

EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Wednesday, 23 September 2020 commencing at 1.00 pm and finishing at 2.37 pm.

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Michael Waine – in the Chair

Councillor John Howson (Deputy Chairman)
Councillor Ted Fenton
Councillor Jeannette Matelot
Councillor Gill Sanders
Councillor Emma Turnbull
Councillor Hilary Hibbert-Biles

Other Members in Attendance: Councillor Lorraine Lindsay-Gale

By Invitation: Mr Stuart Robinson, Council of Oxfordshire Teachers' Organisation (COTO) and Mrs Carole Thomson, Oxfordshire Governors' Association.

Officers: Deborah Bell – Head of Learner Engagement, Hayley Good - Deputy Director for Children's Services and Education, Kevin Gordon – Corporate Director of Children's Services, Kim James, Robin Rogers, Khalid Ahmed and Deborah Miller.

The Scrutiny Committee considered the matters, reports and recommendations contained or referred to in the agenda for the meeting and agreed as set out below. Copies of the agenda and reports [agenda, reports and schedule/additional documents] are attached to the signed Minutes.

22/20 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS (Agenda No. 2)

An apology for absence was submitted by Donald McEwan (COTO), with Stuart Robinson substituting.

23/20 COVID-19 UPDATE (Agenda No. 5)

The Corporate Director of Children's Services provided the Committee with an update on the Council's approach to Covid 19 in relation to education and schools in Oxfordshire.

Members were informed that the service was providing good communications to schools and residents in line with Government guidelines. Messaging was being put out through a variety of channels; the Oxfordshire County Council website, media

releases, social media, through District Council Members and Chief Executives and through Oxfordshire County Council Members and staff.

Reference was made to weekly telephone calls which were made to the 98 Head Teachers of schools. The critical role which Members had to play in terms of communicating to constituents was stressed, together with the feedback the service received from parents which suggested improvements.

Parents required reassurance to enable children to attend school. Members were informed that covid cases in schools were low, although some year groups had been sent home. There had been 20-25 covid cases within Oxfordshire schools, with no case to case transmissions.

Schools needed support and a national helpline had been introduced, staffed by Education and Public Health professionals offering advice and guidance

The Corporate Director of Children's Services referred to the work carried out around school transport. Forty additional school bus routes had been introduced and a new code of practice for behaviour and health and safety had been implemented. There had also been further communication regarding the mandatory use of wearing facemasks when travelling on buses. Specialist support was also offered for mental health and well-being.

Oxfordshire Primary Schools were ahead of the national average in terms of attendance; although there were a few problems with Special Schools. Statistics for attendance were as follows:

- 90.6% attendance for State Schools (96% normal attendance)
- 85% attendance for those children who were classified as vulnerable, who had SEND plans, who had complex transport problems and underlying health problems
- 87.1% attendance for those children with a social worker.

The Committee was informed that Elective Home Education had increased. Parents' preferences were appreciated under the present circumstances, however, it would be preferred if children were educated at school.

Discussion

- Support received from the Department of Education consisted of grant of £500,000 which on current projections would be spent by December 2020. The next announcement on funding was awaited. The Chairman asked that local MPs be made aware of this.
- Reference was made to the Government announcement that children without access to IT and Broadband would receive equipment and officers were asked for the numbers in Oxfordshire. Members were informed that the roll out was going to schools where the equipment was distributed. The Corporate Director of Children's Services said he would discuss with Head Teachers to assess if there was a gap in the provision of equipment. An option could be working with

local businesses and charities to supply any shortfall. Reference was made to Business to Schools who may be able to support this initiative.

- In relation to the wearing of face masks to ensure the health and safety of children and other passengers on buses, Members were informed that there had been a social media and communications campaign asking parents and children about the importance of wearing a face covering on buses.
- At this stage there had been a small number of Covid cases in schools which had meant year groups had been sent home. On occasions this was found not to be necessary but was done as a precautionary measure.
- It was acknowledged that Head Teachers required support from OCC as the requirements for Covid were a difficult burden in addition to their usual responsibilities.
- Discussions took place daily with the DfE and reference was made to the cost of supply teachers for those teachers who were absent due to Covid. Financial support was needed for this.

RESOLVED: That the information reported be noted and the Committee placed on record, their appreciation and admiration of the work of the leaders and teachers at Oxfordshire's schools during the Pandemic.

24/20 UPDATE ON ALTERNATIVE PROVISION (AP) COMMISSIONING ARRANGEMENTS

(Agenda No. 6)

Consideration was given to a report of by the Head of Learner Engagement which provided an update on the Recommissioning of Alternative Provision for children and schools in Oxfordshire.

Members were informed that since September 2019 there had been further discussions initiated to secure effective and affordable alternative provision through the Radcliffe Academy Trust at Meadowbrook College for the interim period to September 2021.

Members were informed that there had been extensive engagement with children, young people, parents and other interested parties. The commissioning attracted alternative providers.

The commissioning of alternative provision would help to deliver the vision in the Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) Learner Engagement Strategy to:

- Assess and manage the financial implications for the Local Authority in meeting the increased and varied demand for alternative provision.
- Ensure good quality, value for money alternative provision is in place so that OCC can meet its statutory responsibilities.
- Robustly monitor providers to demonstrate improved outcomes for young people requiring alternative provision.

