



Notice of a Meeting

Performance Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 9 January 2020 at 10.00 am

Rooms 1&2 - County Hall, New Road, Oxford OX1 1ND

Membership

Chairman Councillor Liz Brighthouse OBE

Deputy Chairman - Councillor Jenny Hannaby

Councillors:

Nick Carter
Mike Fox-Davies
Tony Ilott

Liz Leffman
Charles Mathew
Glynis Phillips

Judy Roberts
Michael Waine
Liam Walker

Notes: *A pre-meeting briefing will take place in the Members' Board Room at 9.30am on the day of the meeting.*

Date of next meeting: 4 February 2020

What does this Committee review or scrutinise?

- The performance of the Council and to provide a focused review of:
 - Corporate performance and directorate performance and financial reporting
 - Budget scrutiny
- the performance of the Council by means of effective key performance indicators, review of key action plans and obligations and through direct access to service managers, Cabinet Members and partners;
- through call-in, the reconsideration of decisions made but not yet implemented by or on behalf of the Cabinet;
- queries or issues of concern that may occur over decisions being taken in relation to adult social care;
- the Council's scrutiny responsibilities under the Crime and Justice Act 2006.

How can I have my say?

We welcome the views of the community on any issues in relation to the responsibilities of this Committee. Members of the public may ask to speak on any item on the agenda or may suggest matters which they would like the Committee to look at. **Requests to speak must be submitted to the Committee Officer below no later than 9 am on the working day before the date of the meeting.**

For more information about this Committee please contact:

Chairman	-	Councillor Liz Brighthouse E.Mail: liz.brighthouse@oxfordshire.gov.uk
Policy & Performance Officer	-	Lauren Rushen, Policy Officer, 07990 367851 Email: lauren.rushen@oxfordshire.gov.uk
Committee Officer	-	<i>Colm Ó Caomhánaigh, Tel 07393 001096</i> colm.ocaomhanaigh@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Yvonne Rees
Chief Executive

December 2019

About the County Council

The Oxfordshire County Council is made up of 63 councillors who are democratically elected every four years. The Council provides a range of services to Oxfordshire's 678,000 residents. These include:

schools	social & health care	libraries and museums
the fire service	roads	trading standards
land use	transport planning	waste management

Each year the Council manages £0.9 billion of public money in providing these services. Most decisions are taken by a Cabinet of 9 Councillors, which makes decisions about service priorities and spending. Some decisions will now be delegated to individual members of the Cabinet.

About Scrutiny

Scrutiny is about:

- Providing a challenge to the Cabinet
- Examining how well the Cabinet and the Authority are performing
- Influencing the Cabinet on decisions that affect local people
- Helping the Cabinet to develop Council policies
- Representing the community in Council decision making
- Promoting joined up working across the authority's work and with partners

Scrutiny is NOT about:

- Making day to day service decisions
- Investigating individual complaints.

What does this Committee do?

The Committee meets up to 6 times a year or more. It develops a work programme, which lists the issues it plans to investigate. These investigations can include whole committee investigations undertaken during the meeting, or reviews by a panel of members doing research and talking to lots of people outside of the meeting. Once an investigation is completed the Committee provides its advice to the Cabinet, the full Council or other scrutiny committees. Meetings are open to the public and all reports are available to the public unless exempt or confidential, when the items would be considered in closed session.

If you have any special requirements (such as a large print version of these papers or special access facilities) please contact the officer named on the front page, giving as much notice as possible before the meeting

A hearing loop is available at County Hall.

AGENDA

1. **Apologies for Absence and Temporary Appointments**
2. **Declarations of Interest - Guidance note on back page of the agenda**
3. **Minutes (Pages 1 - 6)**

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 7 November 2019 and to receive information arising from them.

4. **Petitions and Public Address**
5. **Corporate Plan and Service and Resource Planning 2020/21 - 2023/24 (To Follow)**

10.10

Report by the Director of Finance.

This report provides Councillors with information the Cabinet's proposed budget for 20/21, Medium Term Financial Plan to 2023/24 and Capital Programme to 2029/30 ahead of consideration by Cabinet on 21 January and Council in February 2020.

