

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON 31 JANUARY 2023 FROM 7.00 PM TO 10.40 PM**

Committee Members Present

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

Councillors Present Online

Councillors: Beth Rowland

Other Members Present

Sarah Clarke, SEND Voices Wokingham
Fr Richard Lamey, Church of England representative

Other Councillors Present

Councillors: Prue Bray

Officers Present

Luciane Bowker, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist
Gillian Cole, Service Manager for Schools
Adam Davis, Assistant Director for Children's Social Care and Early Help
Sarah Desson, Child Friendly Project Officer
Zoe Storey, School Admissions and Transport Manager
Sal Thirlway, Assistant Director for Learning, Achievement and Partnerships
Helen Watson, Interim Director of Children's Services
Ming Zhang, Interim Assistant Director for Learning, Achievement and Partnerships

Others Present

David Gussi, Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership Chairman
Holly Mackinnon, Wokingham Youth MP
Terri Walsh, SEND Voices Wokingham

43. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

44. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 2 November 2022 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

45. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

46. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

47. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

48. YOUTH COUNCIL UPDATE

The Committee received a verbal report from Holly Mackinnon, Wokingham Youth MP. She was supported by Sarah Desson, Child Friendly Project Officer.

Some of the main points made by Holly Mackinnon are listed below:

- The main focus of the Youth Council this year was youth engagement in politics, informing young people about political systems and issues that affect them;
- On Thursday 23 February a Youth Politics event was going to be held, Sir John Redwood was invited as a guest to talk about his political career. Also a debate with local councillors from different political parties was being organised to talk about different issues that interested young people;
- Some of the issues that were of interest were: climate change, lowering the voting age, cost of living crisis and mental health;
- The Youth Council was interested in securing a place in the Borough News publication and possibly other publications;
- The Youth Council was planning on organising a Youth Summit in Wokingham. They were seeking support from WBC to run this event. It was hoped that this event would improve collaboration with different schools, giving an opportunity for young people to talk to each other about the issues that interested them;
- Another idea was to run debate events simulating House of Parliament debates, for young people to engage in discussions with local councillors;
- Recent meetings of the Youth Council and WBC had included topics such as: domestic violence, waste collection and the recycling scheme in the borough. The Youth Council valued the opportunity to share their views with WBC and be included in consultations. They wished to continue to be given the opportunity to feedback their views to WBC on policies and consultations;
- The Youth Council wanted to work together with WBC to build a better Wokingham.

Some of the comments made during the discussion that followed Holly Mackinnon's presentation are listed below:

- Members were very impressed with the presentation and the ideas that had been put forward;
- Members suggested that the Youth Council could write columns for local newspapers, they believed this would be well received. Another suggestion was to use the weekly email newsletters that the Council sent to residents that signed up to it;
- Members suggested communicating with schools in the borough to inform them of the work of the Youth Council;
- Helen Watson, Director of Children's Services informed that the Youth Council had participated in the Borough Vision event, which had happened the day before, and that the engagement had been very positive;
- Helen Watson suggested that the Youth Council may be interested in taking part in the Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership (BWSCP), acting as scrutineers of the BWSCP;
- Sarah Desson informed that the Vision event had included various people from different backgrounds talking about what they envisaged for Wokingham in 20 years time.;
- Sal Thirlway, Assistant Director for Learning, Achievement and Partnerships offered to include messages from the Youth Council into the weekly newsletter that was sent from his department to all school in the borough;
- Fr Richard Lamey had attended the Vision event and confirmed that it had been very positive. He added that social media was a good way to communicate the Youth Council's messages to the borough;

- In response to a question Holly Mackinnon stated that the Youth Council would like to be involved in consultations about the development of policies within WBC. She added that young people were interested in a wide variety of issues and it should not be assumed that young people were not interested in issues such as waste collection, for example;
- In response to a question Holly Mackinnon stated that there were around 20 members of the Youth Council, but this number varied. There were representatives from five Wokingham secondary schools currently. However, there was a desire to involve all schools, in particular all the secondary schools in the borough for a more even representation;
- Sarah Desson informed that schools' engagement varied, and she believed more work needed to be undertaken to engage schools;
- Sarah Desson informed that she had been in attendance at some of WBC's internal meetings, in an effort to inform different departments about the Youth Council and their desire to take part in consultations;
- Holly Mackinnon stated that the Youth Council would like to organise a hustings debate with borough councillors, perhaps inviting Politics A-Level students to take part;
- The Chairman suggested that all councillors should receive regular updates on the work of the Youth Council and welcomed ideas to facilitate this;
- Holly Mackinnon stated that a Youth Council Annual Report could be shared with the Council;
- Councillor Rowland offered to liaise with the Youth Council to organise a regular slot for them to address a meeting of full Council;
- Councillor Boyt suggested that the Youth Council could produce a charter (similar to the one included in the Tenants report) to include in their annual report;
- Holly Mackinnon informed that currently, there was a national manifest for young people. She agreed that this was a good idea and there was an ambition to develop something like a 'young people wish list for the borough', this idea was being explored;
- The Chairman added that the Youth Council could submit questions to any of the formal meetings of the Council through the questions process.

