

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON 5 NOVEMBER 2020 FROM 7.00 PM TO 10.56 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Alison Swaddle (Chairman), Andy Croy, David Hare, Pauline Helliar-Symons, Abdul Loyes, Ken Miall, Andrew Mickleburgh and Malcolm Richards

Other Councillors Present

Councillors: Rachel Bishop-Firth, Jim Frewin, Guy Grandison and Graham Howe

Others Present

Catherine Turton-Ryz, Regional Lead in the Regional Schools Commissioner Office for North West London South Central England

Andy Fitton, Assistant Director of Joint Commissioning NHS Berkshire West CCG

Officers Present

Luciane Bowker, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist

Gillian Cole, Service Manager Schools

Adam Davis, Assistant Director Children's Social Care

Nick Hammond, Service Manager Intelligence and Impact

Sal Thirlway, Assistant Director Learning Achievement and Partnerships

Kim Wilkins, Senior Specialist Strategy and Commissioning

28. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillors Prue Bray and Jenny Cheng.

29. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 8 September 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman at a later date.

Matters arising

Councillor Mickleburgh asked for an update on the numbers of Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP) applied for but not issued (Performance Indicators dashboard 1), and also an update on apprenticeship opportunities for care leavers (Performance Indicators dashboard 6).

Sal Thirlway, Assistant Director for Learning Achievements and Partnerships apologised that this information was not included in the report and agreed to provide the data outside of the meeting and in future reports.

30. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

31. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

31.1 Beth Rowland had asked the Chairman of the Children's Services O&S Committee the following question but as she was unable to attend the meeting a written response was provided:

Question

Recent data showed that at the end of September 81% of children in England with EHCPs attending state-funded schools were in attendance, compared to 88% of all children. This difference was largely attributed to a number of pandemic related factors, including problems with infection control, timetables and transport.

For instance, in some areas children have not been permitted to return, or have been placed on reduced timetables. In some parts of the country SEND hubs are not fully functioning because guidance relating to the use of bubbles means they can no longer operate as mixed-year groups.

Please would the Chair of this Committee please outline the current situation with regard to these matters in Wokingham Borough?

Answer

Whilst I am aware that there have been issues nationally, we have worked closely with all of our schools and academies to ensure that every child who is able to attend school can since the reopening in September. Example attendance data for the week commencing 5th October shows the average attendance over the 5 day period for children with EHCP's was 91% for Wokingham schools. This compares with 92% of all children during the same period, showing no significant disparity in attendance with EHCP's as a factor.

It is the case that some children with EHCP's will be isolating either due to family members being symptomatic, the children themselves being symptomatic or having been part of the few closed bubbles that we have had across our schools, and this can also be said of all children who may not be in school at any given time.

At the beginning of the school term there were a small number of children whose normal transport were disrupted as we moved to different arrangements as a result of the pandemic, however the Corporate Transport Unit has worked closely with providers to minimise the impact of such changes.

We are not aware of children with EHCP's being refused return to schools in Wokingham, or any part time timetables that have been introduced specifically for children with EHCP's.

31.2 Morag Malvern has asked the Chairman of the Children's Services O&S Committee the following question:

Question

Nationally 60 per cent of schools have failed to sign up to the government scheme to claim free sanitary products. Period poverty is a source of inequality in our society, and it has been made worse by the financial instability in the Covid crisis, and the lack of access to sanitary products when not attending school in person. Without access to free sanitary products, girls are resorting to using toilet roll, newspaper or socks to cope with their periods, or missing school. Can the committee investigate what actions are being taken by the Council to alert primary and secondary schools to the free scheme and to monitor take-up of the scheme by schools, and report back?

Answer

Thank you for bringing this Government Scheme to my attention.

I am aware that all schools have recently been advised of the scheme, but shall ask that colleagues reiterate the availability of free sanitary products, and request that we review

the take up of the scheme by Wokingham schools in order to feedback to a future Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting.

Supplementary Question

Will the Borough Council be able to develop this into an ongoing relationship or is it more transactional?

Supplementary Answer

As you will be aware most of the secondary schools in our Borough are academy schools, to which we offer strong support to, and we do have a good relationship with those, but also we are all aware that girls from the age of 9 or 10 these days can have the need of sanitary wear offer at schools. Sal, would you be able to add more to the answer I gave?