The report is divided into three main sections which are outlined below:

- 1) Annex 1 - Corporate Plan and Outcomes Framework
- 2) Annex 2 – Revenue Capital
- 3) Annex 3 – Capital and Investment Strategy and Capital Programme

The Committee is RECOMMENDED to consider and comment on the:

- a) **Draft corporate plan and outcomes framework**
- b) **Proposed Revenue Capital Budget**
- c) **Proposed Capital and Investment Strategy and Capital Programme**

6. **SEND Inspection Final Report (Pages 7 - 14)**

13.10

Report by the Director for Children's Services

The Final SEND Re-visit report was published by Ofsted on the 23rd December 2019, following the revisit on the 15th - 17th October 2019. The findings of the report detail the outcome, which advised that the Local Area had made significant progress in three out of five areas of significant weakness, which were highlighted in the Ofsted SEND Inspection held in September 2017.

The Committee is RECOMMENDED to note the outcome of the SEND Local Area Re-Visit report, published on 23 December 2019.

7. **Work Programme (To Follow)**

13.40

To agree the committee's work programme for future meetings based on key priorities and discussion in the meeting.

Declarations of Interest

The duty to declare.....

Under the Localism Act 2011 it is a criminal offence to

- (a) fail to register a disclosable pecuniary interest within 28 days of election or co-option (or re-election or re-appointment), or
- (b) provide false or misleading information on registration, or
- (c) participate in discussion or voting in a meeting on a matter in which the member or co-opted member has a disclosable pecuniary interest.

Whose Interests must be included?

The Act provides that the interests which must be notified are those of a member or co-opted member of the authority, **or**

- those of a spouse or civil partner of the member or co-opted member;
- those of a person with whom the member or co-opted member is living as husband/wife
- those of a person with whom the member or co-opted member is living as if they were civil partners.

(in each case where the member or co-opted member is aware that the other person has the interest).

What if I remember that I have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest during the Meeting?.

The Code requires that, at a meeting, where a member or co-opted member has a disclosable interest (of which they are aware) in any matter being considered, they disclose that interest to the meeting. The Council will continue to include an appropriate item on agendas for all meetings, to facilitate this.

Although not explicitly required by the legislation or by the code, it is recommended that in the interests of transparency and for the benefit of all in attendance at the meeting (including members of the public) the nature as well as the existence of the interest is disclosed.

A member or co-opted member who has disclosed a pecuniary interest at a meeting must not participate (or participate further) in any discussion of the matter; and must not participate in any vote or further vote taken; and must withdraw from the room.

Members are asked to continue to pay regard to the following provisions in the code that *“You must serve only the public interest and must never improperly confer an advantage or disadvantage on any person including yourself”* or *“You must not place yourself in situations where your honesty and integrity may be questioned.....”*.

Please seek advice from the Monitoring Officer prior to the meeting should you have any doubt about your approach.

List of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests:

Employment (includes *“any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit or gain”*.), **Sponsorship, Contracts, Land, Licences, Corporate Tenancies, Securities.**

For a full list of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and further Guidance on this matter please see the Guide to the New Code of Conduct and Register of Interests at Members’ conduct guidelines. <http://intranet.oxfordshire.gov.uk/wps/wcm/connect/occ/Insite/Elected+members/> or contact Glenn Watson on **07776 997946** or glenn.watson@oxfordshire.gov.uk for a hard copy of the document.

This page is intentionally left blank

PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Thursday, 7 November 2019 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 12.40 pm

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Liz Brighthouse OBE – in the Chair
Councillor Jenny Hannaby (Deputy Chairman)
Councillor Nick Carter
Councillor Mike Fox-Davies
Councillor Liz Leffman
Councillor Charles Mathew
Councillor Glynis Phillips
Councillor Judy Roberts
Councillor Liam Walker
Councillor Jeannette Matelot (In place of Councillor Michael Waine)

By Invitation: Dr Rob Bale, Clinical Director & Consultant Psychiatrist for Oxford Health; Alison Chapman – Safeguarding Lead and Designated Nurse, Oxfordshire CCG.