The Chairman, on behalf of the Committee expressed his gratitude for the work of the Youth Council and the presentation received.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The report be noted; and
- 2) The Mayor's Office would be requested to organise a regular slot for the Youth Council Annual Report to be presented at Council.

49. BERKSHIRE WEST SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT 2021-22

David Gussi, Chair of the Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership (BWSCP) presented the 2021/2022 annual report of the BWSCP.

David Gussi believed that Youth Councils were a great idea, and to illustrate his opinion he shared a personal story. He stated that 40 years ago he was the chair of the Youth Council in Wellingborough, at a time when there was no institutional support for youth councils. At the time the Youth Council raised some money for mental health support for young people and set up a counselling service for young people called Serving Six, which was still going today.

David Gussi was appointed chair of the BWSCP in July 2022, after this report date. Some of the points made during his presentation are listed below:

- The BWSCP was set up under the Children's and Social Work Act 2017 which required local authorities to work with local police forces and Health in an executive group to promote children's safeguarding;
- The BWSCP includes Reading, West Berkshire and Wokingham. It is accountable to each local authority, Thames Valley Police and each authority's Chief Executive Officer;
- He believed that it was important to present this report to Youth Council for scrutiny;
- The report set out complex safeguarding contexts, safeguarding had expanded significantly in recent years;
- The three local authorities were very different so it was important to make local decisions where possible;
- He pointed out that this report was much more measured and honest than other such reports in other areas;
- He informed that the Integrated Care Board (ICB) had recently been established, the participation of Health during the period covered by the report had not been as significant as desirable.

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

- Councillor Chadwick asked for clarification on acronyms. It was explained that BOB stood for Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire;
- Councillor Chadwick asked what was the Child Exploitation Indicator Tool (mentioned on page 22 of the agenda);
- It was explained that this was a tool that was used to measure indicators of risk to children. Such indicators were used for prevention of harm;
- Councillor Bray, Executive Member for Children's Services informed that a Harm Outside of the Home Strategy was currently being developed, and this could be shared with the Committee when ready;
- Helen Watson offered to provide examples of the tools used to measure indicators of risk in writing, outside of the meeting;
- Councillor Chadwick made reference to page 24 of the agenda and asked for more information about the findings that there was no evidence that social media was a contributing factor for serious violence;
- David Gussi explained that a thematic review had been undertaken in Reading which had reviewed 13 incidents involving serious violence, and the review found that there was no evidence that use of social media had caused/contributed to those 13 incidents;
- Councillor Rowland expressed concern about reports in the news that children as young as 9 years old were being exposed to pornography online. She asked if Wokingham's primary school children were watching pornography and what could be done about it;
- David Gussi stated that he did not have specific statistics in this respect for Wokingham's children. BWSCP provided advice on its website about the safe use of the internet. However, the issue of online safety was beyond the scope of the partnership, it was a national issue;

- Sarah Clarke, representing Wokingham SEND Voices stated that SEND children were more vulnerable than other children and asked how they were being supported by the partnership;
- David Gussi explained that the partnership's job was to hold others to account, for example to monitor Wokingham's SEND Board and SEND Strategy to make sure they were having an impact in children's safeguarding;
- The Chairman asked if issues such as: increase in poverty, the growing number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) and serious youth violence were impacting the priorities going forward;
- David Gussi confirmed that poverty and the cost of living crisis were issues that had to be monitored in relation to vulnerability. Also of concern, was the number of young people and parents with mental health needs arising from the aftermath of the pandemic;
- Councillor Boyt was pleased to note the initiative in relation to prevention of risk during Reading Festival. However, she was concerned that not all schools had taken part in this initiative and asked that all schools be encouraged to take part in it;
- David Gussi stated that there was a colleague from the Royal Berkshire Hospital that was promoting this with schools;
- It was suggested that the Youth Council could be involved in this initiative;
- In response to a question David Gussi stated that he liked the style of the current report. Going forward, he was keen to establish accountability by the three partner agencies across the area. He believed that the future reports should be presented for scrutiny earlier, and it was important to include the voices of vulnerable children in the report;
- Councillor Malvern suggested including the annual report as a standing item in the forward programme;
- Councillor Bray expressed concern over the police participation in the Wokingham area, given the fact that the other areas in the partnership were much larger. She suggested that more frequent feedback on the work of the partnership be brought to the Committee;

