

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 21 JANUARY 2020 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.30 PM

Committee Members Present

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

Officers Present

Luciane Bowker, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist
Nick Hammond, Service Manager Intelligence and Impact
Carol Cammiss, Director of Children's Services
Gillian Cole, Service Manager Schools
Adam Davis, Assistant Director Children's Social Care
Sal Thirlway, Assistant Director Learning Achievement and Partnerships

40. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Councillor Prue Bray, she was substituted by Councillor Sarah Kerr.

41. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 7 January 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Members wished it to be recorded that in relation to the comment about women only swimming sessions; the complaint had been received by men, they had complained that they were not getting the same treatment as women (men only swimming sessions).

42. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

43. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

44. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

45. CHILDREN'S SERVICES PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The Committee received the Children's Services Performance Indicators report which was set out in agenda pages 15-24. The Committee also received a tabled report with updates. The report was presented by Nick Hammond, Service Manager Intelligence and Impact.

Members were pleased to note that the report included the trends and other requests made by the Committee.

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

- Members asked why were the Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP) still at 14% of completion within the 20 week target if the service was now fully staffed, and asked how many children this related to;

- Nick Hammond, stated that since quarter 2 the service had received 80 new requests and turned around 106 plans at the same time. The issue was dealing with the backlog and new requests at the same time;
- Sal Thirlway, Assistant Director for Learning Achievement and Partnerships reiterated that the service was having to deal with a backlog and cope with ongoing requests at the same time. He stated the timescales were improving;
- Councillor Kerr referred to the minutes of the September 2019 meeting where the Committee was told that the service would achieve the national picture of 58% by December 2019. She believed the service should strive for 100% and she asked what were the barriers stopping the service from achieving better timescales;
- Sal Thirlway stated that the service was working towards clearing the backlog, some of the measures currently being undertaken would be discussed later on, during the SEND Strategy item discussions;
- In response to a question Nick Hammond stated that currently there were 66 open EHCP assessments, 8 of those were over the 20 week target;
- Sal Thirlway stated that back in September the service had underestimated the capacity that was needed to clear the backlog;
- Sal Thirlway stated that the service was aware that the curve of improvement was not quick enough, however it was important not to compromise quality over timeliness;
- Members were interested to know about the statistics around appeal cases against the Local Authority. Nick Hammond stated that there had been 16 mediation cases in the current financial year. Officers agreed to inform the Committee about the outcomes of the mediation cases;
- Sal Thirlway stated that some parents were in agreement to miss the timescales in order to ensure the quality of plans;
- Sal Thirlway stated that there was now more involvement of health professionals, and quicker provision of health information to enable the service to achieve the target;
- In response to a question Nick Hammond stated that there was no deadline for the completion of the Early Help review;
- In relation to dashboard 3, Members were concerned that in order to achieve the target, the quality of assessments might have been compromised. Members were also concerned about the percentage of repeat referrals. Adam Davis, Assistant Director Children's Social Care stated that there was no correlation and that the quality had not been compromised;
- In relation to dashboard 4, Adam Davis stated that visits were taking place within the timeframe, however they were sometimes not being recorded within the timeframe;
- In response to a question in relation to children protection visits, Adam Davis stated that some families might receive unannounced visits, this depended on each case and the risk factors. He stated that visits were set every two weeks if necessary, however if more frequency was needed, the service would look at other strategies;
- In response to a question Adam Davis stated that the recording of visits consisted in a comprehensive report, not just recording the date of the visit. He stated that it was possible that the recording of visits had not taken place at the point in time when the report was run, therefore missing the deadline;
- In response to a question Adam Davis stated that any change in Social Worker inevitably had an impact on the children;
- In relation to dashboard 6, Nick Hammond stated that there were various ways to collect information on care leavers who were Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET), mainly around the work undertaken by Children's Services;
- Adam Davis stated that the service had been working with Housing to ensure that all care leavers were placed in suitable accommodation. There was currently one care

leaver in a B&B accommodation, and housing was looking to find a solution for this case;

- In relation to dashboard 7, Nick Hammond clarified that 49 was the number of children and not the number of incidents; he apologised for the misinformation at the last meeting;
- Councillor Mickleburgh was interested to know if there were any gender issues, risks or trends in the children missing from home/care statistics;
- Members were interested to know the number of Wokingham children who had gone missing from other local authorities; Officers agreed to report back;
- Adam Davis stated that the service was using social media and LinkedIn to spread the message about Social Worker recruitment. The service had recently made six job offers and was looking at other potential candidates;
- In response to a question Adam Davis stated that the service did look at employing graduates. However, it was important to balance the number of newly qualified Social Workers and experienced Social Workers; and
- Councillor Kerr was interested to know the split across departments in the use of agency workers.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Officers would provide the following additional information:
 - a) the number of EHCP mediation cases and their outcomes;
 - b) the number of children missing from home/care who were placed with other local authorities;
 - c) The number of agency workers split across departments; and
- 2) The report be noted.