Officers:

Whole of meeting Lauren Rushen, Policy Officer; Colm Ó Caomhánaigh, Committee Officer

Part of meeting

Agenda Item	Officer Attending
5	Lara Patel, Deputy Director Safeguarding
6	Lorna Baxter, Director for Finance; Ben Threadgold, Policy and Performance Service Manager; Steven Fairhurst Jones, Corporate Performance and Risk Manager
7	Rob MacDougall, Chief Fire Officer; Paul Bremble, Strategic Risk Assurance Manager
8	Jason Russell, Interim Director for Community Operations; Paul Fermer, Assistant Director – Highway & Transport Operations

The Scrutiny Committee considered the matters, reports and recommendations contained or referred to in the agenda for the meeting, together with a schedule of addenda tabled at the meeting and agreed as set out below. Copies of the agenda and reports are attached to the signed Minutes.

59/19 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

(Agenda No. 1)

Apologies were received from Councillor Michael Waine (Councillor Jeannette Matelot substituting).

60/19 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - GUIDANCE NOTE ON BACK PAGE OF THE AGENDA

(Agenda No. 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

61/19 MINUTES

(Agenda No. 3)

The minutes of the meetings of 5 September 2019 and 10 October 2019 were approved and signed.

62/19 SERIOUS CASE REVIEW AND MENTAL HEALTH HOMICIDE REVIEW

(Agenda No. 5)

Lara Patel introduced a presentation on the Serious Case Review relating to the death of a baby through abuse. It had previously been agreed to bring reviews to the Committee on an individual basis rather than in the annual report. The independent reviewer was chosen for their experience in the relevant area. The family was included in the review which was coordinated with the Mental Health review to avoid duplication.

Lara Patel, Dr Rob Bale and Alison Chapman responded to questions from Members as follows:

- The mother agreed to foster care in Swindon, having presented to hospital where she was assessed.
- In this case, as in others, there was a loss of information when the family moved. Information systems in different areas do not match. It's not believed that it made a difference to the outcome in this case, but it is an ongoing problem.
- A social care summary was passed on to Oxfordshire but did not include the key "at risk" information.
- The child was in foster care and not under a Child Protection Plan in Swindon. There was a gradual return to the mother and the professional judgement was a "child in need" and there is nothing to indicate that this was a wrong decision at the time.
- The mother did not want the extended family involved. Swindon had a letter from the grandparents saying that they would like to be involved but Oxfordshire did not have access to this.
- Immediate family members can be involved in cases but parental consent is required to involve the extended family.
- Extended family members and friends can contact social care staff but information cannot be shared with them without consent of the family.

- The mother's mental health issues went back to a number of previous locations where she lived. If a patient does not tell you about previous history elsewhere then there is no way for staff to find out as specialist health records do not automatically follow the patient.
- The problem is that every organisation has its own data system, for example the local authority, GPs, hospital trusts etc. The NHS has been working on this for 15 years. "Data warehouses" are the latest attempt to tackle the problem.
- At the last meeting with the family they felt that they had been heard and were reassured that lessons have been learned. The mother has been kept informed.

It was agreed to ask the Council Leader to raise the information sharing issue at the Health and Wellbeing Board and with the County Councils Network.

Dr Rob Bale added that mental health services and NGOs are not resourced enough. There are pilot schemes in some schools including families in mental health issues. CAMHS is changing its model. For adults with mental health issues it is important to know who they are caring for.

63/19 BUSINESS MONITORING AND MANAGEMENT REPORT

(Agenda No. 6)

Ben Threadgold introduced the report. Two 'red' assessments remain. Timeliness of assessments for children and young people with SEND have improved and are now closer to the national average. Delayed Transfers of Care remain high. This is due for a closer look at the Committee's January meeting. The report includes the Leadership Risk Register. These high level risks are reviewed each month and updates will be included in the Business Management and Monitoring Reports.

