likely impact on diverted children will be one of the most important but the

plan also needs to be affordable, deliverable and create sustainable provision in the long term. Since the diverted children live in the designated areas of a number of schools, there is no single school where they would have priority as a right over children living outside the Earley area. Also, as children can be added to waiting lists (and those waiting lists must be re-ranked at that point) the impact of additional places cannot be known until the point of allocation. A single school site may though largely address these issues provided the scheme is affordable, deliverable and located so most Earley residents are sufficiently close to have priority over residents in other areas.

I know that you and other parents have been working with Brian Grady on this issue and hope that a satisfactory resolution can be found.

**63.2 Kathryn Mitchell has asked the Chairman for Children Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee the following question:**

**Question**

What happens if more children move in, meeting criterion C & D and bump some of the original 29 further down the lists?

**Answer**

The developing primary school provision strategy is looking closely at where primary places are required over the next three years. It will consider the likely impact of new families with children moving into the area (and it is acknowledged that one effect of new families moving into an area could be that children already on waiting lists will have a lower waiting list rank as a result). Further movement into the designated area of an already oversubscribed school would not though necessarily prompt further action relating to that school. Any new provision needs to be deliverable, affordable and sustainable in the long term and will therefore need to be focused, probably on one school.

As noted above the immediate impact of further applications for places could be that children on the waiting list of a particular school would drop to a lower position. In accordance with the statutory School Admissions Code (the Code) allocations must be made in accordance with the determined admissions arrangements (section 2.7 of the Code) and every time a new child is added to the waiting list the list must be "ranked again in accordance with the published oversubscription criteria" (section 2.14 of the Code). This means that where children meet the requirements of a higher criterion they will have a higher priority than a child meeting the requirements of a lower priority criterion. Within each criterion the "tie breaker" – radial distance from the school site - determines an individual child's rank or priority relative to other children in that criterion.

I know that you and other parents have been working with Brian Grady, on this issue and hope that a satisfactory resolution can be found.

**64. MEMBER QUESTION TIME**

There were no Member questions.

**65. DELIVERING EFFECTIVE SAFEGUARDING SERVICES FOR CHILDREN - RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION STRATEGY UPDATE**

The Committee received and considered a report, set out on Agenda pages 13 to 18 giving an update on the impact of the recruitment and retention strategy for Social Workers.

Gillian Ward, HR Business Partner presented the report, which gave details of the process and the outcomes of the recent recruitment campaign in Australia. Five senior social workers have successfully been recruited and are due to start over in the next few weeks. A comprehensive integration programme has been set up to make sure they are welcomed and settled in the UK, as it is crucial that they are retained. The relocation costs they can claim are at the same level and on a similar basis, to that given to someone relocating within the UK.

Felicity Budgen also reported that they have been successful in recruiting newly qualified social workers, who are attracted to Wokingham by the training/development package that is being offered. The turnover of social workers has now reduced for 33% to 9%.

**RESOLVED:** That the update report on the recruitment and retention strategy which is crucial to delivering effective safeguarding services for children be noted and that Officers be thanked for the work that had been done to address these problems.

**66. DELIVERING EFFECTIVE SAFEGUARDING SERVICES FOR CHILDREN - EARLY YEARS HELP AND INNOVATIONS PROGRAMME UPDATE**

The Committee received and considered a report, set out on Agenda pages 19 to 22 giving an update on the progress of the Early Help and Innovations Programme and the development of the Early Help Hub.

Brain Grady, Head of Commissioning, explained that Wokingham is now in Phase 2 of the Programme to ensure that the model is fully embedded in every day practice. This new way of working in partnership with families within the clear practice framework has led to the development of an Early Help Hub as part of the 'front door initiative'. This is a multi-agency group, which works with families to signpost to the relevant services where targeted intervention support is needed.

**RESOLVED:** That the update report on the Early Help and Innovations Programme, as part of delivering effective safeguarding services for children be noted, and that a report on the impact/outcomes of the programme be presented to the October meeting of the Committee.

