

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 7 SEPTEMBER 2022 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.43 PM

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Andrew Mickleburgh (Chairman), Shirley Boyt (Vice-Chairman), Morag Malvern, Anne Chadwick and Pauline Helliard-Symons

Other Councillors Present

Councillor Prue Bray, Alison Swaddle (substitute) and Jackie Rance (via Teams)

Officers Present

Matthew Booth, SEN Consultant

Neil Carr, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist

Gillian Cole, Service Manager Schools

Adam Davis, Assistant Director for Children's Social Care and Early Help

Sal Thirlway, Assistant Director for Learning, Achievement and Partnerships

Helen Watson, Director of Children's Services

Also Present

Sarah Clarke, SEND Voices Wokingham

13. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Graham Howe.

Alison Swaddle attended the meeting as a substitute.

14. CO-OPTED MEMBER

The Chair announced that Sarah Clarke would be joining the Committee as a co-opted member. Sarah is the Chair of the SEND Voices Wokingham. SEND Voices Wokingham is the Borough's parent carer forum representing the voices of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. SEND Voices is one of the key stakeholders in the SEND Innovation and Improvement Programme (discussed later in the Agenda).

15. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 15 June 2022 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The following updates were provided:

The Chair stated that, for future meetings, officers would produce a short report summarising the actions taken against the decisions reached by the Committee. This report would be included in the Agenda.

The Chair confirmed that a briefing note on Home to School Transport had been circulated to Members. A further copy would be circulated to any Members who had not received the first communication.

The Chair confirmed that officers had made further efforts to attract diocese and parent governors to sit on the Committee. To date, no progress had been made, but officers would continue to seek to fill the vacancies.

Officers confirmed that the Youth Council was happy to engage with Members. Consideration was being given to facilitating this engagement which could include attendance at one of the Committee's meetings.

Officers also confirmed that residents at the new Care Leavers accommodation in London Road were happy to engage with Members (including the Corporate Parenting Board). Consideration was being given to the most appropriate mechanism to facilitate this engagement.

The Chair asked about engagement of the Committee re the outcomes of the process for improving return home interviews. It was confirmed that an action plan had been developed which could include reference to the Committee.

Helen Watson provided an update on the potential bid to the Government for capital funding to meet the needs of children with very complex needs. Work was ongoing and officers were hopeful that a bid could be submitted, though there was no guarantee of success.

16. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

17. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

18. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

19. SEND INNOVATION AND IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME (SEND IIP) UPDATE

The Committee consider a report, set out at Agenda pages 29 to 35, which provided an overview of progress relating to the delivery of the SEND Innovation and Improvement Programme (SEND IIP).

Sarah Clarke – Chair of SEND Voices Wokingham, introduced the report alongside WBC officers. Sarah confirmed that SEND Voices Wokingham was the parent carer forum representing the voices of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

The report reminded Members that the SEND IIP had been established to deliver the SEND Strategy 0-25 (2021-24). The aspiration of the SEND Strategy was to ensure that the Borough was a great place for children and young people with SEND to grow up. There were already a number of good services in place alongside a range of private and publicly funded resources and an active and engaged parent carer forum. This was supported by a number of outstanding independent, voluntary, community and charity sector organisations. The SEND IIP was co-produced by WBC and this range of key stakeholders.

The SEND IIP meets every three months to review progress made by its four working groups which met monthly to drive improvements to services and support for children with SEND.

In the ensuing discussions, Members raised the following points:

What were the key messages being presented to the Committee? It was confirmed that the four working groups were working hard to deliver improvements on the ground. The four working groups focussed on:

- Strengthening local provision and quality of practice – better outcomes from appropriate, sustainable local provision;
- Efficient and effective processes, e.g. timeliness and quality of Educational, Health and Care Plans;
- Effective transitions at all ages, key stages and between different types of provision;
- Impact, intelligence and sufficiency – predicting need, strategic commissioning, performance management and effective use of resources.

Matthew Booth, SEN Consultant, stated that SEND impacted on every part of the Council. Members and officers needed to maintain a focus on continuous improvement. Positive change had been delivered but there was still room for improvement in order to achieve effective transitions for children and young people of all ages.

In 2021 there were a number of issues relating to transport – how had services improved in 2022? It was confirmed that there had been a significant focus on transport during the year, e.g. through improved letters to parents, improved processes and greater consistency of drivers and escorts. Although there had been overall improvement, work was ongoing to focus on outstanding issues in order to deliver a consistent high quality service for families.

What was the composition of the SEND IIP Board and how were the members selected? It was confirmed that the Board contained representatives from the education sector, health partners, SEND Voices, the voluntary and community sector, Children's Services officers and the Executive Member for Children's Services. A list of Board members would be circulated to the Committee.