Absolutely Chair, and thank you Mrs Malvern for bringing this supplementary question. As Councillor Swaddle said, we have recently contacted all schools within the Borough, maintained, academies and free schools to advise and signpost them to the government's scheme and encourage them to participate. We do have an ongoing relationship with all schools and as such we are able to go back to schools and ask about the take up of the scheme and understand how schools may have benefited from it. We are absolutely aware of the physical health implications for young women in relation to period, as well as the emotional impact on wellbeing of young women at that time if sanitary products are not available to them. We are encouraging schools and we will continue to work with schools and we will be following this up and hopefully report back to the Committee on the nature of that engagement and take up at some future point. I hope that responds to your supplementary in as much as our relationship is ongoing and it is not just a simple we will inform you once and job done, it is absolutely much more than that.

32. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

33. REGIONAL SCHOOLS COMMISSIONER UPDATE

The Committee welcomed Catherine Turton-Ryz, Regional Lead in the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) Office for North West London South Central England. Catherine Turton-Ryz had been invited to give an update on the work of the RSC in relation to Wokingham's academy schools.

Councillor Mickleburgh asked if the RSC had any concerns that some academies may not be responding as well as some others to the multiple challenges resulting from the pandemic. Is there any additional specific monitoring in place to detect if and when this might be the case? Are there additional and new supports in place for any academies that might be experiencing pandemic-related problems?

Councillor Mickleburgh also asked what did the RSC believe were the most common problems facing academies in our Borough and what additional actions are being taken to help tackle these problems.

Catherine Turton-Ryz stated that there were no particular concerns about the schools in the Wokingham Borough. She stated that attendance to school was closely monitored by the RSC, they also received soft intelligence from the education team in the Local Authority and would follow up any concerns.

Catherine Turton-Ryz stated that if there were significant concerns they would offer the Covid recovery school to school support package. This consisted of matching a school leader in the sector to dedicate an amount of time to help the school.

Catherine Turton-Ryz stated that the most common problem facing schools were: responding to outbreaks, reduced leadership, staff capacity and financial hardship. Schools were not being able to let out their premises like they used to, and were suffering with loss of earnings.

Councillor Mickleburgh asked the following questions:

- Particularly in view of current rising levels of financial hardship in many families, does the RSC monitor at all the costs that Academies impose on parents – particularly very expensive ‘school branded’ uniforms and sports clothing; and is this an area in which the RSC possesses any ‘levers’ to try to limit the impact on families?
- How would you characterise the working relationship between the RSC and our borough and in the spirit of ‘continuous improvement’, do you have specific areas and ways in which this working relationship could be strengthened?

Catherine Turton-Ryz stated that the RSC did not have levers to compel schools to choose good value for money uniform. It was up to the each trust board or governing body to source their uniforms. The RSC published on the website the best practice guidance on school uniform, it was clear in that guidance that schools should give high priority to the costs considerations. The RSC was urging schools to consider how to deal with uniform non-compliance which may come as a result of the financial difficulties being faced by many families as a result of the pandemic.

Catherine Turton-Ryz stated that the relationship with the local authority in Wokingham was very good and it was strengthened during the pandemic.

Councillor Richards asked how progress and performance at schools was going to be monitored this year, in view of the pandemic. Catherine Turton-Ryz stated that the exams next year were being delayed to June and July, and it was expected that the results would reflect the school attendance inconsistency which happened this year.

Sal Thirlway stated that in Wokingham there had been no school closures. He also stated that school attendance, including that of children with EHCP, was high. The school improvement team was working closely with schools in response to the pandemic.

Councillor Loyes asked if there were any particular concerns about Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) children in Wokingham schools. Catherine Turton-Ryz stated that there were no particular concerns locally. Sal Thirlway stated that the service was very mindful of the BAME community and the impact of the pandemic on both students and staff, they were working to minimise and mitigate risk as much as possible.

Councillor Swaddle asked about the process of selecting and choosing the trust provider for the Northern House School. Catherine Turton-Ryz stated that the school had now been transferred to the Chiltern Trust, and the RSC believed that this was very positive. Catherine stated that the matching process involved considering the trust’s expertise and ability to bring improvement to the school as well as having the capacity to take on the school. Catherine stated that Chiltern Trust already run a very successful school in Buckinghamshire and she was confident that they would be able to bring rapid improvement to the school.

Catherine Turton-Ryz stated that it was important for Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) academy schools to have a good relationship with the local authority, and she believed that there was a good relationship between the Chiltern Way Trust and Wokingham.