Discussion took place on greater funding required for SEND and how this would be difficult with future financial pressures.

The Head of Learner Engagement reported that more preventative work would take place with children to prevent exclusions.

The report provided details of the ways to mitigate the risk of fixed and permanent exclusions which included:

- Clear outcomes that Alternative Provision should deliver;
- Children and young people are safe and feel safe.
- Improved emotional health and wellbeing including resilience.
- Improved engagement in learning.
- Successful pathway back to mainstream school or onto post-16 opportunities.
- Progress in learning.
- Improved social skills including friendships, relationships and involvement with the community.

Carole Thomson from the Schools Forum reported that the funding information relating to Radcliffe Academy Trust which had been submitted to the Forum had been incomplete. In addition, it should be noted that the funding came from the DfE and not from the Council.

Reference was made to the commissioning of services and whether the possibility of shared arrangements had been explored; schools working together in partnership. Members were informed that OCC were encouraging school leaders to collaborate.

The Committee noted that there was still a more work to do and that this needed to be managed effectively due to the financial implications.

It was noted that from the consultation exercise, 53% of respondents had expressed dissatisfaction with Alternative Provision in Oxfordshire.

The first phase of the work had been concluded, and Oxfordshire County Council had developed a Service Specification with five 'Lots' for Alternative Provision for all key stages and all learners. Members were informed that some 'Lots' were more popular than others, but it was noted that OCC had not lost the need for physical provision.

Members were informed that 'Lots' had been created based on the needs of children and parents. New or existing Alternative Providers had to apply for any of these lots by joining a dynamic purchasing system (DPS), which enabled the Council to purchase Alternative Provision from quality assured providers using a standard contract and a standard individual placement agreement.

The Head of Learner Engagement reported that the therapeutic and virtual 'Lots' had been the most popular, with the "Face to Face", 'Lots', less popular, due to the scarcity of buildings.

It was agreed that a meeting take place between the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Councillor Turnbull and the directorate to determine when the item would come back to the Committee.

25/20 PERFORMANCE UPDATE ON EDUCATION HEALTH & CARE PLANS IN OXFORDSHIRE
(Agenda No. 7)

The Committee received a report on Education Health and Care Plans process and performance including a focus on Exclusions/Elective Home Education/Part time timetable and on the Early Intervention Service.

The Deputy Director for Children's Services and Education introduced the report. The Education, Health & Care Plans (EHCPs) for children and young people aged up to 25 were introduced in September 2014 as part of the SEND provisions in the Children & Families Act 2014. Local Authorities were required to ensure all plans (previously known as Statements of Special Educational Need) were converted to meet the specifications outlined in the new Code of Practice by 1st April 2018.

The report informed Members that Education Health and Care plans were legally binding documents that detailed the additional education, health and care support required by a child or young person between the ages of 0 -25 years in order to enable them to access learning.

The needs identified were outlined and described by relevant professionals who contributed to a holistic assessment and confirmed how the child's difficulties or disability affected their learning. Plans were produced with interventions and support designed to aid them in accessing education

Oxfordshire had received a statement of action at the time of its last Local Area Inspection in 2017 as a result of weak performance in the production of EHCPs.

The Committee was informed that the SEND code of practice stated that the EHC needs assessment and plan process must take no more than 20 weeks. This was a shorter time limit than the 26 weeks previously given for the completion of statements.

Details of the increasing demand for EHCP's in Oxfordshire was provided in the report.

Members were informed that a SEND Performance Board meeting had taken place last week and that an accelerated progress plan had to be submitted shortly. A formal monitoring meeting would then take place with the DfE.

Reference was made to paragraph 10 of the report which referred to the number of EHCPs having increased in recent years; predominantly in the primary school age group. It was noted that work needed to take place with families early on to avoid huge costs as placements in Independent schools were a big cost.

The Chairman asked how many of the plans came with unwritten statements that they wanted to step out of the state system. The Deputy Director responded that there were around 350 children who were sent out of the County but a written answer would be provided.

Members were informed that the costs of specialised provision also included transport costs. A meeting would be taking place with Special Schools Headteachers on 24 September.

Reference was made to the need for clarity on costs detailed in paragraph 15 of the report which did not contain details of the £6,000 costs per pupil which schools did not recover.

Reference was made to 250 new places which were not taken into account because it could take 2-3 years for the places to filter through the system.

The Corporate Director of Children's Services reported that the building of Special Schools by Oxfordshire County Council had alleviated some of the problems, but he acknowledged that the performance of EHCPs needed to be kept under review.

RESOLVED: that the progress made in relation to Education Health and Care Plans for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities be noted.

26/20 FORWARD PLAN AND COMMITTEE BUSINESS

(Agenda No. 8)

It was agreed that the Chairman of the Committee would meet with officers to plan the Forward Plan and Work Programme and feedback to Members of the Committee.

Officers were asked to ensure that the meeting with Ofsted be set up before Christmas.

The Committee asked that a meeting between the Chairman and Vice-Chairman, the Cabinet Member and Officers regarding East Oxford be set up as a matter of urgency.

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Date of signing 200