

TITLE Establishment of a Wokingham Borough Education Partnership

FOR CONSIDERATION BY Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny

WARD None specific

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OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

This development aims to strengthen educational vision, strategy and collaboration with school leaders to improve inclusion and educational outcomes for children and young people.

RECOMMENDATION

To note the decision by Schools Forum to support the establishment a Wokingham Borough Education Partnership.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

This report explains the rationale for, and the outcomes expected from, the establishment of a Wokingham Borough Education Partnership.

Establishment of a Wokingham Borough Education Partnership

01. Purpose

This development seeks to:

- Re-establish work to co-produce strategic partnership arrangements between Wokingham education leaders and the local authority.
- Set out the case for strengthening whole system educational leadership in Wokingham, drawing on the pre-Covid work and recent conversations with school leaders.
- Propose next steps to address the system issues identified by school leaders.

02. Recommendation

To note the decision by Schools Forum to support establishment of a Wokingham Borough Education Partnership.

03. Introduction

The Lead Member for Children's Services convened and three meetings, two on 8 October & one on 4 November 2021, to seek the perspective of an invited group of primary and secondary school leaders on the strategic partnership between schools and the local authority and how school leaders would wish it to be strengthened.

The first two meetings were also attended by the Leader and Deputy Leader of the council, the elected members who attend Schools Forum and the Corporate Parenting Board, the Director of Children's Services and the Assistant Director, Learning Achievement & Partnerships (LAP).

These conversations sought to build on strategic work undertaken in 2019, prior to the Covid pandemic. Paul Brennan, a consultant, was then commissioned to work in conjunction with Headteachers to consider the future role of the local authority in Wokingham, and to identify the education system issues requiring development. These findings were shared with Headteachers at the termly briefings before COVID.

The outcome of the meetings with school leaders in October and November 2021 was a proposal to establish a Wokingham Borough Education Partnership

with terms of reference as set out below. This proposal was formally considered and unanimously supported by Schools Forum on 8 December 2021.

04. The Case for System Leadership Change

The borough's political and education leaders are ambitious for children and young people. Whilst there is much to be proud of with regard to Wokingham's education provision and the outcomes being achieved for children and young people, the education system is facing increasingly complex challenges that require whole system engagement and strategic thinking to manage and overcome.

The education landscape has changed in recent years and will continue to change. Government policy is for all schools to be Academies within larger Multi-Academy Trusts. Academies and Multi-Academy Trusts share the accountability for educational system leadership with the local authority. There is no vehicle in Wokingham to enable this joint accountability and respective roles and responsibilities are not yet clearly defined.

Whilst individual schools and settings are strong in Wokingham, the education system is fractured and needs to work as a cohesive whole. Strategic decisions need to be collectively shared, explored and owned, as decisions made to improve one part of the system have impact on other parts of the system. The Pandemic has made it even more essential that schools and the local authority work together as one education system.

Having a shared and agreed strategic vision for education is essential to bring everyone together with common purpose. We need to know what we are collectively working towards to get strategic decisions right. As yet no truly shared educational vision for the borough has been defined, collectively agreed and communicated.

The fact that the local authority has embarked upon a major improvement programme is hugely welcomed, but school leaders report mixed levels of understanding about, and engagement with, the change process.

There are growing pressures on resources at all levels of the education system. The level of pressure on an increasingly limited resource is unsustainable. Long-standing reliance on out-of-borough specialist provision and its cost is crippling High Needs budgets. Effective in-borough solutions are required to release the funding required to operate a fully graduated response to meet additional and special needs. These can only be achieved through whole system engagement and co-construction.

The demand for early and specialist intervention to meet additional needs, especially with regard to social, emotional and mental health, is increasing in scale and complexity. This pressure is having a negative impact on the whole education system; on operational capacity, system coherence and inclusion. School leaders require a coherent whole system map of provision to support

them in meeting children's additional needs. The range of existing provision and processes to access support for inclusion are not well understood and some support offers are perceived by school leaders to no longer match need.

The attainment gap between vulnerable and non-vulnerable pupils is increasing. There is huge commitment to closing the gap but a borough-wide legacy of silo working. Closing the gap requires a coherent borough-wide approach as so many factors impact on outcomes for vulnerable children.

Wokingham schools are popular schools, but this brings pressure on school places. A whole system approach is required to school place planning as one decision in one part of the system has huge impact on other parts of the system.