In response to a question Catherine Turton-Ryz stated that Ofsted visited 'inadequate' schools once a term, however because of the pandemic these visits had now stopped. She stated that Ofsted was independent of the Department for Education (DfE). She stated that because the school had now joined a new trust, she believed the school would not be formally inspected for two to three years. She stated that the RSC would hold regular conversations with the trust to monitor the school's progress.

Councillor Swaddle expressed concern that the Committee would not be receiving any evidence based information on the improvement of the school for two to three years. Sal Thirlway confirmed that there was a good working relationship between the local authority and Chiltern Way Trust and the service would continue to monitor the progress and improvement at the school. Sal pointed out that Chiltern Way had commenced the improvement programme at the school prior to them having formally taken on the school, showing commitment to the improvement agenda. Sal felt confident that the trust would be able to deliver the improvement that was expected.

Councillor Swaddle asked about the process of choosing Maiden Erlegh Trust to take on the new Oaktree SEND School. Catherine Turton-Ryz believed that this trust had been chosen because of its expertise and capacity. Sal Thirlway stated that there had been a competitive tender process to choose the trust and Wokingham had taken part in this process.

Councillor Swaddle stated that the Keys Academy Trust, which was a Church of England trust, ran a number of schools in the Borough. She asked if there was a religious implication on the schools being managed by this trust. Catherine Turton-Ryz stated that the trust had to sign a document stating that the education they provided was the same to church schools and community schools.

RESOLVED That the Regional Schools Commissioner update be noted.

34. CAMHS REVIEW

The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) Review report was presented by Andy Fitton, Assistant Director of Joint Commissioning NHS Berkshire West CCG and Kim Wilkins, Senior Specialist Strategy and Commissioning.

Members of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee were in attendance to participate in the discussions of this item.

Andy Fitton stated that the report contained the refreshed Future in Mind Local Transformation Plan (LTP). This report provided an overview of the achievements of the partnership with providers, the CCG and the local authority, and it also outlined of what still needed to be achieved and what the priorities were.

Andy Fitton highlighted the following points:

- The establishment of the first local Mental Health Support Team, providing early intervention and support service which was co-located in the community around the schools. A third of Wokingham Borough was currently covered by this new scheme, it was hoped that in time NHS England would fund more teams for Wokingham;
- There had been an increase in access to services, both for early intervention stage and for more specialist CAMHS. Referral rates continued to increase year on year;
- The training offer was much improved, both for schools and for Children's Services staff, it was important to be able to identify the need for intervention as early as possible;
- Seven priorities had been identified across the partnership. Particular attention was being given to meeting the emotional and mental health needs of Children In Care (CIC);
- Response to crisis was an area that was continuing to be developed;
- The development of response to eating disorders was continuing to be developed;
- During the Covid pandemic there had been a decrease in the number of referrals and an increase in the number of acute cases;
- Providers had been very quick to offer online solutions during the pandemic.

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

- Councillor Grandison was concerned about the waiting time for the treatment of anxiety and depression (page 19). He also wanted to know if there was any feedback on the usefulness of Kooth;
- Andy Fitton stated that the Kooth service had only been running for the last three months, he had not yet received any feedback but would report back when this information was available;
- Andy Fitton believed that the high waiting time for the treatment of anxiety and depression was likely to be because the demand for the service outstripped the capacity of the service. He offered to bring more information on this data to the Committee;
- In relation to the replacement of Willow House, Councillor Mickleburgh asked if the new provision was going to offer the same services and how many young people were placed out of area. He was also interested to know of data about eating disorders and self-harm and whether the new initiatives were having an impact on those conditions;
- Andy Fitton stated that Willow House was commissioned by NHS England and he suggested that the Committee ask them to comment on it;
- Andy Fitton stated that the self-harm data came through Public Health, he was not able to comment further. The numbers for eating disorders had been going up every year, but there was a quick response to young people with eating disorders;
- Councillor Mickleburgh asked how young people could access urgent care at the moment. He also asked about the waiting times for ADHD assessments and whether these assessments had been suspended;
- Andy Fitton stated that he was not aware that ADHD assessments had been suspended. He confirmed that wait times for ADHD were going up, and offered to confirm the average waiting time. However, reducing waiting times was related to capacity, and it was a challenge to recruit staff with the necessary specialism; it was also important to support people during the waiting time;
- Andy Fitton stated that very acute cases of crisis were dealt with by hospitals or the police, who were both able to deal with such cases. He also stated that there was a mental health help line which could be accessed by dialling 111;