Officers responded to issues raised by Members as follows:

- They will take on board the point that the commentary could be more challenging, particularly on 'achievement of planned savings', 'levels of energy use' and children's reviews.
- Air quality indicators are being reviewed, including recognising that decisions in other areas could reduce air quality.
- The overspend on Children's Social Care countywide services is not related to direct service delivery. Forecast savings on third party spending have not been achieved in full. We are currently reviewing how to address this.
- It is not anticipated that the overspend will increase significantly during the year. Demand is not currently increasing. The Family Safeguarding model will address this for future years.
- Variations are reported against the latest budget. Changes from the original budget are reflected in Annex C-1. Virements related to service delivery and are for tidying up purposes. Virements relating to any change in policy are reported to Cabinet.
- The overspend on the in-year High Needs Block Dedicated Schools Grant is still presented but the Department for Education consultation sets out that Councils should not be using their own resources to meet any overspend. The consultation implies that the Department for Education will pick it up but it is still not clear. The Council is still lobbying central government on this.

- Regarding areas where no targets have been set – for example volunteering rates – officers will look at how measures can show whether they are improving or not.
- The latest carbon emission figures will be in the October report.

64/19 HMICFRS REPORT ON THE INSPECTION OF OXFORDSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE 2018/19

(Agenda No. 7)

The Chief Fire Officer introduced the report. The inspection did not turn up any surprises. Any issues of concern noted were already known to OFRS. It is planned to do another full inspection in 18 months and after that inspections will be focussed on certain areas.

The work done with Oxford City Council on the installation of sprinklers in high-rise residential blocks was mentioned in the report and this was particularly relevant as a kitchen fire had been extinguished by sprinklers on the fourteenth floor of Plowman Tower just the day before this Committee meeting.

Members raised a number of issues on the report and officers responded as follows:

- The issue of unwanted fire alarm calls is being examined with Thames Valley Fire Control Service. Businesses are encouraged to update their systems as older systems are more susceptible to false alarms which cost the business time and money too.
- The “requires improvement” ratings were related to risk information on hardcopy being out of date, although the information was correct on the system. This has already been tackled. Also, while the service had a good record of developing leaders, there was no specific policy on identifying talent.
- Co-responding is down because, as part of the national pay negotiations, the union is not supporting co-responding. Changes at the South Central Ambulance Service have also led to less demand.
- Co-responding is ongoing with one on-call crew.
- The reference in relation to uniforms relates to an inappropriate comment by a fitter. A new uniform contract has been awarded. Religious issues are taken into account.
- Although there is a high proportion of females in the cadets they are not coming through into the service at the same rate. This is being examined. The service has a policy of utilising existing female members in mentoring roles.

65/19 HIGHWAYS DEEP DIVE FOLLOW-UP

(Agenda No. 8)

Jason Russell introduced himself as the Interim Director for Community Operations. He was previously an Executive Director at Surrey County Council.

Paul Fermer introduced the report which gave an update on the actions following the Highways ‘Deep Dive’. A new suite of documents on future highways plans is outlined in Annex 2. These will reflect better engagement with councillors and the increasing priority being given to walking and cycling.

Officers responded to Members questions as follows:

- It was agreed that communications with Skanska regarding coordinating works needs to be one of the focusses in deciding whether to extend the contract.
- An updated Highway Maintenance ‘who does what’ factsheet will be circulated to Members. If Members are having different experiences of response, then that is likely to be a training issue, this will be looked into and addressed as appropriate. A new software update will address some of the issues with Fix My Street. The high rate of reports that result in no action indicate that there needs to be some kind of triaging. It’s also being examined as part of the wider customer service improvement programme across the Council.
- A pilot with 40 ‘superusers’ is being tried. Members will be updated on its success at the end of trial, and if rolled out asked to help promote it.
- Officers will look at the problem of A34 diversions through rural roads/market towns. They are Highways England diversions and the options for alternatives are limited.
- The introduction of a permit system for roadworks next year will give the Council more control.
- The Oxford City locality meeting will be party to setting future highways programmes the same as other locality meetings. It was confirmed a senior officer from the County Council will now start to attend in addition to City/ODS.
- There is no specific budget for small scale improvements. Parish Councils can raise their own funds should they wish though.
- The guide in Annex 3 has just been finalised and will be publicised shortly.
- Condition surveys and other highway data can be made available, and perhaps a good way to report would be a regular end of year report.