Children's Services Dashboard update (tabled at the meeting)

46. CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD REVIEW

The Committee received the Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) Review report which was set out in agenda pages 25-36. The report was presented by Adam Davis, Assistant Director for Children's Social Care and Early Help.

Councillor Kerr stated that the proposal showed limited involvement of Foster Carers. In her opinion the Local Authority should be reaching out to Foster Carers, especially in relation to receiving the views of young children who may not be able to articulate themselves very well. Adam Davis agreed to reflect on this.

Councillor Kerr asked Officers about the best way for Councillors to facilitate conversations with Children In Care (CIC) and Foster Carers at social events.

Adam Davis stated that there were various events during the year that Corporate Parent Members could attend to meet the CIC, such as the Christmas party and the summer event. However, the attendance by Councillors last year was low. Councillors could also get involved in one to one visits with the CIC's Advocate where they could explain about their role to children in care and care leavers and receive feedback.

Members agreed that CPB needed reforming and were pleased with the proposal to improve the Board.

Some Members expressed concern that with the reduced number of meetings of the Board might not allow sufficient time to review all the reports that needed to be analysed. Adam Davis stated that the service was planning the forward plan for CPB to ensure that reports were presented to the Board at the right times in the year.

Adam Davis stated that the new structure aimed to facilitate communication and develop relationships with the CIC.

Some Members expressed concern that the operational board would create extra work for Officers. Adam Davis stated that this would not be an issue because there would be two less meeting of CPB which would free up Officers' time.

Councillor Croy stated that Councillor Rachel Burgess, who was a Member of CPB, had expressed concern that she had repeatedly asked for reports and not received them.

Members would like to continue to receive updates on the development of the proposal.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The Committee would receive regular updates on the work of Corporate Parenting Board; and
- 2) The report be noted.

47. SCHOOL PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND OFSTED REPORTS

Gillian Cole, Service Manager Schools presented the Schools Performance Indicators and Ofsted reports report.

Gillian Cole stated that since the last meeting Gorse Ride Infant School had undergone an Ofsted inspection. This had been a Section 8 inspection and the school had sustained Good.

Members asked Officers for their comments on the recently published Ofsted report in respect of the Northern House School. Sal Thirlway, Assistant Director for Learning Achievement and Partnerships stated that the school had not changed its status, this had been a monitoring report. It was agreed that this report would be discussed in the part 2 session of the meeting.

In response to a question Gillian Cole stated that Gorse Ride Infant School was having to adapt to changes in demographics as a result of re-generation. Schools in general were keen to get extra resources and a broader range of services; this was part of ongoing discussions.

Members wished to congratulate the Headteacher of Gorse Ride Infant School on this achievement.

Gillian Cole stated that the schools performance indicators would be available for the next meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

48. SEND STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

Sal Thirlway present the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Strategy report.

Some of the points made by Sal Thirlway are listed below:

- The SEND inspection had identified six areas for development, these were listed in the report;
- The work timeframe was as laid out in the report;
- The SEND Strategy was one of the key areas that had been identified;
- Task and Finish Groups had been set up to address each of the six areas for development and improvement;
- It was recognised that the SEND Strategy needed to be developed in conjunction with the stakeholders; this strategy was being co-produced with stakeholders and it was a working document;
- Five key strands of work had been identified within the strategy: improving data, improved engagement with partners, improved transition arrangements (in particular from childhood to adulthood), improved provision and co-production activity;
- There was an aspiration and commitment to move towards partnership work with stakeholders;
- An action plan had been developed to deliver the strategy.

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

- Members wished to receive an update on the Strategy and Task and Finish Groups at the September meeting;
- In response to a question Sal Thirlway stated that some families decided to get private reports because of the timeliness issue, others because they were in disagreement with the report results;
- With regards to the timeliness of Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP), Members asked if parents who could afford private reports for therapy were jumping the queue. Sal Thirlway stated the service was trying to avoid that from happening. However, it was important to be careful to not ignore those reports and increase parents' frustration;
- Sal Thirlway stated that addressing the issue of timeliness of reports would reduce parents propensity to seek private assessments;
- In response to a question Sal Thirlway stated that it was necessary to base decisions on evidence, that was the reason why the strategy was investigating this issue further;
- In response to a question Sal Thirlway stated that SEND Voices Wokingham was involved in the development of the strategy, this was one example of collaborative work;
- Sal Thirlway stated that the service had facilitated half-day sessions with partners, and also a national speaker had been invited to present to the service and partners;
- In response to a question about engagement with parents, Sal Thirlway stated that parents would receive a post planning questionnaire, which would help the service to understand how the parents were feeling and this information would be fed back to the task and finish group;
- In response to a question Sal Thirlway stated that the service was benchmarking against other local authorities as well as looking into the Council's own key performance indicators; the service also used the Personal Outcome Evaluation Tool (POET) to measure its performance;
- Councillor Kerr was interested to know how schools, colleges and academies were held into account. Sal Thirlway stated that SEND was a challenge for many schools.