One of the working groups was focussing on improving Education, Health and Care Plans. Were there any issues relating to academies? It was confirmed that the approach was the same for pupils at maintained schools and academies.

Was the Special Educational Needs and Disability Information Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS) involved in developing the SEND IIP? It was confirmed that SENDIASS was more involved in providing impartial guidance and support to parents and children up to the age of 25 with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The experience and feedback from SENDIASS had been embedded into the improvement programme. It was suggested that SENDIASS be invited to a future meeting of the Committee.

One of the key challenges facing WBC related to matching SEND provision to growing levels of demand within the Borough. How was this challenge being addressed? It was confirmed that the majority of out-of-Borough expenditure related to special schools and residential places for children. Officers were continuing to explore options for the delivery of two new special schools within the Borough.

How was data being used to demonstrate progress relating to transitions? It was confirmed that various data sets were being used to build a picture of the experiences of children and young people as they transitioned at every stage. Data was also being collected on the experiences of young people and families through a range of activities. These included the outcomes of annual reviews, employment and training data. SEND Voices supported this work and had carried out a local survey which generated 440 responses from a cross section of the community. The new Ofsted inspection regime required that the views of children and young people be an integral part of the process, so this work would be of great benefit moving forwards.

Helen Watson confirmed that an update report on SEND and the Safety Valve Programme would be submitted to the Executive at its September meeting.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) progress relating to the delivery of the SEND Innovation and Improvement Programme (SEND IIP) be noted and welcomed;
- 2) the positive role played by SEND Voices Wokingham in driving progress be recognised;
- 3) the Chair and Vice-Chair be authorised to work with officers to develop recommendations from the Committee on the SEND IIP, for submission to the Council's Executive;
- 4) the recommendations to the Executive include a focus on accountability for all SEND services, including shared services;
- 5) the Committee's comments emphasise the view that SEND improvement and innovation is the shared responsibility of all Members and officers at WBC – part of everyone's business;
- 6) a list of SEND IIP Board members be circulated to the Committee;
- 7) a representative from SENDIASS be invited to attend a future meeting of the Committee.

20. UPDATE FROM THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

The Committee received an update from Prue Bray, the Council's Executive Member for Children's Services. The update focussed on three key issues, as follows:

Review of the Budget process – the Council's financial situation would not be totally clear until January 2023, following the Government's funding announcement at the end of December. However, there were a number of ongoing pressures including the impact of the war in Ukraine on energy prices, the rising level of inflation and the ongoing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic which included increased demand for SEND services. The Borough also had to deal with increasing numbers of unaccompanied and asylum seeking children.

Home to School Transport – arrangements and communication had improved compared to 2021. However, the budget was under severe pressure and would overspend in 2022. The

Council received 400 applications for transport in June 2022 which was twice the usual number. The increasing number of arrivals from places such as Hong Kong was also placing pressure on the provision of school places. This increased the pressure on the Home to School Transport budget.

Lack of local capacity for SEND provision (as discussed earlier). It was hoped that a new specialist school would be able to open in September 2023, but at this stage there was no guarantee of funding from the DfE. The DfE had offered to assist local authorities in addressing spending pressures relating to SEND.

Councillor Bray thanked officers and partners for the progress made on improvement areas.

In the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points:

The ongoing pressure on the SEND budget was noted. What plans were being developed to increase the level of provision within the Borough? As discussed earlier, plans were being developed for two new specialist schools in the Borough. Although Addington was full, discussions were ongoing in relation to additional capacity. Officers were also exploring the potential for additional resource units within mainstream schools. Although there were positive developments it was recognised that there would always be a requirement for some acute provision outside the Borough.

In relation to funding, the High Needs Block was regularly overspent and the position was deteriorating year on year. What steps were being taken to address this issue? It was confirmed that a lot of work was going on locally and nationally relating to the High Needs Block. The Government had stated an expectation that the High Needs Block should balance over a three year period.

What was the latest position relating to the proposed extension of Bohunt? It was confirmed that Bohunt was due to submit a bid shortly – supported by WBC. The bid would be considered initially by the Regional Schools Commissioner.

Matthewsgreen Primary was due to open shortly. Was it being filled by catchment area children? It was confirmed that the school would be filled from the youngest year group up. There needed to be a balanced approach to ensure that other school budgets were not unbalanced by the opening of the new school.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Prue Bray be thanked for attending the meeting to answer Member questions;
- 2) In relation to future meetings, Member questions to the Executive Member be submitted in advance, if possible.