66/19 WORK PROGRAMME

(Agenda No. 9)

The meeting of 12 December 2019, which was due to consider budget pressures and savings, has been cancelled due to the General Election being held on that day. The meeting on the 9 January 2020 will be extended into the afternoon to discuss those matters as well as capital, investment and review of charges.

The Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service have asked if the Community Risk Management Plan could be taken at the March meeting. This was agreed.

The Chairman also suggested taking the Young Carers Review at the March meeting. She will work with the Policy Officer to allocate other items on the Work Programme to Committee dates.

67/19 TRANSFORMATION SUB-COMMITTEE MEETING

(Agenda No. 10)

For information only.

..... in the Chair

.....
Date of signing 20

Division(s): N/A

PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 9 January 2020

Local Area SEND Re-visit Report – Inspection date 15 – 17 October 2019.

Report by the Corporate Director for Children’s Services

RECOMMENDATION

1. The Committee is RECOMMENDED to note the outcome of the SEND Local Area Re-Visit report, published on 23 December 2019.

Executive Summary

2. The Local Area SEND revisit was undertaken on the 15th – 17th October 2019, with the final report published on the 23rd December 2019. The report details the outcome of the report which highlighted that three out of five areas of significant weakness highlighted in the Local Area SEND Inspection in September 2017 had been deemed to have made sufficient progress.

The following areas were highlighted as having made sufficient progress:

- The lack of clearly understood and effective lines of accountability for the implementation of the reforms.
- The timeliness of the completion of EHC plans
- The high level of fixed-term exclusion of pupils in mainstream secondary schools who have special educational needs and social emotional and mental health needs in particular.

The two areas deemed not to have made significant progress are:

- The quality of EHC plans.
- The quality and rigour of self-evaluation and monitoring and the limited effect it has had on driving and securing improvement.

The Local Area will be required to provide an updated Action Plan to the Department for Education (DfE) but will not be subject to a further Ofsted/CQC inspection in this inspection window.

This action plan will be monitored each month by the SEND Performance Board.

The Department for Education will provide monitoring visits, however the frequency of these are yet to be decided, however it is likely that it will be one further visit in 2020.

Lucy Butler
Corporate Director for Children's Services

Background papers:
Local Area SEND RE-Visit report

Contact Officer:
Jayne Howarth
Head of SEND
07776 996944

20 November 2019

Ms Lucy Butler
Director of Children's Services
Oxfordshire County Council
New Road
Oxford
OX1 1ND

Ms Lou Patten, Chief Executive, Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group
Ms Jayne Howarth, Local Area Nominated Officer

Dear Ms Butler and Ms Patten

Joint area SEND revisit in Oxfordshire

Between 14 October and 17 October 2019, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) revisited the area of Oxfordshire to decide whether sufficient progress has been made in addressing each of the significant weaknesses detailed in the written statement of action (WSOA) issued on 27 November 2017.

As a result of the findings of the initial inspection and in accordance with the Children Act 2004 (Joint Area Reviews) Regulations 2015, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) determined that a written statement of action was required because of significant areas of weakness in the area's practice. HMCI determined that the local authority and the area's clinical commissioning group(s) (CCGs) were jointly responsible for submitting the written statement to Ofsted. This was declared fit for purpose on 28 March 2018.

The area has made sufficient progress in addressing three of the five significant weaknesses identified at the initial inspection. The area has not made sufficient progress in addressing two significant weaknesses. This letter outlines our findings from the revisit.

The inspection was led by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors from Ofsted and a Children's Services Inspector from CQC.

Inspectors spoke with parents and carers, and local authority and National Health Service (NHS) officers. Inspectors considered 492 responses from parents and carers who responded to the revisit online survey. Meetings were held with some headteachers, special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs) and leaders from mainstream primary and secondary schools and specialist provision to discuss how they are implementing the disability and special educational needs reforms. Inspectors looked at a range of information about the performance of the area,

including the area's self-evaluation. A sample of education, health and care (EHC) plans were scrutinised, along with their relevant assessments. Inspectors met with leaders from the area for health, social care and education. They reviewed performance data and evidence.