05. Priorities Identified for Collective Action

1. Ensure a partnership mechanism to deliver strategic whole system leadership of education in Wokingham, effective engagement and transparency of communication with all education leaders.
2. Clearly define the local authority's role and statutory duties to underpin the above in the context of legislation and the growth of academies and multi-academy trusts.
3. Ensure collective understanding of high-level data and analysis with regard to key issues: e.g.: school places, exclusions, specialist provisions; to support prioritisation and informed decision-making.
4. Ensure collective understanding, engagement and change management with regard to critical strategic priorities, for example:
 - (a) Securing sufficient school places to meet need and address SEND pressures with an immediate focus on Secondary Strategy
 - (b) Admissions and Fair Access policy: systems, processes and protocols
 - (c) Support to meet pupils' additional and special educational needs, with particular focus on meeting social, emotional and mental health needs and minimising exclusions
 - (d) Closing the Achievement Gap, including arrangements to strengthen sector-led school improvement
 - (e) Early intervention and prevention in the early years

06. Proposal

The proposal is to establish a new body called the Wokingham Borough Education Partnership.

The role of this new body will be to strengthen educational vision, strategy and collaboration to improve inclusion and educational outcomes for children and young people.

The Education Partnership's core values will include: ambition for children & young people; fairness; professionalism; transparency; collective accountability & collaboration.

The Education Partnership will build on and draw from existing groups such as Wokingham Schools Forum, Wokingham Primary Heads Association and Wokingham Secondary Heads Federation. Proposed core membership is set out in terms of reference.

To fulfil its role, the Education Partnership will have:

- An independent Chair who is an experienced educationalist with whole system knowledge and understanding.
- A clear definition of role and functions, accountability and authority to influence strategic priorities and to make decisions.
- Operational arrangements that enable system-wide transparency: all education leaders have access to the information received and what is being discussed at meetings and the outcomes of those discussions.
- A clearly defined programme of work matched to collectively agreed priorities.
- Routine access to high level data to inform strategic discussions.
- Clear arrangements for local authority officer attendance to support/observe strategic discussions as appropriate.
- Operational arrangements and protocols that enable system-wide communication with all education leaders.
- Arrangements to evaluate the impact of the partnership.
- Administrative and/or programme management support arrangements to ensure high quality meetings and communications, informed by high quality data and information.

In carrying out its role the Education Partnership will have the following functions:

- Consider and advise regarding the development and implementation of strategic proposals, identifying systemic and change management concerns that need addressing and/or improvements that should be made (not individual cases).
- Identify and consider any further information and/or data required to inform the above.
- Commission working groups to co-construct aspects of strategic proposals where required.
- Share the work of the Education Partnership and its outcomes openly and transparently with all Wokingham school leaders.

- Receive updates on any refinements to strategy / implementation for consideration and challenge.
- Evaluate the impact of the Education Partnership.

Core members of the Education Partnership will:

- be persons with appropriate levels of authority to act on behalf of the Partner group that they represent.
- seek to achieve what is best for the Wokingham education system and not for any individual Partner group.
- appoint a proxy member to attend meetings of the Education Partnership in the absence of the appointed member.
- not have any delegated statutory powers or functions of the Partners. Nothing in these arrangements shall be construed as a delegation of statutory powers by any of the Partners to the Education Partnership and nor shall any Partners be deemed to have delegated any other powers to the Education Partnership.

The Education Partnership will work with an identified Operational Group which will include officers of the local authority and other representatives seconded to the group as required by specific pieces of work.

The role of the Operational Group will be to:

- Present strategic proposals, procedures or systems, ensuring a concise and transparent rationale including relevant high-level data and information.
- Identify how information required by the Education Partnership will be gathered, and commission this with clear timescales for delivery.
- Respond to feedback on proposals from the Education Partnership, or from working groups commissioned for the purpose; refine and improve procedures and systems and present these improved options to the Education Partnership.
- Note concerns from the Education Partnership with regard to any systemic concerns and propose how to resolve these.
- Implement agreed strategy, procedures or systems following the Education Partnership's consideration, drawing up a precise implementation plans showing clear accountabilities and timescales.
Provide updates to the Education Partnership and to wider Education Partners as agreed.

07. Expected Outcomes

1. The education system is co-developed by all Wokingham school leaders for all Wokingham children. All partners share a clear educational vision that underpins all strategic decisions.
2. The education system is increasingly responsive to the needs of Wokingham's children, young people and families, and to the needs of schools as front-line

services for them. Key indicators include reduction in the achievement gap between vulnerable and non-vulnerable pupils.

3. The education system is capable of adapting to changing needs, demands and financial pressures and has built-in review processes.
4. Capacity to continuously improve outcomes for children is built across the whole education system.

08. Proposed Next Steps

- Three initial Education Partnership meetings take place by **31 March 2022**.
- Emergent partnership model & work programme reviewed in **April 2022** to finalise Terms of Reference and work plan for 2022-23.
- Independent Chair appointed by 1 April 2022.

Draft Terms of Reference

Wokingham Borough Council, Wokingham Primary Heads Association, Wokingham Secondary Heads Association and Wokingham Schools Forum have established a strategic partnership body to be known as the Wokingham Education Partnership.

These are its terms of reference.

Purpose

The purpose of the Wokingham Education Partnership is to strengthen educational vision, strategy and collaboration to improve inclusion and educational outcomes for children and young people.

Role

The Education Partnership's key role is to act as a strategic advisory board on behalf of all Wokingham school leaders; to advise on and influence the development and implementation of strategy to improve outcomes for children and young people in Wokingham.

Values

The Partnership is underpinned by the core values of: ambition for children & young people; fairness; professionalism; transparency; collective accountability & collaboration.

Membership

The Education Partnership will build on, and draw from existing groups such as Wokingham Schools Forum, Wokingham Primary Heads Association and Wokingham Secondary Heads Federation as follows:

Wokingham Primary Heads Partnership	4 representatives
Wokingham Secondary Heads Federation	3 representatives
Wokingham Special Schools	1
Foundry	1
Schools Forum	3 representatives - to include early years
Multi-Academy Trust Executive Heads	Elected representation required; mechanism to be discussed / identified at first meeting
Wokingham Borough Council	Director of Children's Services Assistant Director, Learning, Achievement & Partnerships
Independent Chair	Process for appointment to be determined by the Partnership

The Education Partnership has an independent Chair who is an experienced educationalist with whole system knowledge and understanding. This person is appointed by the Education Partnership for a 2-year term.

The Education Partnership has administrative & programme management support to ensure high quality meetings and communications, informed by high quality data and information. This support is provided & funded by Wokingham Borough Council.

Core members of the Education Partnership:

- Are persons with appropriate levels of authority to act on behalf of the partner groups that they represent.
- Seek to achieve what is best for the Wokingham education system and not for any individual partner group.
- Appoint a proxy member to attend meetings of the Education Partnership in the absence of the appointed member.
- Do not have any delegated statutory powers or functions of the partners. Nothing in these arrangements shall be construed as a delegation of statutory powers by any of the partners to the Education Partnership and nor shall any partners be deemed to have delegated any other powers to the Education Partnership.

Decisions require a meeting to be quorate: e.g.: attendance includes a minimum of two representatives for each of Schools Forum, Primary Heads Association and Secondary Heads Federation.

The Education Partnership works with an identified Operational Group which includes officers of the local authority and other representatives as required by specific pieces of work. Those identified attend meetings as required by the priorities of the work programme.

Functions

The Education Partnership has the following functions:

- Consider and advise regarding the development and implementation of strategic proposals, identifying systemic concerns that need addressing and / or improvements that should be made (not individual cases).
- Identify and consider any further information and/or data required to inform the above.
- Commission working groups to co-construct aspects of strategic proposals where required.
- Share the work of the Education Partnership and its outcomes openly and transparently with all Wokingham school leaders.
- Receive updates on any refinements to strategy / implementation for consideration and challenge.
- Review, on a regular basis, its own performance and terms of reference to ensure it is operating at maximum effectiveness.

Authority

The Education Partnership is authorised to consider any strategic issue within its terms of reference and to seek any information it requires from the local authority and school leaders to fulfil its role. Local authority officers are directed to cooperate with any request made by the Education Partnership.

The Education Partnership is authorised to take decisions to:

- Set and steer the strategic direction for partnership working between the LA and Wokingham Schools to improve educational outcomes for all children and young people in the borough.
- Commission working groups to address key issues and improve educational outcomes.
- Govern, steer and quality-assure the above work (including sign-off on completion) to ensure any activity commissioned by the partnership delivers the intended outcomes.

Meetings

The Education Partnership determines a clearly defined programme of work matched to collectively agreed priorities.

It shall meet on such dates as determined by the Education Partnership and at such other time as the clerk shall specify at the request of any member of the Education Partnership.

Unless otherwise agreed, notice of each meeting confirming the venue, date and time together with an agenda shall be sent to each member of the Education Partnership and any other person invited or required to attend no fewer than seven working days prior to the date of the meeting.

The clerk minutes the proceedings and resolutions of the Education Partnership. Minutes of each meeting are sent to all members of the Education Partnership within seven working days of the meeting.

Communications

The Education Partnership is committed to ensuring system-wide transparency with all school leaders. The Partnership determines its arrangements to ensure that all school leaders have access to the information being received by the Partnership, what is being discussed at meetings and the outcomes of those discussions.

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