It was important to support schools and promote inclusion; schools were held into account through the schools improvement service;

- In response to a question Sal Thirlway stated that most schools wanted to be inclusive of SEND; some of the challenges was the growth of SEND and complex needs and greater expectations from parents and carers;
- Sal Thirlway stated that the Council had a good relationship with the Regional Schools Commissioner, they were working in tandem to achieve the best results for the children;
- Members asked for an update on the proposal to build a new special school. Sal Thirlway stated that this would be a joint venture with Reading and West Berkshire local authorities. The site for the school was in the process of being identified within Wokingham, the school would have 150 places. This bid had not yet been signed by the Department for Education (DfE), therefore he could not give the timeframe yet;
- Members asked if there was any documentation about the bid which was public available that they could receive. Sal Thirlway agreed to investigate and report back;
- The Chairman referred to the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) report which was presented to the previous meeting, which stated that the numbers for SEND were decreasing in Wokingham. Sal Thirlway stated that the information contained the JSNA report looked at a five year trend, there was no breakdown year by year and this masked the information. The numbers had gone up in the last 18 months, but were not as high as they were five years ago;
- Members asked if there were any signs of hard to reach groups. Carol Cammiss, Director of Children's Services stated that girls with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) were more difficult to diagnose and were probably under represented; and
- In response to a question Sal Thirlway stated that a lot of work was undertaken in Early Years to identify traits early.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The Committee would receive an update on the SEND Strategy and Task and Finish Groups in September;
- 2) The report be noted.

49. WOKINGHAM YOUNG CARERS SERVICE

The Committee received the Young Carers report which was set out in agenda pages 37-50. Sal Thirlway and Adam Davis presented the report.

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

- Councillor Kerr stated that the service offered to young carers seemed good, she was interested to know more about the accessibility and engagement of the service;
- Sal Thirlway stated that there were group activities as well as one to one activities which were offered. Some young people's responsibilities were such that they could not attend social activities, others liked the social activities as it offered release;
- Councillor Kerr asked why 37% of referrals had been declined by families, she was concerned that the service may have been declined by the family and not by the young carer who may need the help. Sal Thirlway stated that he would ask the report writer to answer this question;
- Councillor Mickleburgh asked for more information about the young carer at school award, and he also asked if the rapid increase in numbers indicated that some young carers were not being identified;

- Sal Thirlway stated that there was a lot of work being undertaken with schools helping them identify traits and signs that children may be caring for someone in their family;
- Sal Thirlway would ask the report writer to respond the question about the school award;
- Councillor Croy was surprised to note that there were no referrals from GPs (page 44) and asked if there was any engagement with GP's. Sal Thirlway would ask the report writer about this; and
- Members were interested to know if there was a correlation with gender in the statistics, Sal Thirlway stated that there was no gender imbalance.

Members agreed that the unanswered questions would be referred to the report writer Lesley Buckland, Commissioning Specialist People's Services.

RESOLVED That the report be noted and that the unanswered questions would be forwarded to Lesley Buckland.

50. FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered its Forward Plan as set out in agenda pages 51-52.

Gillian Cole confirmed that the schools key performance indicators would be available for the next meeting. Members reminded Officers that the Committee had requested data around permanent and fixed term exclusions in schools (and academies if possible).

Members decided to add a meeting at the end of March to discuss the Children and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing. It was agreed that HOSC Members would be invited to join this meeting. *Subsequently 31 March 2020 was identified as a suitable date.*

Councillor Croy stated that he would be interested to know more about the appeals process in the Council.

Members agreed to receive a written reply on the question about the reason that the take up of apprenticeships was so low in the Borough.

Councillor Kerr stated that in view of the fact that the Local Authority was not able to answer questions relating to academies, the Regional Schools Commissioner should be invited to attend a meeting to talk about academies. Members were in agreement and it was decided that this should be a standing item in the forward plan. The Regional Schools Commissioner would be invited once in every municipal year. Members were interested to know more about quality assurance mechanisms for academies.

The Chairman stated she would be looking at the forward plan for the next municipal year and asked Members to suggest items to the Committee. The following items were identified:

- Overview of appeals against the service;
- School places
- School transport and school transport appeals

51. 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.

52. SCHOOLS CAUSING CONCERN - PART 2

The report was discussed in a part 2 report.