Main findings

■ **The lack of clearly understood and effective lines of accountability for the implementation of the reforms.**

Arrangements for holding leaders to account across education, health and care have improved since 2017. A clear accountability and governance structure for special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) has been established. The SEND Performance Board is accountable to the Health and Well-being Board. Lines of responsibility are usefully explained and represented in a visual diagram on the local offer. Senior leadership from education, health and care is well represented at the SEND Performance Board. As a result, SEND is now a shared priority across all partners in the local area.

The designated clinical officer (DCO) is in post and working effectively. The positive impact of this work can be seen in improved health involvement in EHC needs assessments.

The SEND Performance Board routinely monitors the actions being taken to bring about improvement. Consequently, accountability has been strengthened and there is now a helpful mechanism for overseeing improvement work in SEND and holding leaders to account. However, despite these positive developments, many parents remain unclear about who is accountable for different aspects of SEND provision. Leaders acknowledge that there is more work to do to ensure that communication with parents improves.

The local area has made sufficient progress in addressing this significant weakness.

■ **The quality and rigour of self-evaluation and monitoring and the limited effect it has had on driving and securing improvement.**

Leaders have an aspirational vision for the work they are doing to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND in Oxfordshire. However, parents do not yet feel part of this vision and do not fully understand what work is being done to achieve it.

Co-production with parents, carers, children and young people is still at a relatively early stage of development in the local area. The promising start seen at the previous inspection has stalled. There are some pockets of positive practice and the recently published 'Co-production Handbook'

provides helpful materials to support this work. However, co-production as a way of working is not yet consistently established in the local area's systems and structures. Parents are not involved in strategic developments right from the start. For example, important developments, such as the 'Behaviour Pathway', have only included consultation with parents rather than true co-production. Consequently, many parents are frustrated by the pace of change and do not always feel confident in the work of the local area to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

A consultation for the draft SEND strategy is under way. This sets out a helpful blueprint for future work and improvements, although these are largely education focused. However, while there are several positive and innovative projects in place to improve SEND provision, leaders do not check well enough, especially with families, that these are having the desired impact. Furthermore, there is not yet an overarching co-produced strategy that is effectively bringing these projects together and ensuring swift improvement in the local area.

Leaders' self-evaluation of progress in this area of work is overly positive and does not fully reflect the experiences of children and young people with SEND and their families.

The local area has not made sufficient progress in addressing this significant weakness.

■ **The quality of EHC plans.**

The high volume of EHC plans being produced and frequent changes of staffing in the SEN assessment team have contributed to a slow rate of improvement in this aspect of the written statement of action. Helpful work is under way to improve the quality of EHC plans. However, it is too soon to see the impact of this work.

A useful quality assurance framework has been established. A multi-agency panel now meets regularly to audit the quality of a sample of EHC plans against the framework. Pertinent recommendations for improvements are made, although the panel is not yet checking on the progress of the implementation of these recommendations.

Overall, the quality of EHC plans remains too variable. Outcomes described in the EHC plan do not reliably reflect children, young people and their parents' aspirations. Person-centred approaches are used in the EHC needs assessment, but this information is not used effectively in the plan. Typically, EHC plans are focused predominantly on a child or young person's educational needs and do not successfully capture a complete view of their education, health and care needs. For young people, transition planning is often weak and does not provide a useful pathway to support young people to make a successful transition to adulthood.

Health contributions to the EHC needs assessment process are too inconsistent. Although professional reports from therapists and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are detailed and useful, contributions from universal services, such as school nursing and health visiting, are often not of the same quality. General online training about EHC plans is now provided to health professionals, but focuses too heavily on the assessment process rather than improving the quality of contributions. As a result, health advice is not always enhancing the quality of EHC plans.

EHC plans are not reliably updated following an annual review within the prescribed timeframes. There are often lengthy delays in making amendments to EHC plans following an annual review. This results in too many EHC plans that no longer accurately describe children and young people's needs and the required provision. The current quality assurance system focuses on new EHC plans, but does not include existing EHC plans. Leaders have firm plans in place to improve this aspect of work, including increasing capacity in the SEN team, although this work is not yet complete.