- Councillor Hare asked if there was anything that the local authority could do to help reduce the waiting times of ADHD assessments. Andy Fitton stated that work to support the child could be initiated before a formal diagnosis, particularly at schools;
- In relation to anxiety and depression, Andy Fitton stated that it was important to support people at an early stage before their needs escalated;
- Councillor Bishop-Firth asked if there was a reason for the high levels of anxiety and depression in the Borough and if there were any particular groups which were at risk;
- Andy Fitton stated that Public Health would be able to provide a review on the issues raised around anxiety and depression;
- Councillor Helliars-Symonds expressed concern over the length of time children were having to wait for assessments. In view of the fact that intervention could start at schools before a formal diagnosis, she asked what training was being offered to teachers at schools;
- Andy Fitton stated that training was offered to schools. This consisted of two levels of training, one level was for the whole school and the other level was for key staff focusing on specific conditions;
- Sal Thirlway stated that the School Improvement Team worked alongside the Educational Psychology Team at schools developing programmes;
- Gillian Cole, Service Manager Schools stated that there were programmes being developed with schools. There was a Therapeutic Thinking programme and also the Wellbeing for Education programme. Senior leaders were being invited to attend two sessions where training material would be provided so that it could be cascaded back to schools. Other focused sessions were being planned for the spring;
- Councillor Helliars-Symonds asked if the offer of training extended to independent schools. Andy Fitton stated that training to independent schools was delivered on request, however there was an issue with capacity to contact them directly;
- Councillor Helliars-Symonds was interested to know if online services were as good as face-to-face services. Andy Fitton stated that there was no clear evidence yet, as this was a new way of delivering services. However, the initial feedback was mixed, it worked really well for some children and others preferred face-to-face. He envisaged that in the future that would be a mixed offer of online and face-to-face delivery.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The Committee would receive an update on the monitoring and evaluation of Kooth when available;
- 2) Andy Fitton would update the Committee on the waiting times for ADHD assessments and depression and anxiety treatments;
- 3) Public Health England would be invited to a future meeting to review self-harm, eating disorders, anxiety and depression amongst young people in the Borough;
- 4) The report be noted.

35. CHILDREN'S SERVICES PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The Performance Indicators report was presented by Nick Hammond, Service Manager Intelligence and Impact.

The following comments were made during the presentation and discussion of the report:

Dashboard Item 1 – Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP)

- Nick Hammond stated that there had been a slight dip in the percentage of plans issued within the 20 week period, but was still above statistical neighbours. He stated that in some cases parents had asked for additional time to feedback/submit evidence, in other cases professional reports had been received late and where schools could not be named in a plan, these had been delayed until such a time as they could be;
- Nick Hammond stated that the number of EHCPs were up 17% compared to this time last year;
- In response to a question Sal Thirlway stated the statistics in Q2 had been impacted by a couple of cases of children moving into the Borough from out of the area, where their plans had been started with another local authority; and also by one member of staff having to take time off due to a family bereavement;
- In response to a question Sal Thirlway stated that the figures showed an increase of 23 children out of Borough from Q1 to Q2. Nick Hammond added that the out of Borough figures reflected the fact that there were no colleges in Wokingham and sometimes children chose to go to college out of the Borough.

Dashboard Item 2 – Early Help

- Nick Hammond stated that the average length of time between referral and assessment completion had gone down, despite the significant increase in the number for referrals in Q2;
- Councillor Mickleburgh asked for an update on the internal review. Adam Davis, Assistant Director for Children’s Social Care stated that the Early Help strategy was waiting to be signed off, once that was completed there would be a task and finish group to look at the activity, but there had been a delay because of Covid.

Dashboard Item 3 – Children’s Social Care Front Door

- Nick Hammond stated that it was encouraging that the number of repeat referrals had gone down, especially given the current circumstances;
- Councillor Mickleburgh asked if the pandemic was having an impact in the number of repeat referrals and he also asked about the complexity of cases;
- Adam Davis stated that there had been an increase in the complexity of cases, but this was not linked to Covid;
- Councillor Loyes asked for more detail about the open cases mentioned on page 31. Nick Hammond stated that this referred to the service promptly closing cases where appropriate.

Dashboard Item 4 – Child Protection

- Nick Hammond stated that these figures related to the reduced number of referrals;
- Nick Hammond stated that the service had an internal non-statutory timescale of 10 working days for child protection visits, and there was a high percentage of visits occurring within the timescales. He pointed out that most visits were still being carried out face to face.