**67. DELIVERING EFFECTIVE SAFEGUARDING SERVICES - DEVELOPMENT OF A MULTI AGENCY SAFEGUARDING HUB (MASH)**

The Committee received and considered a report, set out on Agenda pages 23 to 26, giving an update on the development of a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) in Wokingham.

Felicity Budgen, Head of Social Care and Intervention, presented the report and explained that MASHs are part of a national initiative and that a decision had been made that all the six Berkshire Local Authorities would set up individual MASHs. Following work on the Early Help and Innovations Programme in Wokingham where the Triage and Early Help Hubs have been developed, Wokingham is in a good position to set up a MASH.

MASHs are multi-agency hubs which provide information sharing arrangements across all agencies involved in safeguarding, ie police, health, local authority. Their work should lead to the early identification and understanding of potential risk to a child, young person or vulnerable adult, so that the best decision can be made about any intervention necessary.

The Officers from the Thames Valley Police explained that although the development of the individual MASHs is in its infancy, Project and Programme Managers have been appointed to link practice across Berkshire. The Local Authority has appointed a development manager to work with the hub. The heart of the process is to protect confidentiality, but to share pieces information, which when added up may indicate there is problem which may show a child in need.

During the discussion the following comments/clarifications were made:

- All information given is recorded and considered, even hearsay, although action may not be required;
- MASH does not create new information it just share information already held by the various agencies;
- Thames Valley Police are already one of the Council's strategic partners, making it easier to set up a local MASH;
- As well as the 6 MASHs across Berkshire there will be one covering the whole of the area where information can be exchanged on a wider basis, improving the existing partnership working across all the Local Authorities;
- National guidance requires the passing on of information if families move to other Local Authority areas;
- Clinical Commissioning Groups are engaged in the MASH Strategic Implementation Board, so GPs and hospitals are involved;
- It is known that incidents of sexual exploitation do occur in the Borough , but there is multi-agency support in place through the Thames Valley Police, and Children's Social Care and individuals have been identified and protected.. Local Safeguarding Children Board has commissioned training for those involved. There is no evidence of the involvement of gangs, but there is a need to remain vigilant to possible internet based exploitation by individuals;
- The risk of radicalisation would be one of the issues raised via the MASHs, where understanding a whole range of risks is part of the work;
- The Thames Valley Police and Children's Services strategic group has a strategy in place to recognise vulnerability, with the preventative Early Help agenda to ensure the right capacity and resources are in place.

**RESOLVED:** That the update report on the development of a multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) be noted and that Officers be thanked for the work that is now being done which gives reassurance that information on vulnerable children is now being shared.

#### **68. DRAFT PRIMARY SCHOOL PROVISION STRATEGY 2015-2018**

The Committee received and considered a report,, set out on Agenda pages 27 to 34, giving an update on the draft Primary School Provision Strategy (2015-2018).

Brain Grady, Head of Commissioning, indicated that the previous three year strategy had identified shortfalls and investment had been made to meet the predicted demand. This strategy was for the next three years and has identified that there are or will be shortfall in the number of Reception places. There are three 'hot spot' areas of concern: in Earley, Woodley and the South West. The shortfall in Earley came to light this year and around 30 parents did not get places at any of the schools they had applied for. The demand shift this year had not been predicted and Internal Audit have been checking the process. This issue is considered in more detail under the next item.

During the discussion the following comments were made:

- From parents' point of view it appears that they have not been given freedom of choice;
- This type of blip may occur in other areas in future, are we in a position to deal with it?
- There were sufficient places in the wider Earley area, but some of the places at the less popular schools had been allocated to those living in Reading Borough because places were not filled by Wokingham Borough residents;
- As Earley is an established area now, with a lot of buy-to-let properties there are a lot of young families moving in and out. Is this trend being looked at in other areas?
- Lessons are being learned and the model is being finessed, but looking at Estate Agent data was not very helpful;

The report indicated that a task and finish group is being set up to give Members the opportunity to oversee the development and implementation of the Strategy, made up as follows:

- Chairman - Deputy Executive Member for Children's Services
- The Executive Member for Children's Services;
- Ward Members from the three 'hotspot' areas;
- A minority party Member
- A Member from the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

**RESOLVED:** That the report on the draft Primary School Provision Strategy (2015-2018) be noted and that Ken Miall be appointed as the Committee's representative on the task and finish group.