Parents experience high levels of frustration with the EHC processes. They told us that they do not find it easy to know how decisions are made or who is responsible for different aspects of the process. Parents described continually having to 'chase' professionals to find out information about their child's EHC plan.

The local area has not made sufficient progress in addressing this significant weakness.

■ **The timeliness of the completion of EHC plans.**

More new EHC needs assessments are being completed within the statutory timeframe than in the past. Despite a significant increase in the number of requests for EHC needs assessments, the percentage of new EHC plans finalised within the required 20 weeks is now broadly in line with the national average. Sensibly, all aspects of the EHC needs assessment process have been rigorously scrutinised. Helpful adjustments to assessment procedures are being made which are improving efficiency.

The DCO is working proficiently to coordinate health contributions to EHC needs assessments. Pleasingly, 80% of health advice and 100% of advice from therapists are successfully submitted within the statutory timeframe. Last year, all age phase transfers were completed within the appropriate timeframe. Leaders have well-considered plans in place to continue to improve the timeliness of EHC needs assessments.

The local area has made sufficient progress in addressing this significant weakness.

■ **The high level of fixed-term exclusion of pupils in mainstream secondary schools who have special educational needs and social, emotional and mental health needs in particular.**

Helpful initiatives to reduce the high level of fixed-term exclusions in mainstream secondary schools are starting to make a difference.

Encouragingly, the number of days lost to exclusion are reducing. The rate of fixed-term exclusions for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs in secondary schools is also lower than it was in 2017. Leaders are not complacent. They know that, despite these promising signs, some children and young people are still experiencing too many fixed-term exclusions while others experience prolonged reduced timetables. Leaders are firmly committed to building on their success in reducing fixed-term exclusions to continue to tackle these issues.

Since the inspection in 2017, the Learner Engagement Strategy has been established. This is the area's approach to reducing rates of exclusion. Parents are involved in this now and leaders rightly acknowledge that parents should have been part of this development from the beginning. Sensibly, the learner engagement board has been merged with the early help board, to ensure that support can be offered to families holistically.

Firm leadership from Oxfordshire local authority is providing effective support and challenge to schools to reduce fixed-term exclusions. Leaders have ensured that they now have a much more accurate picture of the pattern of exclusions across Oxfordshire because they have rigorously checked the information they are given by schools. In some cases, this has included personal visits to schools to scrutinise individual children's records. Leaders challenge schools when they notice that exclusion rates are particularly high and there is convincing evidence of significant improvements as result of this robust approach.

Processes are being effectively strengthened so that schools can challenge and hold each other to account for the use of exclusions. Effective meetings of the In-Year Fair Access Panel ensures school leaders work well with a range of professionals in the local area to provide earlier support for children and young people who are at risk of exclusion.

There are several initiatives focused on reducing fixed-term exclusions and improving support for children and young people with social, emotional and mental health needs. These sensibly include professionals across education, health and care. The Community Around the School Offer (CASO) is a positive example of a coordinated multi-agency approach to support vulnerable children and young people who are at risk of exclusion because of wider issues that affect their well-being. For example, one project is focused on supporting children and young people who have been identified as being at risk of criminal exploitation. There are promising signs that this work is having a positive impact on reducing exclusions.

The local area has made sufficient progress in addressing this significant weakness.

The area has made sufficient progress in addressing three of the five significant weaknesses identified at the initial inspection. As not all the significant weaknesses have improved, it is for the Department for Education (DfE) and NHS England to determine the next steps. Ofsted and CQC will not carry out any further revisit unless directed to do so by the Secretary of State.

Yours sincerely

Claire Prince
Her Majesty's Inspector

Ofsted	Care Quality Commission
Christopher Russell South East Regional Director	Ursula Gallagher Deputy Chief Inspector, Primary Medical Services, Children Health and Justice
Claire Prince HMI Lead Inspector	Lee Carey CQC Inspector

cc: Department for Education
Clinical commissioning group(s)
Director Public Health for the area
Department of Health
NHS England