The Committee voted in favour of the recommendations, and that the final wording would be agreed via email with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The Committee recommends that Wokingham Youth Council is invited to take part in the scrutiny of BWSCP;
- 2) The Committee recommends that the Executive supports the Online Safety Bill, specifically in respect of the concerns relating to children's exposure to online pornography;
- 3) Requests the development of a mechanism for regular updates on the matter of children's safeguarding, to include information about the development of priorities;
- 4) Requests regular updates from the Community Safety Partnership, focusing on children related work.

50. ANNUAL WOKINGHAM BOROUGH SEND SURVEY

The Annual Wokingham Borough SEND Survey was presented by Sarah Clarke and Terri Walsh, both representatives from Wokingham SEND Voices.

Some of the comments made during their presentation are listed below:

- SEND Voices Wokingham is an independent organisation of parent/carers of SEND children (0-25 years of age) in Wokingham. This organisation's purpose is to represent the voice SEND children, parents and carers;
- The role of SEND Voices is to act as a critical friend and work with the local authority;
- This survey was the first annual survey undertaken by SEND Voices, and it was used to ask about everything to do with SEND;
- Smaller surveys had been undertaken in the past, but the idea was to continue to undertake annual surveys going forward, and to track improvement;
- The annual survey had been sent out to all parents, carers and voluntary organisations that worked with SEND children. 440 responses had been received, which was a good level of response;
- One of the key findings from the survey was that there were a number of services in the borough available for SEND children and families:
 - Special Educational Needs and Disability Information Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS),
 - Autism Spectrum Service for Information, Support and Training (ASSIST),
 - Short breaks team – gaps were identified in this service, but it was noted that some new members of staff had made a positive improvement
 - SENDIASS training – made a real difference for families
 - Preparing for adulthood booklet
- The report also identified some areas for improvement, as written in the report.

Councillor Helliar-Symonds expressed serious concern about the transport service provided to SEND children around the borough.

Sarah Clarke clarified that two surveys had been carried out: the SEND Annual Survey and a SEND Transport Survey. She informed that improvements had been made in relation to SEND transport, however there was some work to be done to improve training.

Sal Thirlway recognised that although improvements had been made in SEND transport, more improvement was needed. Work was ongoing to keep improving the service. He would raise the issue of training with Corporate Transport Unit (CTU).

In response to a question from Councillor Chadwick, Sarah Clarke clarified that answers to the question in the survey about communication had revealed that many parents were finding that they were having to re-tell their story to lots of different professionals. Therefore, it could be concluded that communication between professionals and families could be improved.

It was confirmed that answers to Member's questions that had been emailed prior to the meeting would be circulated via email with the minutes.

Councillor Chadwick asked if it was the delays in the production of Educational Psychology reports that was causing the delays in issuing Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP). Terri Walsh informed that there was a shortage of Educational Psychologists and Speech and Language Therapists, this was a national issue and it did cause delays.

Councillor Chadwick noted that there was a theme in the survey around difficulties in finding information. Sarah Clarke stated that every local authority was supposed to have a

website where parents could find information. The improvement of the website was part of the improvement plan and was linked to the Safety Valve Programme.

Councillor Bray informed that the Council's website was being completely replaced next year, with a new supplier. As part of this work, there would not be updates on the current website, unless absolutely necessary. The service was conscious that the new website needed to be more user friendly.

Councillor Bray added that it was recognised that better communication with parents was needed, so that they understood better why certain decisions had been made. She believed that engaging in co-production of letters to parents with SEND Voices, for example, was part of the improvement process.

Councillor Bray announced that Wokingham SEND Voices had recently achieved charitable status and this was very good news.

Sarah Clarke added that acquiring the charitable status was positive as it allowed the organisation to apply for funding to support families.