## **69. PRIMARY PLACE PLANNING AND ALLOCATION PROCESS**

The Committee received and considered a report, set out on Agenda pages 35 to 40, detailing the supply and allocation of Reception places in Earley schools, which had been prepared following a scrutiny request referred by the Overview and Management Committee to look at the pupil place planning and processes for the allocation of places.

The Chairman said that there was a genuine concern amongst Members and Officers about what had happened in Earley this year. It appears that there was an increased rate in the movement of young families into the area, which had not been predicted. The area was such that older families were moving out releasing the homes for families with young children.

Brian Grady, Head of Commissioning, presented the report and pointed out that unfortunately some parents in Earley had expressed preferences for four local schools but had not been allocated a place any of them, so had been diverted to schools outside the area. Also, some parents had not used all their preferences which meant they had to be allocated schools outside the area. Once the current issues had been raised, Officers moved quickly to understand the problem and have been working with a group of the affected parents to find a solution.

The report includes the initial findings of the Internal Audit service which had been commissioned to review school place planning and school place projection model. The school projection models and data were tested and validated. No significant errors in either the Primary or Secondary Projection Models were identified and that the Council presently had sufficient school places to meet the requirements across the Borough. Future roll growth is predicting that Reception Year will peak in 2016/17 and then decline. However there is a need to create additional capacity in Earley to meet the short term need.

One of the immediate actions has been to test the entrance requirements for 2016/17 and the Admissions Team have been working with other departments to consider whether or not offers are based on misleading information.

During the discussion, the following comments/clarifications were made:

- There were different 'hotspots' when the first strategy was prepared 3/4 years ago;
- Are Wokingham residents given priority over Reading Borough residents? Applications from other areas are dealt with in same manner as those from Wokingham residents. If there are places available for non-designated area applicants, they will be allocated based on radial distance, from the school, so Reading residents living close to the boundary may be allocated a place;
- Overall more Reading Borough residents are given places in Wokingham, than in the other direction. The shortfall of places in adjoining local authorities affects the sufficiency provision in Wokingham;
- admission arrangements have to comply strictly with the national policy framework and can only be changed after a consultation process.
- The consultation on the 2017/18 arrangements may include looking at developing shared designated areas in Earley. Also the possibility of allowing Earley residents to put down 6 preferences is being investigated with the Schools Adjudicator;
- Parents should be encouraged to complete the four preferences allowed, but they cannot be forced to do so;
- It is hoped that schools and Members will work to get that message out to parents; Admissions Officers are not allowed to influence parents.

In relation to the issue in Earley of reported 'fraudulent' applications, they were not investigated in those terms, but were identified in the light of misleading information included on applications in relation to the residence requirements. The issue of people moving close to popular schools on a temporary basis or giving a relative's address in order to secure a place has been investigated and some places have been withdrawn, with places filled from the waiting list. A policy framework to allow for better checks and tougher sanctions is being looked into.

It will not be possible to create additional places in Earley for September 2015, as bulge classes require the consent of Headteachers and all sites have significant challenges, which need to be addressed. So the parents currently affected by the short fall in places at the popular schools in Earley, will have to take up the places in the alternative schools offered, but the Strategy is looking to provide additional places in Reception and Year 1 in 2016. This is a compromise solution which has been worked on with the affected parents and should give them the opportunity to move their children back to local Earley schools for Year 1 in September 2016.

The Chairman thanked the parents who had been working with Brian Grady. Officers assured Members that they were working to provide enough places for Wokingham children.

**RESOLVED:** That the information provided in the report looking at the supply and allocation of Reception places in Earley schools for September 2015 be noted, and that the Committee had been reassured that the problems identified were being addressed.