Dashboard Item 5 – Children In Care

- Nick Hammond stated that the percentage of visits to CIC within timescale remained stable. It was positive that there had been a decrease in the percentage of children who had more than one allocated social worker in the period;
- Adam Davis stated that some virtual visits had had to be carried out virtually for those children who were placed out of the area, in areas that were under strict Covid restrictions.

Dashboard Item 6 – Care Leavers

- Nick Hammond stated that the service was in touch with 91% of Care Leavers, this represented 84 out of 92. There had been a slight increase in Care Leavers who were Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET), it was believed that this was linked to the current situation;
- Councillor Mickleburgh asked what actions were being taken to support Care Leavers who were NEET. Adam Davis stated that the role of the Virtual Schools was extending to the ages of 16 to 21, the service was also looking into ways to ring fence apprenticeships to Care Leavers.

Dashboard Item 7 – Children Missing From Home/Care

- Nick Hammond stated that the number of children not currently on a school roll had decreased significantly when compared with this time last year and there had not been any permanent exclusions in the period;
- Councillor Swaddle asked that the narrative should state: ‘not on school roll or being educated at home’;
- Councillor Swaddle stated that Members would be interested to know the numbers in relation to elective home education and whether these numbers were going up due the current situation;
- Councillor Swaddle asked that Dashboard Item 7 be renamed in future as it now includes exclusions and EHE.

Dashboard Item 8 – Children’s Services Workforce

- Councillor Helliard-Symonds asked if the agency staff were long term staff. Adam Davis stated that some of them had been with the local authority for a long time, however the aspiration was to increase the number of permanent staff;
- Adam Davis stated that there was a recruitment and retention strategy, the service had recently undertaken a number of newly qualified social workers. He stated that it was important to create an attractive working environment to recruit more permanent social workers.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

36. CHILDREN'S SERVICES RESPONSE TO COVID-19

The Children’s Services Response to Covid-19 report was presented by Adam Davis.

Adam Davis stated that the report contained a review of how the service had operated since the lockdown in March and how the services continued to be delivered. He highlighted that the service was able to continue to offer sustained respite care during this time and undertake a children’s social care audit for quality assurance.

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

- Councillor Swaddle asked what the key learning points for the department during this time were. Adam Davis stated that it was noticeable how workers were able to quickly adapt to working from home and deliver services differently, keeping staff and children safe;
- Councillor Mickleburgh asked if there any particular concerns in relation to supporting schools during the next phase of the pandemic. He also asked about attendance rates and if there any groups or localities that were more affected by the pandemic;
- Sal Thirlway stated that schools provided data on attendance daily to the DfE, the attendance in the Borough was currently very good, in the range of 90%, this

compared well with neighbouring authorities. This data was not broken down in gender or localities;

- Councillor Grandison asked what support was being offered for parents of pre-school children. Adam Davis stated that the Early Help service has been offering support virtually to the families they were working with, this was a targeted service;
- Councillor Grandison asked how the local authority was supporting pre-schools and nursery settings. Sal Thirlway stated that support had been offered to all early years and childcare settings throughout the pandemic. Sal stated that where settings had to close temporarily parents had been helped to find alternative arrangements. Sal believed that two settings had closed during the pandemic but not as a result of the pandemic;
- Councillor Loyes asked how the service was being delivered to children with disabilities. Adam Davis stated that Bridges had remained open throughout the pandemic, and the Saturday club for children with disabilities was re-opening.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

37. SCHOOL PLACEMENTS SUFFICIENCY

The School Placements Sufficiency report was presented by Piers Brunning, Strategy and Commissioning Places Specialist.

Piers Brunning stated that the report presented four phases of school sufficiency planning: statutory primary, statutory secondary, post 16 and SEND provision.

During the presentation Piers Brunning highlighted the following points:

Primary Phase

- There had been sufficient places in 2020. All the schools were full in the Shinfield area, including the new school;
- There had been a raise in demand in Arborfield, Wokingham Town West and Woodley areas and a significant number of unfilled reception places in Earley, the South East and Wokingham Town East;
- In the long term there was tension between the underlying decreasing population trend in the population and the impact of new housing developments;
- There were overall pressures for places in Key Stage 2 (years 4 to 6);
- The impact of Covid-19 on demand for school places was not yet known.

Secondary Phase

- There was pressure for places for secondary school places, this year it has been necessary to offer 25 additional places in Emmbrook School for year 7. By the start of the academic year in September 2020, the number of children requiring secondary school places had fallen compared to the number on offer day. It was believed that this was as a result of parents choosing to send their children to independent schools;
- There were three schools in the Borough with surplus capacity, the Forest School having the largest number of surplus places;
- There was a historical challenge in projecting numbers in Wokingham because of cross Borough movement. However, the analysis indicated that there was no need to create an additional secondary school.