In response to a question about co-production, Sarah Clarke confirmed that they had been very involved in the production of the Written Statement of Action and SEND Improvement Plan. She believed that what was missing at the moment was the production of a '*you said we did*' type of document in a language that parents could easily understand.

Councillor Malvern asked what was being done to speed up communications and letters to parents. Sarah Clarke stated that some letters were complex due to the fact that they had to include legal information. There was a co-production working group, which was part of the SEND IIP, trying to speed things up.

The Chairman asked if there were any strands of work that SEND Voices believed the Committee should be monitoring in the next year. Sarah Clarke stated that issues around inclusivity in mainstream schools needed to be monitored. She believed that the children in mainstream schools that did not quite meet the threshold for an EHCP should be better supported, and this would result in savings in the long term. This concept was called the 'ordinarily available' and schools, health and social care should be encouraged to engage with this concept and offer support.

Sal Thirlway stated that broadening inclusivity was part of the SEND IPP and the local authority was looking at ways to support schools to support children in mainstream schools. He informed that, statistically, Wokingham had more children with SEND and EHCPs in mainstream schools than most other local authorities.

Sarah Clarke suggested that it was possible that so many children with EHCPs were in mainstream schools because there was no specialist placements available for them. It would be interesting to look at this data more closely.

Councillor Boyt was interested to know if Wokingham was looking to learn from best practice in other local authorities. Sarah Clarke informed that there were 152 parent/carer forums in England, Wokingham fed into one of the regions – SE19 in the Southwest. The region fed into a national network where there was opportunity to talk to ministers and take part in other important work at a national level. Additionally, there was a lot of work within the region where best practice was shared.

Fr Richard Lamey confirmed that support for families was very welcome, as it could be very difficult to go through the application process for an EHCP.

Helen Watson was in support of the idea to produce a 'you said we did' document.

The Chairman asked for more information about the process of ceasing SEND support. Sarah Clarke informed that this process was done on a case by case scenario. However, she pointed out that this linked with the work to be developed around inclusion, where some children, with the right support may be able to step down from an EHCP and be placed in a mainstream school.

It was clarified that EHCPs did come to an end at the age of 25.

Councillor Bray commented that changes over time in an individual's EHCPs were to be expected, if there was no change, this would be a sign that there had been no improvement. EHCPs were reviewed at least annually, and at transition points. She believed that there was more work that could be done to improve the reviews of EHCPs.

Sarah Clarke agreed that some work needed to be done to improve the quality of reviews. She pointed out that timeliness of reviews had improved in recent years.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

51. SEND VOICES WOKINGHAM SCHOOL TRANSPORT SURVEY 2022

The SEND Voices Wokingham School Transport Survey 2022 was presented by Sarah Clarke and Terri Walsh.

Sarah Clarke informed that SEND transport had been one of the key issues that parents had complained about in the past. The service had been completely re-commissioned in September 2021 and there had been a lot of issues at that time. The introduction of a new SEND Transport Process and Panel had brought much improvement to the service.

The survey had been undertaken in November and December 2022. 100 responses had been received which represented 24% of the cohort, this was considered a good level of response.

Councillor Boyt asked for information about the issues which had been identified in relation to training for drivers and escorts. She wondered if the issue was the churn in staff within providers.

Councillor Helliard-Symonds pointed out that the local authority spent a significant amount of money on home to school transport and it was important to get it right. She recognised that there had been improvements, but she was still concerned about the lack of training and understanding on the part of drivers. She highlighted comments and concerns about safeguarding and wellbeing recorded within the report.

Councillor Helliard-Symonds proposed that future iterations of the SEND Transport Survey report be brought to the Committee for review.

Sarah Clarke informed that the intention was to run surveys annually. She added that Wokingham SEND Voices surveys were run independently from the local authority, and as such did not have enforcement powers.

Terri Walsh stated that SEND Voices would like to recommend that:

- CTU kept them informed of commissioning negotiations going forward,
- That training for drivers and escorts included SEND specifically, not just safeguarding; and
- That SEND Voices be involved in the production of letters to parents.

Helen Watson pointed out that often in such surveys, it was sometimes a minority of people who were dissatisfied with the service that responded. There was a large number of people who were satisfied with the service. She advised that she would discuss with CTU the issues raised at this meeting.