## **70. SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS AND DISABILITY (SEND) - IMPLEMENTATION BOARD**

The Committee received and considered a report, set out on Agenda pages 41 to 50, outlining the key work strands undertaken by Wokingham Borough Council in the delivery of the Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) reforms and the progress made within each.

Brain Grady presented the report and highlighted that the information provided demonstrates the progress made in delivery of the reforms which will ensure that all children and young people and their families will benefit from the new legislation within the Children's Act at the earliest opportunity. He pointed out that the key work strands approach has received excellent feedback from the Department for Education on recent inspection visits, and all key deadlines have been met.

**RESOLVED:** That the report outlining the key work strands undertaken by Wokingham Borough Council in the delivery of the Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) reforms and the progress made within each be noted.

## **71. SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS AND DISABILITY (SEND) REFORMS - FRAMEWORK FOR DISABILITY STRATEGY**

The Committee received and considered a report, set out on Agenda pages 51 to 56 detailing the framework for the development of a strategy for the services for children with a disability.

Judith Ramsden explained that this was a refresh of the strategy, the aim of which is to identify and steer service development for children and young people with disabilities. It is part of a family of strategies setting out the way in which the Council will support and children/young people and their families.

In answer to a question about the financial impact, Officers responded that changing the approach towards more local provision should save money as it would reduce the number of children having to be placed in out of Borough settings. A refreshed approach is being worked on, with the ambition of accessing appropriate funding from Health and the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant to give a comprehensive package.

**RESOLVED:** That the report detailing the framework for the development of a strategy for the services for children with a disability be noted.

## **72. RESPONSE TO MINISTER'S CONSULTATION REGARDING FREE NURSERY PLACES**

The Committee received and considered a verbal report from the Chairman on the proposal by the Government to increase the provision of free nursery places. She said that the Government was going to consult on the proposal to increase the number of hours of free nursery provision for 3 and 4 year olds in September 2016, from 15 hours per week for 38 weeks to 30 hours per week.

The issue of concern that has come to light is that some of the independent and private providers are currently struggling to meet their costs in providing the 15 free hours, and can only create the extra income needed to survive by charging those people who currently buy additional hours of provision. If the free hours were to increase there would be little or no requirement for parents to buy extra hours, so the income for the settings would not cover their costs. Providers would have to increase their charges for any

additional hours bought. It has been suggested that Local Authorities could help settings in financial difficulties by offering discounted business rates. Wokingham is a high cost area, and is in competition for staff with adjoining areas which are able to pay more.

Gill Walker, Service Manager Standards in Learning, confirmed that the funding is at a national rate which is passed on to the providers via the Local Authority for the sessions they provide. The Council tries to give as much 'upfront' funding as it can, however the level of funding per place will not rise. Officers had carried out a sufficiency audit for the provision of the free 15 hours, and are now renewing the audit to gather information on the provision for 30 hours; to understand the current capacity and the potential level of need. Members are asked to encourage the providers to give the information requested so that a full picture can be obtained.

If the Early Years settings are not able or willing to meet the demand for the free 30 hours, there would be an impact on the Local Authority, as the responsibility to meet the demand sits with them. There is little prospect of additional funding coming from either the central Children's Services budget or the Dedicated Schools Grant funded budgets.

The Chairman suggested that the Committee should send a response to the consultation highlighting the specific issues in Wokingham as follows:

**RESOLVED:** that response to the Government's consultation on increasing the provision of free nursery places for 3 and 4 year olds from 15 hours per week to 30 hours per week for 38 weeks each year be sent in the following terms:

'The costs of running a nursery/early years setting is higher in Wokingham Borough than on other areas of the country, because of the rising costs of rent. The allocated funding does not cover their basic costs, so some settings are facing the dilemma of having to increase the charge to those families who currently buy additional hours; some of whom only have one working parent, or who might not be able to afford increased costs.

To allocate more from the DSG would take funding away from all other schools in the Borough. Wokingham receives the lowest per pupil funding in the country.

The Local Authority is not in a position to top up funding for nursery/early years places from central budgets, as it is one of the lowest funded Unitary Authorities in the country.'