Post 16

- The immediate challenge was that there were two schools in the Borough for 11 to 16 year olds, so there could be a need for additional capacity for post 16 education, especially in view of the new housebuilding;
- A discussion with schools about the possible options for post 16 education would be undertaken.

SEND Provision

- There was an issue with raising numbers of children with EHCPs needing specialist education. A particular issue was in relation to young people being placed in expensive out of Borough independent non-maintained special schools;
- It was necessary to create more SEND places within the Borough.

Piers Brunning stated that the local authority used population projections provided by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), as described in the report.

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

- Councillor Helliard-Symonds asked if consideration was being taken in relation to the location of possible sixth form expansions;
- Piers Brunning stated that Wokingham town centre schools were being considered. St Crispin's School had permission to expand, should the capacity be needed. He stated that it was important to engage with schools about any potential investment;
- Councillor Helliard-Symonds asked if there enough demand to justify a potential investment in sixth form places in the Arborfield area;
- Piers Brunning stated that this was part of the discussion with school leaders, if Bohunt was to open a sixth form, this was likely to be successful in that area;
- Councillor Croy asked about the viability of the Forest School in view of the high number of vacancies at the school;
- Piers Brunning stated that the number of children coming from the primary phase was increasing, therefore it was expected that the numbers at the Forest would rise. However, there was an element of parental choice and there was concern;
- In response to a question Piers Brunning stated that if the Forest School were to change to a co-educational school, that would create an imbalance in the Borough, in relation to the Holt school being a girl school;
- Councillor Mickleburgh asked about the surplus places in reception classes in the Earley area and the potential to expand classes for other school years which were oversubscribed;
- Councillor Mickleburgh asked if there were concerns about teacher recruitment in the Borough;
- Gillian Cole stated that teacher recruitment was a challenge in the Borough, partly because Wokingham was very close to neighbouring authorities which had London weighting allowance, and also because of house prices. The local authority was aware of this issue and helped schools with their recruitment campaigns. She stated that there was pressure on subject specific areas such as science and maths;
- Piers Brunning stated that there were many logistical problems with opening and supporting bulge classes. However, there was the intention to expand places in KS2 and a conversation with Earley headteachers about the options would take place in the future;
- Councillor Loyes asked when the new SEND school would open and whether Wokingham children would have priority of places, he also asked how many SEND children were placed out of the Borough;

- Piers Brunning stated that the new SEND school was being built in partnership with Reading and the places would be split between the two authorities; he also stated that there were around 55 children in out of Borough independent non-maintained schools;
- Piers Brunning stated that it was expected that the new SEND school would open in 2022;
- Councillor Richards asked if there any statistics available in relation to the educational outcomes for Wokingham's children who were attending colleges out of the Borough; he believed that children who stayed at a school six form tended to do better academically;
- Piers Brunning stated that sixth form colleges tended to offer a broader range of subjects;
- Councillor Swaddle asked if there was link between the low number of Wokingham young people taking apprenticeship courses and the fact that there was not a college in the Borough;
- Piers Brunning stated that it would be challenging to justify the creation of a college in the Borough; the tendency in this sector was of an amalgamation of colleges;
- Councillor Helliar-Symonds agreed that children tended to better academically at sixth form schools rather than colleges.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The Committee wished to encourage the retention of six form provisions attached to the Borough's schools;
- 2) The Committee encouraged broadening the range of options for post 16 education beyond A-Level.

38. FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered its Forward Plan for the remaining of the 2020/21 municipal year.

The Schools Performance Indicators and Ofsted reports item was removed from the January meeting because Ofsted was not undertaking inspections during the pandemic. *Subsequently the Chairman agreed that for the same reason the Schools Causing Concern report would not be submitted until Ofsted inspections were re-instated.*

The following items were added to the Forward Plan:

- Elective Home Education – 22 March 2021
- Mental Health Issues – Public Health – jointly with HOSC

A Children's Social Care Briefing session was being organised and would take place in February 2021.

The Committee discussed the issue of child poverty and its impact on education. Sal Thirlway agreed to investigate what data was available on children in low income families but not receiving free school meals for a future discussion.

39. 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 Schedule 12A of the Act as appropriate.

40. SCHOOLS CAUSING CONCERN – PART 2

The report was discussed in a part 2 session.

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