Councillor Bray explained that CTU did not sit within Children's Services, therefore an effort had to be made to work together to deliver the best possible service. She informed that Zoe Storey, School Admissions and Transport Manager was the Officer responsible for linking CTU with Children's Services.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The Committee would welcome the SEND Voices Wokingham Transport Survey report in future years;
- 2) The Committee recommended that the CTU:
 - a) informed SEND Voices at an early stage about commissioning providers;
 - b) included specific SEND training for drivers and escorts
 - c) SEND Voices be involved in the production of letters to parents.

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

Councillor Bray informed that the proposal on the Safety Valve had been made to the DfE and the DfE had instructed the Council not to divulge any information about the negotiations until the outcome was revealed.

The outcome of the bids for two new special schools in the borough was expected at the end of January, however this had not yet been announced.

In relation to the cost of living crisis, the Committee was informed that Sally Watkins, Chief Operating Officer, Councillor Rachel Bishop-Firth, Executive Member for Equalities, Inclusion and Fighting Poverty and Emma Cantrell, First Days CEO had met after that last CSO&S meeting. Emma Cantrell had produced some guidelines for schools on how to reduce the cost of a school day, Sally Watkins' team was working on rolling this out to schools.

Emma Cantrell was also working on developing a second-hand uniform shop for schools. Although some schools already had second-hand uniforms, this was a more cohesive offer.

The Council would continue to fund pre-school meals until May. It was believed that more funding from the government would be received for free school meals, but this was not yet known.

Councillor Helliar-Symonds asked if the Council was considering as possible sites for the new SEND schools and suggested the old site of the Farley Hill School and a site within the Garrison site as possible sites.

Councillor Bray informed that although there had been comments about the use of the site in the Arborfield Garrison, there had been no conversations with the relevant developer about it and it was not certain that the site was suitable. The Farley Hill site was under active consideration.

Helen Watson confirmed that everything was in place for the opening of the new SEND school in Winnersh in September 2023. Members were delighted that this new school would have sprinklers.

Sarah Clarke sought reassurance that the commissioning for the new school was on track, as this could take time. Helen Watson explained that the commissioning for the new school was linked to the outcome of the Safety Valve Programme. Councillor Bray added that the detail of expenditure in schools would be included in the Budget papers which were due to be submitted to Budget Council in February.

RESOLVED That the verbal report by the Executive Member for Children's Services be noted.

53. EDUCATION UPDATE

Sal Thirlway presented the Education Update report. He stated that the report contained a broad overview, at strategic level, of education services provided by the local authority in the borough.

The report highlighted 10 key service areas:

- Virtual School
- Education Welfare Service
- School Improvement Service
- SEND 0-25 Vulnerable Learners Service
- Education Psychology Service
- Adult Education Service and NEET Prevention Team
- Early Years and Childcare
- School Admissions
- School Place Planning
- CAMHS Pheonix School

A consultation about the SEND review had recently been undertaken and an action plan was being developed to reflect the findings of this consultation.

At a strategic level, the local authority was also preparing for the future. A recent white paper on education, which was now postponed, had outlined some areas of focus: good teachers, school attendance and the move towards further academisation of schools.

Wokingham's schools, providers and partners had a high level of commitment to education, and as such Wokingham was a good place to learn. However, it was recognised that there was some work to be done in relation to closing the gap between high achievers and the most vulnerable learners.

The Chairman thanked Sal Thirlway and his team for their work in producing such a comprehensive report. He noted that the Committee already regularly scrutinised most of the key areas highlighted in the report.

Councillor Howe pointed out that this document would be a useful way to disseminate the work undertaken by Children's Services to other councillors in the Council. He observed that the report could include more options, and thought it was overly negative in some areas.

In response to a question about SEND services being available from 0-25, Sal Thirlway explained that consistency in terms of naming of services.

Councillor Chadwick asked where the NEET support services were located. Sal Thirlway explained that the NEET support services had moved online since the pandemic. Bespoke meeting places could be arranged as and when needed.

Councillor Bray informed that the Virtual School had undergone a voluntary peer review recently and the feedback had been positive. The service was in the process of recruiting a new Virtual School Headteacher. She also informed that the Adult Education and NEET services had undergone an Ofsted inspection and the result had been a Good rating.

Councillor Bray wished to highlight that a lot of work had been undertaken to strengthen the support and relationship between the local authority and elective home educated children.

Councillor Howe suggested that a future iteration of the report should include a vision and or objectives for each key area.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The report would be circulated to all councillors; and
- 2) Future iterations of the report would include a vision and/or objectives for each key line of work.

