

EDUCATION AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Monday, 20 May 2024 commencing at 1.30 pm and finishing at 3.25 pm

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Eddie Reeves - in the Chair
Councillor Liz Brighthouse OBE - Vice-Chair
Councillor Trish Elphinstone
Councillor Andy Graham
Councillor Jenny Hannaby
Councillor Roz Smith
Councillor Michael Waine
Councillor Ted Fenton
Councillor Damian Haywood

Other Members in Attendance: Councillor Kate Gregory, Cabinet Member for SEND Improvement
Councillor John Howson, Cabinet Member for Children, Education & Young People's Services

Officers: Stephen Chandler, Executive Director of People
Lisa Lyons, Director of Children's Services
Jean Kelly, Deputy Director for Children's Social Care
Ian Smart, SEND Transformation Programme Director
Zaheer Ahmed, Interim Head of School Improvement and Learning

The Council considered the matters, reports and recommendations contained or referred to in the agenda for the meeting and decided as set out below. Except insofar as otherwise specified, the reasons for the decisions are contained in the agenda and reports, copies of which are attached to the signed Minutes.

8/24 NEW APPOINTMENT (Agenda No. 1)

The Committee noted that Ruth Bennie had resigned from the Committee and Toby Long had been appointed as her replacement by the Diocese of Oxford.

9/24 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS (Agenda No. 2)

Apologies were received from Cllr Ian Corkin (substitute: Cllr Fenton) and from Cllr Povolotsky (substitute: Cllr Haywood), from Toby Long and from Fraser Long.

Fraser Long attended virtually as a guest of the Committee, at the discretion of the Chair.

10/24 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

(Agenda No. 3)

There were none.

11/24 MINUTES

(Agenda No. 4)

The Committee resolved to **AGREE** the minutes of the meeting of 18 January 2024 as a true and accurate record.

12/24 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESSES

(Agenda No. 5)

K. Nellist spoke to the committee and questioned the work on how well the voice of the child was heard, the equal rights of the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) youth forum, and how the improvement process was co-produced and communicated. She also offered some ideas to make young people with SEND more involved and interested.

The Committee agreed to take item 8 next before returning to the order set out in the agenda.

13/24 INSPECTING LOCAL AUTHORITY CHILDREN'S SERVICES - ILACS REPORT

(Agenda No. 8)

Cllr Kate Gregory, Cabinet Member for SEND Improvement, and Cllr John Howson, Cabinet Member for Children, Education & Young People's Services, attended to introduce the report on the recent Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) inspection. Lisa Lyons, Director of Children's Services, Stephen Chandler, Executive Director of People, and Jean Kelly, Deputy Director for Children's Social Care, attended alongside.

The Deputy Director provided a broad overview and explained that, after a slightly delayed inspection, the ILACS report was published with Oxfordshire being judged as 'Good' across several areas. The inspection checked several themes, such as child neglect and abuse, over a standard 3-week period.

The report identified a great number of strengths, across the localities and areas of work. The help and protection offered to children in need had significantly improved since the previous inspection. The strategic and operational leadership was noted for significant praise in the report.

The report also identified some areas which could be further improved. The main areas were as follows: how quickly actions were taken to escalate proceedings; arrangements for different agencies to share information; closer collaboration with corporate leaders; and the standard of direct work with disabled children.

The Action Plan to be reported back to Ofsted was due on 18 July 2024. This action plan also covered other areas which the Council wanted to improve regardless of the ILACS report.

Members of the Committee explored the following issues:

A multi-faceted plan was in place for improving the stability of the workforce. This included an apprenticeship scheme, which was funded by the Department for Education (DfE), resulting in twelve new colleagues. Recruitment had begun for the next intake of newly qualified social workers. The service was also looking at international recruitment, which was common across the industry. There was also an active return to social work route, to encourage qualified staff to return to the profession. Work to support existing staff was also being done to encourage greater staff retention.

Lengthy waiting times had been addressed with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and other partners. The service had provided some CAMHS engagement for children in care and those with high level needs, and they also signposted families to online support and early intervention approaches.

It was acknowledged that waiting times for CAMHS were too long, but the service did not have a ready solution for that. It was suggested that CAMHS should offer a view on how to improve the situation. The Executive Director agreed that this was a problem across the country and suggested that the Committee might refer this to the Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) to explore further. The Committee agreed that this issue needed to be resolved.

The previous 18 months had seen a decrease in the number of children in care, but more efforts were being made to address the main causes, such as domestic violence, drug abuse, and mental health problems. Work had been done to stop issues worsening by helping parents deal with issues as early as possible. Teams had also been established to support families to enhance conditions and work towards possible reunification.

In order to improve the quality of direct work with disabled children in care, the service would ensure that, in every statutory review, there was supervision from the independent reviewing officer and actions were taken to help each child comprehend why they were not being looked after by their families. For disabled children, this would involve exploring different methods of communication with them. The service needed to ensure that this work was clearly evidenced in every child's case file. The Deputy Director emphasised that, whilst appropriate work had been undertaken, it had not always been evidenced. It was this that needed improvement.

To support work demonstrating areas of improvement within the action plan relating to participation and engagement, CoramBAAF, a leading UK organisation for adoption, fostering and kinship care, had been asked to lead a survey of all children in care about their experiences in care, which was currently ongoing. It was hoped that this would inform the service of its strengths and areas to improve. Case audits were also a continuing piece of work where every family had the opportunity to

engage with the service and talk about their experiences including what else could be done to support them. These audits included young people and their separate views.

The Committee requested the following **ACTION**:

- That HOSC be requested to consider CAMHS waiting lists on its work programme.