### **73. SCHOOLS PERFORMANCE - OFSTED REPORTS**

The Committee received and considered summaries of recent Ofsted inspection reports in respect of the following schools, set out on Agenda pages 57 to 72:

- Lambs Lane Primary School – overall rating 3 'requires improvement', previous rating 3 'requires improvement'
- Shinfield Infant and Nursery School – overall rating 2 'good', previous rating 2 'good'
- Loddon Primary School – subject survey – Mathematics overall effectiveness 'good'
- Maiden Erlegh School – overall rating 2 'good', previous rating 1 'outstanding'
- Bearwood Primary School – outcome of the first monitoring inspection following judgement in December 2014 that the school required improvement. Effective action is being taken to tackle the areas requiring improvement; three further actions required
- Lambs Lane Primary School – outcome of the first monitoring inspection following judgement in February 2015 that the school required improvement. Effective action is being taken to tackle the areas requiring improvement; one further action required.



It was noted that the reports had made good comments about the support that the Local Authority was giving to the schools that required improvement. In relation to Lambs Lane, Officers reported that recent change to the Governing Body had meant the school was now in a position to deliver challenge and support. It was disappointing that Maiden Erlegh had changed from 'outstanding' to 'good'.

In response to a question, Officers confirmed that there were no schools in the Borough who were in the position of being forced to become an academy because of poor performance.

**RESOLVED:** That the recently published Ofsted reports be noted.

#### **74. CHILDREN'S SERVICES PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

The Committee received and considered a report, giving details of the Children's Services performance indicators in the Balanced Score Card, relating to the following headings: Keeping Children Safe; Narrowing the Gap; and Opportunities for All, as set out on Agenda pages 73 to 80.

The Committee were pleased to note that Indicator 5 – *Safeguarding - % of children subject to a child Protection Plan for the second, or subsequent time* was now green, and that all other indicators were green.

**RESOLVED:** That the report giving details of the Children's Services performance indicators in the Balanced Score Card be noted.

#### **75. COMMITTEE'S FORWARD PROGRAMME**

The Committee received and considered its current work programme, set out on Agenda pages 81 to 88, and agreed the following amendments:

- October – add an update report on the Early Help Programme, moved from September
- October – add an update report on the School Improvement and Delivery Model
- December – add an update report on the implementation of the Primary Place Strategy
- December – add an update report on the MASH
- February – add an update report on the outcome of the Recruitment and Retention Strategy

*(Subsequently an update on the development of the Draft Primary School Places Strategy was added to the September meeting, as the Strategy would now be going to the October Executive Committee meeting)*

#### **76. DELIVERING EFFECTIVE SAFEGUARDING SERVICES FOR CHILDREN - CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE ANNUAL REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the Children's Social Care Annual Review, which had been included as an urgent item and circulated separately.

Felicity Budgen presented the report, which summarised some of the successes and challenges within Children's Social Care. There have been improvements and the evidence base suggests that the welfare of vulnerable children is effectively safeguarded.

Several things are underpinning the improvements:

- The recruitment of permanent staff;
- Training given to all staff
- The development of the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)
- The new ways of working within the Positive Choice Framework.

Areas requiring further action and development include: the need to look at the quality of consistency of approach; and robust record keeping. The permanency of managers and the new tools given to social workers to do their jobs will assist in embedding the improvements.

In response to a question, Section 20 was explained, as follows:

Section 20 is in relation to children who become 'looked after children' voluntarily with their parents' consent, not via a court order. There is new guidance that children should not be left in these voluntary arrangements, long term. Decisions about the permanency of their care should be made at an early opportunity to give legal certainty to their future. Within the Borough, 12 months ago there were 44 such children. However no concerns had been raised when this situation was last checked.

It was noted that within the report, there had been more compliments than complaints. The teams should be congratulated for the improvements made.

**RESOLVED:** That the Children's Social Care Annual Review 2014/15 be noted, and that the areas for development identified within the report be monitored on a quarterly basis by the Quality Assurance Manager to inform the next Annual Review report which will be presented to the July meeting of the Committee in 2016.