54. TRAVEL ASSISTANCE POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

The Travel Assistance Policy Implementation report was presented by Zoe Storey. She informed that the overall cost of providing this service was going up, it was anticipated that it would £5 million by the end of 2023.

She highlighted that over the years Children's Services had strived to contain this budget through many measures such as looking for savings, and redirecting reserves to offset the overspend.

The new policy had removed the majority of the discretionary spending, it also better explained the eligibility criteria. Additionally, a review of routes had been undertaken to better manage resources.

The report identified pressures in relation to an increase on demand for services, fuel costs, driver wages and inflation.

Zoe Storey acknowledged the issues raised during the meeting, in particular about the training of drivers and she stated that she would speak with the Community Safety Team Manager about it to find a solution.

In response to a question Zoe Storey informed that work would be undertaken in the future to develop independent travel training. This training would start, but not be limited to, with special schools. A training provider was still being sought.

Zoe Storey confirmed that post-16 students were asked to contribute to the cost of their transport to school or college.

Sarah Clarke asked if Officers were considering pickup points for SEND students. Zoe Storey informed that pickup points were relatively new to Wokingham, and this was for mainstream students only. Should a decision be made to consider pickup points for other cohorts, there would be a consultation.

Sarah Clarke made reference to the number of pupils moving into the borough this year and asked how the service planned for such increases and how this year compared to other years.

Zoe Storey stated that the number of children moving into the borough had increased significantly in the last 18 months. This was due to the fact that many families had moved in from Hong Kong and Ukraine, the service could not have predicted immigration.

Sarah Clarke asked why Bohunt school, given that it was a new school in a newly built area, did not have safe walking routes to it. Zoe Storey informed that those children attending Bohunt for whom there was no safe walking routes were not living in the new buildings, they lived in old stock houses in rural areas. However, she agreed that a piece of work needed to be undertaken to assess the routes and decide if it was possible to make them safe.

Councillor Boyt asked how parents had received the introduction of pickup points. Zoe Storey stated that they had not received any formal complaints.

The Committee wished to formally record their appreciation of the work which had been carried out to implement the new policy, Zoe Storey and her team had done a great job and were thanked for their dedication and hard work.

Councillor Helliars-Symonds commented that part of the reason for the overspend in this budget was the fact that some SEND children had to be transported outside of the borough to specialist places.

Councillor Helliars-Symonds asked that a recommendation be made for the Committee to receive an update on actions undertaken to address the issue of training of drivers and escorts.

Sal Thirlway advised that it would be more appropriate to invite and give CTU the opportunity to discuss the issues raised during the meeting.

Sarah Clarke stated that the SEND Travel Survey had been shared with CTU, so they were aware of the issues raised.

Councillor Bray informed that a significant amount of money had already been spent by the Council to make safe walking routes to Bohunt. She believed that consideration in relation to safe walking routes should have been taken at the time of planning for a new school. She vowed to include this consideration when planning for new schools in the future.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Members note the contents of this report;
- 2) The Committee will receive an update on actions being undertaken to address the issues identified in relation to training of drivers and escorts;
- 3) The Committee supported the SEND Voices School Transport Survey and welcomed the opportunity to review future iterations; and
- 4) The Committee expresses its concern to the Executive at the significant direct financial costs to Children's Services of insufficient safe walking routes, including serving Bohunt School.

55. FORWARD PROGRAMME

The following items were added to the Forward Programme:

22 March 2023

SEND Youth Forum

Update on the progress of SEND training for drivers and escorts

20 June 2023

Cost of living crisis update – with Youth Council participation

Attendance issues in schools

Sal Thirlway explained that although the government's white paper which focused on school attendance was on hold, there was an expectation that local authorities worked with schools on the issue of attendance. Sarah Clarke asked that care be taken when collecting school attendance data so that SEND children were not disadvantaged. She informed that there was inconsistency - some schools gave permission to attend medical appointments and others did not.

Ming Zhang, Interim Assistant Director for Learning, Achievement and Partnerships was of the opinion that school attendance was very important and it should be discussed at a future meeting.

56. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

That under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for item 57, on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of the schedule 12A of the Act.

57. SCHOOLS CAUSING CONCERN

This item was considered in a part 2 session.

58. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Chairman, on behalf of the Committee, wished to thank Sal Thirlway, who was leaving the Council. Sal Thirlway's work and commitment during his time in WBC was much appreciated and he wished him well in the future.