14/24 PRIORITY ACTION PLAN UPDATE

(Agenda No. 6)

Cllr Kate Gregory, Cabinet Member for SEND Improvement, and Cllr John Howson, Cabinet Member for Children, Education, and Young People's Services, were present to deliver the report, and to update members on the progress of the Priority Action Plan (PAP). The Cabinet Members were accompanied by Lisa Lyons, Director of Children's Services, and Ian Smart, SEND Transformation Programme Director.

A further update on the progress made on the PAP would be submitted to the Committee at its meeting in September 2024.

There had been a deep dive at the end of March 2024 undertaken by the Department for Education (the DfE). The DfE said appropriate progress had been made. A stocktake was also scheduled for June which would include the wider SEND Improvement and Assurance Board (SIAB) and several other stakeholders. The Director of Children's Services saw this as a demonstration of the impact and progress that had already been made.

The Director informed the Committee that it was likely that the Ofsted monitoring visit would be in the spring of 2025.

The SEND youth forum was also to be revamped. It was seen as important that young people with SEND were both engaged and consulted, making sure the youth forum was coordinated and effective in influencing plans. There were existing groups and fora but there was a recognition that the work and involvement of such groups could be clarified, and it was hoped that the work by the steering group would show in policies and approaches taken.

Members were advised that the co-production charter they had requested would be circulated that day.

Cllr Haywood left the meeting and did not return.

The Committee discussed a number of issues, including the following:

Working with the co-production board, the Director confirmed that the 2022 definition of co-production had been adopted and was that to which the Council worked and would continue to work. A meeting was to be held with an advisory group of young people with SEND to adapt the language to make it more accessible.

In response to concern that some schools had reported that they had received inadequate information on new pupils with Education and Health Care Plans (EHCPs) and insufficient time to implement preparations for their arrival, the Committee was advised that Children's services worked closely and regularly with schools, including multi-academy trusts and special schools, and their leaders. Most EHCPs were requested by or applied for with the help of schools. Schools with many EHCPs received money based on a central formula, with the Schools Forum's support. Concern was also expressed that some mainstream schools were expected to cater for a higher proportion of students with EHCPs than others. A breakdown of the number of pupils with EHCPs at individual schools across the county was requested.

The Committee established that the section on page 25 of the agenda pack (paragraph 5 of the section entitled 'School funding' in Appendix D) which stated "Schools forum is the key decision making forum for all school funding" was imprecise and that Schools Forum was, as members had understood, an advisory body.

It was explained that, in order to support school staff to ensure satisfactory outcomes for students with SEND, the teaching hub offer was being supplemented with additional training on trauma-informed, emotional and behaviour support, and that there was improved pathways for support staff. Support staff, as well as frontline teaching staff, should receive adequate training on various techniques and approaches for all students.

The Committee requested the following **ACTION**:

- A breakdown of the number of pupils with EHCPs at individual schools across the county to be provided to members.

15/24 OXFORDSHIRE PUPIL OUTCOMES: VALIDATED EXAMS DATA (Agenda No. 7)

Cllr Kate Gregory, Cabinet Member for SEND Improvement, and Cllr John Howson, Cabinet Member for Children, Education, and Young People's Services, introduced the report on the Validated Examinations Data. Lisa Lyons, Director of Children's Services, and Zaheer Ahmed, Interim Head of School Improvement and Learning, attended alongside.

The report used the final official results for the 202/23 academic year, which were not the same as the unvalidated results that were issued in November. The report gave a statutory assessment standard of how Oxfordshire children compared to the rest of the country. The report included all children, regardless of home address, in state-funded schools within Oxfordshire, from age 5 until the end of year 13.

The Interim Head of School Improvement and Learning identified some main issues including that Oxfordshire's disadvantaged children and black and minority ethnic children performed less well than their national counterparts.

The Committee members raised the following queries and issues based on the report:

There were concerns that, despite the fame of Oxfordshire educational institutions, the data suggested there was a number of children being let down by the education system.

With 95% of Oxfordshire schools being rated either Good or Outstanding by Ofsted, the Interim Head of Schools Improvement and Learning proposed that this indicated that most Oxfordshire schools were performing well in meeting the needs of most children in their community. Where the data suggested certain cohorts were not achieving to a similar standard as their national counterparts, there was room to adjust their curriculum and provisions to meet their needs.

The data was not gathered and formulated specifically to look at the performance of individual schools and was not divided between maintained and academy schools. The data highlighted struggling groups which could be drawn out and communicated with the whole education system. With disparities known, good practices can be promoted to improve the whole system.

There were ways to communicate with the Department for Education (DfE), which monitored the results of trusts and academies rather than the local authority. Those channels of communication were used to improve the system as a whole for all children.

The Committee noted that it would have been preferable if clearer headline charts had been provided breaking down the data across different criteria.

16/24 MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE (Agenda No. 9)

Whilst no expressions of interest had been received for the parent governor co-optee vacancies, expressions of interest had been received for the young people co-optees. The Committee resolved to delegate to the Chair and the Scrutiny Officer the practicalities of their appointment process.

17/24 COMMITTEE ACTION AND RECOMMENDATION TRACKER (Agenda No. 10)

The Committee resolved to **NOTE** the action and recommendation tracker.

18/24 COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PLAN (Agenda No. 11)

The Committee resolved to **AGREE** the proposed forward work plan, having taken account of the Cabinet Forward Plan and the Budget Management Monitoring Report, noting that it will be for the Committee at its first meeting of the next municipal year to agree what it will consider.

19/24 RESPONSES TO SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS

(Agenda No. 12)

The Committee resolved to **NOTE** the Cabinet response to the report on the Oxfordshire Education Commission.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing