

## **MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 15 SEPTEMBER 2021 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.31 PM**

### **Committee Members Present**

Councillors: Prue Bray, Anne Chadwick, Pauline Helliard-Symons, Norman Jorgensen (Chairman), Rebecca Margetts (Vice-Chairman), Andrew Mickleburgh and Morag Malvern

### **Other Councillors Present**

Councillors: Graham Howe

### **Officers Present**

Luciane Bowker, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist  
Piers Brunning, Senior Specialist Strategy and Commissioning (People and Place)  
Carol Cammiss, Director of Children's Services  
Gillian Cole, Service Manager Schools

### **13. APOLOGIES**

An apology for absence was submitted from Sal Thirlway.

### **14. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 15 September 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Matters arising

Members were pleased that the Unicef application had been successful and thanked Officers for their work in this achievement.

Councillor Mickleburgh asked for an update on the national concerns raised in relation to pre-mobile children during lockdowns and on the issue of care leavers who were Not In Education Employment or Training (NEET).

Carol Cammiss, Director for Children's Services stated that the service had not seen an ongoing theme in relation to harm to pre-mobile children during the pandemic period. However, a front door Officer was working closely with the 0-5 year old cohort, in an effort to be proactive in helping families that had struggled with the pandemic.

Carol Cammiss would ask Adam Davis, Assistant Director for Children's Social Care and Early to Help to circulate the information in relation to NEET care leavers.

Carol Cammiss confirmed that Wokingham had been successful in its application to Unicef to take part in the Child Friendly Cities and Communities Programme, the programme would start in January 2022.

### **15. DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

A declaration of interest was submitted from Councillor Bray on the basis that she was a Governor for the Forest School.

### **16. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no public questions.

## **17. MEMBER QUESTION TIME**

There were no Member questions.

## **18. EDUCATION UPDATE**

Gillian Cole, Schools Service Manager presented the Education report.

Some of the main points made during her presentation are listed below:

- During the summer term of 2021 schools continued to operate within the Department for Education (DfE) guidelines, with significant operational measures still in place;
- Some off-site school trips were re-instated towards the end of the summer term;
- Some measures are still in place, such as the requirement that schools must continue to offer remote learning for those that cannot attend school because of Covid;
- From 1 September 2021 there were changes to the mitigation restrictions, in line the government's road map;
- Schools have undertaken their own risk assessments and decided which measures they wished to continue with, depending on their context. For example, some schools found that having staggered starts was helpful in terms of alleviating traffic around the school site, and decided to continue with this measure;
- Lateral flow tests continue to be undertaken by secondary school pupils twice a week. Lateral flow tests were also undertaken at schools before the term started;
- School leaders continue to attend the weekly leadership team drop in sessions, with a high number of attendance. Best practice is discussed in these sessions, with a public health consultant having attended the last session to give advice and guidance to schools;
- A-Levels and GCSE's moved to teacher assessed grades in 2021, this being a different method to the one used in 2020. This incurred a significant increase in teachers' workload and was a complex operation;
- All performance tables remain suspended, with no national or local data available for analysis for the second year running;
- Ofsted has undertaken some remote visits during 2020/21. Those were monitoring visits with the aim to ensure that schools continued to provide good education in the current context. Two schools in the Borough experienced those visits: Gorse Ride and Forest, both were judged to be providing effective education;
- Substantive inspections were paused until September 2021. Section 8 inspections (which cannot change the grading of a school) did take place in the summer term. Section 8 inspections did, however, have the power to bring forward Section 5 inspections if it was found that the current grading no longer reflected the level of the school. This happened to the Forest School (at the time of writing the report the result of this inspection was not available);
- The full inspection programme had now re-started. However, there is a delay of approximately 6 terms in the schedule;
- The service was going to be working closely with the schools which were due to undergo inspections;
- The report highlighted some of the key lines of work, such as: Racial equity at schools; therapeutical approaches and mental health strands.