21. UPDATE ON CHILDREN'S STRATEGY DELIVERY

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 17 to 28, which gave details of progress relating to the update/refresh of the Children's Services Strategy (2021/24).

The report stated that the focus of the Children's Services Strategy was to improve outcomes for all children and young people in the Borough. The strategic priorities and key actions in the Strategy were aligned with the Borough's Community Vision and were

designed to ensure that the Council and its partners worked together to ensure that children and young people were at the heart of all activity.

The report reminded Members of the Strategic Priorities in the Strategy and the business areas driving delivery. The report also highlighted key delivery successes to date, including:

- Establishment of a Serious Violence and Exploitation Board;
- A new approach to Corporate Parenting, including improved opportunities for Member engagement;
- A more effective performance cycle, driving improvement through learning;
- Stabilisation of the Social Care workforce – including growing our own through the ASYE programme;
- Launch of the new Emotional Wellbeing Hub in Wokingham, providing a single “front door” for access to support;
- Establishment of an Education Partnership for Wokingham, bringing together education providers to drive improved educational outcomes.

In the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points:

The successes achieved to date were welcomed. However, it was also recognised that there were significant ongoing challenges including the rise in demand and increased complexity of cases. There were also ongoing issues relating to staff retention. It was becoming more difficult to fill specific posts such as occupational therapists.

In relation to the list of outcomes for children and young people, it was suggested that point 10 be amended to read “Have parents **or siblings** with mental health needs **and/or physical disabilities**”.

In relation to the Emotional Wellbeing Hub, were there plans for more schools to participate in the programme? It was confirmed that WBC had received Government funding for a Mental Health in Schools Team which was one of the few in the country to be managed within the local authority rather than by a health partner. At present, there was no additional funding to expand this scheme.

In relation to the focus point on children and young people living in low income families, was Children’s Services inputting into the Borough’s Anti-Poverty Strategy? It was confirmed that Children’s Services officers were involved in the Strategy, e.g. through school holiday activities – food programmes and local community events. Officers were also supporting schools in “poverty proofing” the school day – removing barriers to learning which existed because of the impacts of living in poverty.

RESOLVED: That progress on delivering the Children’s Services Strategy 2021/24 be noted and welcomed.

22. KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The Committee considered the dashboard of Key Performance Indicators for Children’s Services, set out at Agenda pages 55 to 68. The report gave details of Children’s Services performance during April to June 2022 (Q1). The report included eight dashboards with performance data, background, national context and any actions being taken to address indicators which were not moving in the right direction.

During the discussion of the report, Members raised the following points:

Dashboard 2 – Early Help – Improved performance was welcomed. The number of Early Help referrals increased by 40% from the previous quarter and 9% from the same period in 2021. The number of assessments increased from the previous quarter by 25% and 15% compared to the same period last year.

Dashboard 4 – Child Protection – WBC set a best practice standard of carrying out each Child Protection visit within 10 working days of the previous visit. Performance of 74% in Q1 against a target of 80% constituted high performance against a stretching target.

Dashboard 7 – Children missing from Home/Care. It was confirmed that 8 children missing from care in Q1 constituted a positive direction of travel compared to the previous two quarters.

RESOLVED: That the Q1 2022/23 Key Performance Indicator report be noted.

23. FORWARD PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its forward work programme, set out at Agenda pages 69 to 72. During the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points:

The Chair suggested a brief Part II report to the November 2022 meeting on accommodation issues linked to unaccompanied/asylum seeker children and young people coming into the Borough. A more detailed report could then be submitted to the meeting in January 2023. This could include an assessment of emotional/mental health issues. Prue Bray confirmed that a report on children in care, linked to this issue, had been considered recently by the Corporate Parenting Board. That report could provide a useful introduction for Members at the O&S meeting on 2 November.

Pauline Helliard-Symons reminded Members that the Committee used to receive a summary of Ofsted reports for all schools in the Borough and suggested that these reports be reintroduced. Members did not support this proposal but agreed that officers explore the potential for including hyperlinks to recent Ofsted reports within the regular reports.

The Chair suggested a report to the March 2023 meeting providing an update on the first six months of care leaver CAMHS provision.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the Committee receive an introductory Part II report on unaccompanied children/asylum seekers at the meeting on 2 November 2022;
- 2) the recent Corporate Parenting Board report on unaccompanied children be appended to the report as an introduction for Members;
- 3) officers consider including hyperlinks to recent Ofsted reports in the Agenda papers for future meetings;
- 4) a report be submitted to the March 2023 meeting providing a six month update on care leavers CAMHS provision.

24. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED: 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 it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

25. SCHOOLS CAUSING CONCERN

This item was considered in a Part II session.