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

- Councillor Bray stated that the Forest School's Ofsted report was now publicly available and that the school had been graded 'Good'. This was a fantastic result and

a huge improvement from the previous grading. She expressed her gratitude to the support received from the Council and gave credit to the work undertaken by the Headteacher to achieve such a good result;

- Councillor Mickleburgh stated that areas outside and near schools were being targeted with anti-vaccination propaganda. He asked if schools had raised this issue with WBC and what was being done to tackle this issue;
- Gillian Cole stated that she was not aware of this occurrence and stated that she would take this back a look at ways in which to support schools to re-enforce a positive message around vaccinations;
- Councillor Mickleburgh asked if there were any concerns around remote teaching and remote learning going forward;
- Gillian Cole stated that it was important to recognise the additional workload involved in delivering remote learning. She stated that schools were now better prepared, with resources on their websites and packs that could be sent to children at home. Some staff who were unable to attend school had been able to support remote learning offer, which was positive;
- Gillian Cole stated that since September attendance at school was again compulsory, so it was only the children who were awaiting test results or who had tested positive that were accessing remote learning. This was being monitored by staff;
- Councillor Mickleburgh asked for data in relation to the uptake of summer school catch up. Gillian Cole stated that there had been a high uptake, however she did not have the data to hand and offered to circulate this information post meeting;
- Councillor Mickleburgh asked for details of the Racial equity programme being rolled out to schools;
- Gillian Cole stated that there had been work with a local black and minority ethnic stakeholder group across the education sector to develop programmes; the service had also commissioned the Reading International Solidarity Centre who have a lot of expertise in this field of work to do some facilitation with staff in order to help develop the strategy;
- Some of the programmes are:
  - A planning for equity workshop for school leaders. Leaders are being encouraged to bring along a person of colour or from an ethnic minority who works in their school;
  - Stakeholder group working in the community engagement group developing activities for the black history month in the Borough;
  - Training is available to schools on developing an understanding unconscious bias;
  - Training sessions for school staff and governors led by Race Matters on racial literacy;
  - Work around auditing resources in primary schools and how they could be more equitable and around teaching about black history;
  - Work for secondary schools involved creating safe spaces for Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) pupils, training for staff to be able to facilitate workshops for pupils of colour, Staff Allies training for staff to review how incidents are reported;
  - Another element was working with Reading University led by students of colour mentoring pupils of colour in Wokingham secondary schools, this was at discussion stage;
- Members commended the offer and felt it was very innovative;
- Councillor Chadwick asked what was meant by the statement in the report which stated that Officers would be challenging schools;
- Gillian Cole stated that the local authority's statutory function was to support and challenge schools. Conversations, in particular with schools which are due to have

Ofsted inspections would be undertaken to challenge them and prepare them for inspections;

- Councillor Bray asked for information about the pressure for primary school places created by the fact that Farley Hill school had moved sites, and the insufficiency of school places in the Strategy Development Location (SDL);
- Gillian Cole confirmed that Farley Hill school had changed site, however the designated area and published admission number had not changed;
- Piers Brunning, Senior Specialist Strategy and Commissioning (People and Place) stated that the local authority had a responsibility to ensure sufficiency of places across the Borough. Creating additional places at that school could not be justified in the context of places within the area. The garrison area, now the Arborfield Green community, had always been served by two schools: Farley Hill and Coombes. The Coombes school had capacity to take more children. The majority of the children in the area had been able to secure places in one of their preferred schools and within walking distance to their houses;
- Councillor Bray asked what the role of the Council in a case was where a child with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) was unable to secure a place in their preferred school, where the preferred school is an academy school;
- Carol Cammiss offered to provide an answer outside of the meeting.

**RESOLVED** That the Education Update report be noted.

## **19. SECONDARY SCHOOL SUFFICIENCY**

Piers Brunning presented the Secondary School Sufficiency report.

Some of the main points made during his presentation are listed below:

- This year the Local Authority was able to secure places for all on time Year 7 applicants. This was possible with the assistance of Emmbrook and Waingels' schools who agreed to offer additional places;
- Since offer day the number of applications dropped, as expected. Now the total number of applications is slightly less than the total number of places available in the Borough;
- The Forest school has not been popular and as a result there have been a significant number of places available for boys in the Borough;
- Additional capacity was agreed at other co-educational schools, all of which have waiting lists which includes boy and girls, and this increased the number of unfilled places at the Forest School;
- It was hoped that following the Forest School's good Ofsted result that parents would name the Forest School in their preference lists;
- There have been concerns from families in south Twyford with difficulties in securing a place at the Piggott School;
- It is a concern for the Local Authority when families cannot obtain a school place near their residence, as this can create difficulties with home to school transport, and the home to school transport budget is tight;
- Although schools in the Borough were able to provide surplus capacity, this was not sustainable and there was a need to invest in schools in the near future;
- Bulge years were being projected until 2027, it was expected that numbers would drop back after that. Some temporary accommodation would be required to deal with this bulge;

- The high number of house building in the Borough was being considered in planning for future school places. A site for a new secondary school may be identified in the Council wide plans for future development as and when needed;
- Meetings with Headteachers and school leaders had taken place before the summer to update them on the planning of school places, these conversations would continue during the year;
- There were some challenges with capacity in Years 8 and 9;
- Families continued to move into the Borough, with primary and secondary school children. This presented a challenge when planning for school places when there were not many surplus places in the Borough;
- There were no signs that families had moved away as a result of Brexit in the Borough;
- Construction costs have been going up considerably, which would impact on the Council's ability to deliver additional places;
- Currently there was no pressure with the delivery of Post-16 places;
- The new all through Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) school was on course to open as scheduled.

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

- Councillor Helliard-Symonds asked for clarification in relation to comments in the report about not being able to offer places from the waiting lists to the Forest School;
- Piers Brunning stated that schools were required by law to offer places in accordance to their oversubscription criteria. All schools, apart from the Forest had waiting lists. When surplus places were agreed, those schools had to allocate places from their waiting lists (which included boys and girls). The unintended consequence was additional unfilled places at the Forest. However, this reflected parental preference;
- Councillor Helliard-Symonds was concerned about future strategy in relation to the location of future school places, in the context of avoiding children having to travel across the Borough; she also asked how many children were having to travel out of their area to go to school;
- Piers Brunning stated that he did not have that data at the moment. He agreed that it was in everybody's interest to avoid children having to travel long distances to school, it was the Council's intention to avoid cross Borough movement. However, there were some practical limitations in certain school sites when considering surplus places;
- Councillor Mickleburgh asked about the wider effect of the additional capacity for boys at the Forest School, and how this impacted on girls placements;
- Piers Brunning stated that this was a relatively small Borough, he agreed that attending a school far away from one's residence had an implication on the ability to attend extra-curricular activities and making friends with local children;
- Piers Brunning observed that some schools had chosen to become co-educational. From a school admissions perspective, that would facilitate placements;
- Piers Brunning stated that the local authority did not hold a budget to invest in academy schools such as the Forest School, but perhaps this was something that should be considered in future planning;
- In response to a question Carol Cammiss offered to provide more information in relation to the pressure on places for girls in the Borough outside of the meeting;
- Councillor Mickleburgh was interested to know if there was anything that could be improved, or any lessons learnt in the planning of secondary school sufficiency;
- Piers Brunning stated that the issue of popularity or unpopularity of single sex schools had not been sufficiently considered at the planning stage. He stated that it was

important to continue to communicate effectively with schools. Secondary school headteachers were mindful to not undermine capacity at schools across the Borough;

- Piers Brunning confirmed that there was good communication with colleagues working on developing the housing strategy plans for the Borough. However, plans and projections were flexible and could change;
- Councillor Margetts was concerned about the projected bulge and the need for temporary accommodation, she asked how prepared the Council was to deal with the need for additional places in 2022/23;
- Piers Brunning stated that headteachers had a clear view of the challenges and where they would like to go next, they were working with the Local Authority and discussing options. He pointed out that some schools also had to consult with their academy trusts about their future plans;
- The Chairman asked if it was possible to move temporary accommodations to different areas in the Borough, according to demand for places;
- Piers Brunning stated that it was likely that any temporary accommodation would be left for the school to make use of it. He explained that a lot of the cost of building temporary accommodation went into things that could not be moved, such as additional car parking facilities for example.

Members wished to thank Piers Brunning for his report and all the information provided.

**RESOLVED** That;

- 1) The report be noted; and
- 2) The questions that could not be answered during the meeting would be emailed to Officers and the responses would be circulated via email.

## **20. FORWARD PLAN**

The Forward Plan for the Committee was considered and the following item was added:

4 November 2021

- A review of the Home to School Transport Process

Members noted that the Schools Causing Concern – Part 2 report was not listed in the Forward Plan. Luciane Bowker, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist stated that due to the fact that Ofsted inspections had been suspended, it had been decided to temporarily remove that report from the schedule. Luciane Bowker would liaise with Gillian Cole about the best time to bring this report back.